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Final paper

Using Absurdist Drama As Part of Critical Pedagogy in Secondary Language Arts.

Making schooling applicable requires that secondary language arts teachers exchange traditional school methodology for teaching strategies and curricula that promote critical educational theory. While it may be a heavy responsibility, America's students need teachers who are willing to create critical pedagogy that advocates social integrity and human improvement. This in mind, one possible strategy for teaching young adults to be more socially and politically critical, inquisitive, and reflective requires that language arts teachers use dramatic texts written by Theatre of the Absurd playwrights such as Eugene Ionesco. Arguably, an enthusiastic discussion involving some of the playwright's informed, absurdist musings on social conventions and forms of social practice can be affecting. Those interested in connecting language arts to students' daily lives could use his dramatic textual representations to bolster a critical teaching unit that explores political and social inequalities and injustices as well as vital questions related to personal identity, knowledge, language, and power.

In theoretical terms, critical pedagogy is about providing students with learning opportunities that promote discovery and emancipation. Relying heavily on critical teaching theory, Marxist theory, and postmodern criticism, critical pedagogy calls for the use of student-centered curricular strategies such as problem posing, observation,

reflection, and discussion in classroom communities that encourage students to critique cultural, social, historical, economic, and political practices. In general, critical pedagogues look to create classroom conditions that

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encourage opposing viewpoints; they rely on teaching approaches that replace the “authoritative language of recitation” with opportunities for students to “speak from their own histories, collective memories, and voices while simultaneously challenging the grounds on which knowledge and power are constructed and legitimated” (Giroux 157). Critical pedagogues also tap into students’ perceptions of their world and help them focus their attention on forces shaping society such as power, knowledge, and language. For instance, when it comes to power and control critical teachers show students that the world is not a “static and closed order, a given reality which man must accept and to which he must adjust” (Freire 14). Instead, they teach that the world is a “problem to be worked on and solved” (14). Furthermore, the critical pedagogical model holds that all students are capable of “looking critically at the world in a dialogical encounter with others” (14), and assumes that teachers can serve as intellectuals responsible for creating curricula that empowers students with the tools to enter into critical discussions with others about their surroundings (Freire 14). As Paulo Freire rightly argues, teachers must provide students with the “proper tools for such an encounter” (14) so that they can “gradually perceive personal and social reality as well as the contradictions in it, become conscious of his or her own perception of that reality, and deal critically with it” (14). Overall, critical pedagogy is about providing hope. It is a transformative educational practice that not only promotes diversity and civic courage, but also articulates a

commitment to building a better society.

Helping young people to become courageous, critical citizens can be difficult given the repressive nature of institutionalized education in this country. Although it is widely assumed that the current system of education in America is an effective mechanism for developing democratic thinking and an egalitarian society, this is not the case. America's education system

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does not provide equal opportunities for “self- and social empowerment,” or constitute a major site for “social and economic mobility” (McLaren 31). On the contrary, as pedagogic theorists such as Peter McLaren affirm, education is a part of a dubious cultural and knowledge industry in America. He suggests that mainstream public education in America serves the needs of an elite, dominant ruling class interested in maintaining political and economic power. McLaren argues, for instance, that contemporary schooling exists as a “cultural and historical process in which select groups are positioned within asymmetrical relations of power” (31). According to McLaren, schooling “represents forms of social life and is always implicated in relations of power, social practices, and the privileging of forms of knowledge that support a specific vision of past, present, and future” (30). As well as anyone, he notes that schools generally fail to address class issues, and that the cultural politics of schools “historically and currently inculcate a meritocratic, political ideology” that rationalizes the “knowledge industry into class-divided tiers” (30). In sum, McLaren recognizes that schools do not provide equality of opportunity to all students, and that a dominant cultural hegemony reinforces multiple forms of oppression in America's schooling system by privileging a certain few.

Despite the apparent gloom and doom, the possibility for educational and social transformation still exists. Certainly, this paper does not suggest that critical language arts pedagogy by itself will end all oppression, injustice, or inequity in schools or in society. However, as Henry Giroux rightly points out, the “theoretical sweep” of critical pedagogy “may be broad, the sentiment utopian, but it is better than wallowing in guilt or refusing to fight for the possibility of a better world” (Giroux 161). Paradoxically, although schooling privileges some and subordinates others, schools can improve civic life by serving as sites for social

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transformation. Progressive educators who are willing to work within the critical teaching tradition do not need to forsake the nature of their pedagogical task. In spite of the aforementioned negativisms, they must remain committed to pursuing and creating spirited curriculum that promotes classroom analysis and debate of the socio-political structures that students see everyday.

Admittedly, getting students to participate effectively in critical classroom investigations of weighty subjects involving oppression or socio-political structures can be difficult no matter how dynamic the curriculum. For any number of reasons, young adults sometimes shy away from classroom deliberations, especially discussions involving complex issues and attitudes. As many language arts teachers can attest, purposeful reading and discussion approaches designed to stimulate cognitive thinking and active participation can be difficult to find.

This said, one language arts strategy for encouraging more interaction, engagement, and transformative thinking involves reading dramatic art in the context of

critical pedagogy. Educators such as Jeffrey Wilhelm, Clar Doyle, Geneva Gay and Stone Hanley enthusiastically endorse the idea of “critical drama pedagogy,” the idea of reading drama in the classroom as a pedagogical technique for promoting critical thinking and empowering young adults. Each shares the opinion that blending critical pedagogical theory with in-class readings of plays produces several positive outcomes. Wilhelm, for instance, stresses the point that drama draws students into textual worlds and provides a “meaningful mode for moving around in that textual world, making meaning of it and in it, and observing and reflecting on the world and its meaning” (Wilhelm 111). By its very nature, Wilhelm feels that the active, “participatory

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experience” (111) of reading drama critically helps students negotiate textual and cognitive terrain, especially students who are passive or less-than proficient readers.

Similarly, Gay and Hanley point out that drama can be used to teach young adults important critical thinking, observational, and reflective skills. For one, they argue that critical drama pedagogy enhances skills that are “fundamental to learning and adult living,” such as hypothesizing and inquiring (Gay & Hanley 3). According to Gay and Hanley, when students interact with drama, they must analyze and “take into considerations many different facets of story line, roles, timing, settings [and] situations” (3). Their work also makes the important point that many students do not have experience with complex and problematic issues central to critical pedagogy such as “racism, ethnic identity, stereotypes, powerlessness, and marginalization” (4). Hence, as they remark, the creative,

imaginative process of reading drama can bring complex cultural constructions, societal contacts, and critical discourses to life for young people. They feel that this helps to bridge the gap between ideas and reality (4).

Lastly, Doyle reinforces the point that critical dramatic readings can be used to promote deep pedagogical critiques of culture, power, and empowerment. To Doyle, drama can be a “powerful educational tool as well as a fertile site for critical pedagogy” because it “concerns itself with the crucial skills of interpreting, questioning, examining, focusing, reflecting, and sharing” (Doyle 44-45). She points out that drama promotes ideological critique because it challenges students to probe the “layered meanings behind drama” (22) by opening up “situations that require investigation and interpretation” (31). For instance, when students read drama in class, they can be asked to comment on: the “values, beliefs, and relationships” that are being depicted or “taken for granted” in the play; the cultures that are “being affirmed or

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ridiculed” in the play; or, on the truisms, symbols, images, and the critical questions that the play suggests (30). Just as important, Doyle also feels dramatic art can be used to examine the “contradictions and cultures of schooling” (38). Rightly so, Doyle argues that not all forms of cultural capital, the “beliefs, knowledge, customs, and languages” that individuals exhibit, are favored (38). Some forms are dominant and some are ignored. To her, a critical reading of a play could, for instance, provide students with an opportunity to examine various examples of cultural capital skills and unequal social arrangements in school and society. Not only this, it could also help students think about ways that schools can help to promote equity by producing cultural capital that tips the

social and educational scales “toward possibility and transformation” (38). Ultimately, like Wilhelm, Gay and Handley, Doyle persuasively illustrates reasons why teachers should make drama a part of a critical language arts learning experience that challenges students to deconstruct and demystify discourses related to culture, power, language, and knowledge.

In making the case for using drama as a site for critical pedagogy in the secondary language arts classroom, this paper argues that dramatic textual representations found in absurdist plays can be used to strengthen curriculum that encourages students to critically examine socio-political issues. Almost certainly, the central elements of absurdist theatre make this art form an ideal resource for critical pedagogical investigations. To review, “Theatre of the Absurd” drama describes a dramatic art form that does not limit itself to just one identity or style. As critic Martin Esslin cogently argues, absurd drama seeks to distance itself from “habit and fossilized” theatrical conventions (Esslin 328). Commenting on the “element of ‘pure’, abstract theatre in Theatre of the Absurd” (328), Esslin feels that absurd drama reflects a “turning away

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from language as an instrument for the expression of the deepest levels of meaning” (328). Often, absurdist plays attempt to go beyond the limitations of simply reading and performing language. Wordless skills, such as those exhibited by jugglers, tightrope walkers, mime, dancers, and singers, are important ingredients in a typical Theatre of the Absurd performance. The same can be said for comedy, jokes, pantomime, verbal nonsense, and general foolishness. Absurdist theatre owes a great deal to the sophisticated frenzy exhibited by vaudeville performers and many early twentieth century

comedians such as the Marx Brothers and Charles Chaplin.

To say that absurdist drama is just about fun and games however would be an oversight. Indeed, social, political, and cultural processes inform a great deal of absurd drama. Jan Culik, for one, notes the “traumatic influences” of the Second World War on absurd drama, a war that “showed the total impermanence of any values, shook the validity of any conventions and highlighted the precariousness of human life and its fundamental meaninglessness and arbitrariness” (Culik 1). Further, absurd theatre also “seems to have been a reaction to the disappearance of the religious dimension from contemporary life” (1). As Culik makes clear, absurd theatre can be seen as “an attempt to restore the importance of myth and ritual to our age, by making man aware of the ultimate realities of his condition, by instilling in him again the lost sense of cosmic wonder and primeval anguish” (1).

Along the same lines, Esslin argues that the “literature of verbal nonsense” in absurdist plays is often used to topple walls enveloping the “human condition” (Esslin 341): walls fabricated by stupidity and ignorance. According to Esslin, these plays hope to examine the “situation of modern man” (355) by drawing an audience’s attention to the “anxieties and guilt feelings” of sensitive human beings “lost in a world of convention and routine” (354). Truth be

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told, many absurdist plays take pleasure in shocking the bourgeois, a social class arguably responsible for creating so much of society’s apprehension. By relying on satire and nonsense to examine modernity and important questions related to war, sex, violence, and the capitalist world, Esslin feels that most absurdist playwrights have fashioned

socially conscious works that explore question marks encircling and negatively affecting the working-class: questions ranging from the “impossibility of knowing the motivation of human beings in their actions,” “problems of communication between human beings” (376), to the “deepest conflicts of the human mind” (383). Admittedly, Theatre of the Absurd plays can be surrealistic and goofy at times. However, as Esslin and Culik both make clear, absurd drama makes good use of nonsensicality to shed light on human beings, particularly on how society’s controlling elite uses mechanical, dehumanizing rules and mannerisms to negatively shape human lives and meaning. In light of these points, it seems to make sense to use absurd drama to enrich critical pedagogy emphasizing socio-political investigation.

Again, of the absurdist playwrights, critical language arts teachers can trust in Eugene Ionesco’s work to help strengthen students’ sensitivity to social, political, and cultural conditions. By no means does this imply that other absurdist playwrights such as Beckett, Genet, or Pinter do not warrant classroom attention. There are several imaginative and insightful absurdist playwrights and dramas that teachers could draw on to explore politics, society, or the complexities of the human condition. However, as a whole, Ionesco’s work simply feels more socially and politically informed. A fervent believer in human rights and a longtime foe of political tyranny, his plays repeatedly dare readers to examine man's struggle to survive in an oppressive society that Ionesco believed formed barriers between human beings. As Rosette

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Lamont convincingly argues, Ionesco was “passionately interested in politics” for most of his life (Lamont 6), and the militant, anti-bourgeois, anti-authority, anti-military,

feminist themes found in his work reflect a broad political view. To Lamont, Ionesco was committed to fighting repression; to her, he neither “preaches nor teaches, but is always ready to denounce the cruelties of so-called ideologies, the inhumanity of man to man, in the name of future generations (6). Ultimately, it is Lamont’s opinion that Ionesco savored the opportunity to use his art to draw an audience’s attention to “silenced voices” (177). His plays echo his personal “It is forbidden to forbid” motto, and generally reflect his personal belief that artists and thinkers must criticize their society to assist society’s development (177). Like Lamont, Esslin also feels that Ionesco’s absurd drama demonstrates complex cultural and social criticism. To Esslin, there is more to Ionesco than a collection of absurd, “hilarious nonsense plays” (Esslin 133). In fact, Esslin maintains that Rumanian-born playwright is a “serious artist dedicated to the arduous exploration of the realities of the human situation” (133). For instance, his plays often tackle themes and issues related to fossilized language; the mechanical, bourgeois civilization people live in; and, the loss of “real, felt values, and the resulting degradation of life” (Esslin 196). Persuasively, like Lamont, Esslin argues that Ionesco’s creations reveal an interest in examining the “loneliness and isolation of the individual, his difficulty communicating with others, his subjection to degrading outside pressures, to the mechanical conformity of society” (197).

To regard Ionesco’s attitude as “wholly pessimistic” (198) would however be a mistake. On the contrary, as Esslin rightly points out Ionesco’s goal is to place individuals face to face with “the harsh realities of the human condition” in an attempt to liberate them from despair (198). Noticeably, the playwright’s work seems occupied with opening society up to question

and analysis, and with creating conditions for self-empowerment. Needless to say, this is exactly what critical pedagogues hope to accomplish. Instead of writing plays, critical educators infuse classrooms with curriculum that helps students increase the critical knowledge they need to “broaden their understanding of themselves, their world, and the possibilities for transforming the taken-for-granted assumptions about the way we live” (McLaren 214). Consequently, it makes sense for teachers to draw on Ionesco’s politically and socially insightful plays to strengthen critical language arts curriculum, particularly if pedagogical goals require that students look into the prevailing societal and political attitudes and ideologies that inform and shape lives, or require that they discuss approaches for ending degrading and oppressive social, political, and cultural practices and pressures.

Deciding which Ionesco plays to include in critical drama pedagogy should not be difficult. Plays such as *Rhinoceros*, *The Chairs*, *The Bald Soprano*, and *The Lesson* could all be used to create open-minded classroom examinations of the playwright’s political principles and his estimations of cultural practices. However, teachers would be wise to start with *The Bald Soprano* and *The Lesson*. Because they are short and generally easy to read, these two plays could be taught together as part of an critical investigation focusing on Ionesco’s complex personality as well as his skillful use of absurdist ideology to craft amusing, yet lethal social and political commentary on issues related to language, conformity, power, and knowledge.

Briefly, *The Bald Soprano* examines individuals living in a society where there is nothing left to communicate. The play revolves around two snooty, class-conscious English couples, the Smiths and the Martins, who speak to one another in dysfunctional

clichés: in what Richard Coe calls “the cadaveric language of an alienated society” (Coe 63). In the play, the puppet-like Mrs.

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Smith darns “English socks,” and announces to readers in a tiresome tone that she and her husband drink soup, eat fish, chips, and “English salad” (Ionesco 8). Apparently, they eat “well” because they live in the “suburbs of London and because [their] name is Smith” (8). Her stuffy husband, Mr. Smith, wastes the day clicking his tongue, lounging in an “English armchair,” smoking an “English pipe,” and reading an “English newspaper” (8). When the couple does talk to each other, conversations are marked with nonsensicality. For instance, during a funny, albeit monotonous conversation over an obituary notice, the Smiths enter into a meaningless discussion that repeatedly includes the name Bobby Watson: the Bobby Watson who is not only married to Bobby Watson, but is also a member of a family whose members are all named Bobby Watson. As Deborah Gaensbauer remarks, the “deadpan” Watson exchange between the Smiths in the play “introduces a distinctly Ionescan world where the outlandish is accepted without question,” and where “only the utterly mundane elicits astonishment” (Gaensbauer 60). The Watson exchange, along with everything else the Smiths say and do during the play, reflects their formulaic relationship, meaningless lives, and middle-class attitudes. The Smiths are characters that, for most of the play, appear to be as boring, commonplace, and as insignificant as their name suggests.

The same can also be said for the Martins. Younger than the Smiths, the Martins are equally prudish and hollow; they are exact duplicates of the Smiths, both internally and

externally. Instead of inchoate discussions about Bobby Watson, the Martins enter into equally foolish deliberations, most notably an agonizingly long chat on whether they are husband and wife. In short, their inane conversation goes like this: After admitting that they feel like they have met each other “somewhere before” (15); that they both live in Manchester, “took the 8:30

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morning train” (15) to London and sat in “coach number 8, compartment 6” (16); that they both “reside at No. 19” Bromfield Street (17); and, that they have a daughter with one red eye and one white eye, the Martins realize that they are married. As well as any, this discussion casts the Martins as the “the living dead” (Lamont 42). By play’s end, it is clear that they are exactly like the Smiths: they have no identities and their lives are empty because they willingly accept tired, meaningless, commonplace communication.

Added up, *The Bald Soprano* presents a world that is “utterly incomprehensible” (69), a world filled with an illogical mishmash of erratically ticking clocks, ringing doorbells, “nonsensical aphorisms, neologisms, non sequiturs” and “puerile obscenities” (Gaensbauer 62).

Why? Most likely, Ionesco wants his audience to consider the connection between the feelings of emptiness in the play and the vacuity of language. James Knowlson, for one, supports this point by suggesting that the play not only aims to “mock, challenge, fragment, and, ultimately perhaps, explode” the “cozy, conformist, Cartesian view of reality” (Knowlson 58) exemplified by the Smiths and the Martins, but that the play also seeks to expose the “hollowness and the emptiness of the language” in their lives (68-69).

Ionesco himself extends Knowlson's argument, stressing that the Smiths and Martins represent individuals who have "forgotten how to talk because they have forgotten how to think; and they have forgotten how to think because they have forgotten the meaning of emotion, because they are devoid of passions" (65). Insightfully, he remarked that *Soprano* reflects:

a kind of universal petty-bourgeoisie . . . the very incarnation of the common-place, of the slogan, of conformism, wherever it occurs . . . [the play reveals]

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ready made expressions, of the most threadbare platitudes imaginable [and] the secret of 'talking and saying nothing'; the secret of talking and saying nothing because there is nothing personal to say, the absence of any inner life, the mechanical soullessness of daily routine: man totally absorbed in his social context and indistinguishable from it. (65)

Together, Ionesco and Knowlson's perspectives generally affirm the position that *Soprano* demonstrates an interest in exploring symbolic representations and how language supports and perpetuates social and political relations and ideologies. Not only this, the play reveals a concern over the suppressive and repressive nature of language, and how individuality and identity can be affected by the production and circulation of sterile discourses. To be sure, the play is amusing. However, in the context of social criticism *Soprano* could be an excellent resource for generating candid and critical

classroom discourses about symbolic formations, the mechanization of language, social conformity, and reasons why communication between individuals breaks down.

As for *The Lesson*, it also can be used to explore critical issues related to language and conformity. But just as important, the play also reveals Ionesco's interest in delving into contemporary social issues, and in deconstructing ideologies limiting human freedom, such as the abuse of knowledge and power. In short, the play highlights the relationship and eventual communication breakdown between an elderly male professor and his 18-year-old female pupil. The Pupil is cast as a demure, fresh-smiled, "well-brought-up girl" whose personality is "gay,

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[and] dynamic" (Ionesco 45); the Professor is a "little old man with a white beard" who is "excessively polite, very timid" and, apparently, "very much the teacher" (46). The audience/reader learns that the Pupil travels to the Professor's home seeking help on how to "qualify for the total doctorate" (49). Particularly worth noting is the exchange of ideas between the Pupil and the Professor during the early moments of the play. Marked with respect and graciousness, the Professor's initial treatment of the Pupil could be described as easygoing. For instance, as he quizzes her knowledge "past and present" so that he may chart a "future course" (50) of teaching, he repeatedly praises her and her "great thirst for knowledge" (48). As for the Pupil, she also appears polite and agreeable. Perhaps as a response to the Professor's initial questions and praise, she makes it clear that she is at his "disposal" (50), and even "begs" (49) the Professor to begin teaching.

Regrettably, pleasant feelings between the Professor and the Pupil quickly

evaporate. As the play develops, the Professor's actions suggest that he has little interest in helping the Pupil find an identity. While teaching the Pupil, the once-timid Professor loses touch with reality. He becomes aggressive, inflexible, and uses his power and knowledge to reduce the Pupil to a level of non-existence. During a teaching lesson on math, for example, the Professor learns that the Pupil can add "one and one" and "Seven and one" (51-52). However, he also realizes that she cannot subtract. Noticeably, the Pupil's inability to subtract annoys the Professor. Even though she knows addition and has "memorized all the products of all possible multiplications" (59), the Professor feels it is not enough to know how to add. Consequently, instead of paying heed to the critical skills that she exhibits, the Professor blames the Pupil for a lack of dexterity in

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"specialized mathematics" (59), and informs her that she will not "qualify for the total doctor's orals" (59). Not surprisingly, as a subordinate in the social hierarchy, the Pupil immediately

complies with the Professor's judgment, and politely accepts the notion that she would be better off preparing for a partial doctorate than working on her total doctorate.

Like *Soprano*, language is often illogical and misguided in *The Lesson*. However, as Esslin persuasively argues, there is "more about language in *The Lesson* than a demonstration of the difficulties of communication" (Esslin 146). In the play, language is an instrument of power. Throughout the play, the Professor cares little that his lessons on math, ideas, or meaning are falling on "deaf," demoralized ears (Ionesco 62). In fact, by the time he starts exalting the virtues of language -- when he argues about "Firmin

instead of Firmin, French bean instead of French bean (64) -- it is clear that he enjoys being, in Esslin's words, a "prescriber of meanings" (Esslin 146). To Esslin, because words "must have the significance *he* decides to give them, the pupil comes under his dominance" (146). Like a tyrant, language becomes a tool the Professor uses to overpower, control, and destroy the student.

From a critical social theorist's standpoint, having students analyze and discuss *The Lesson* is important for two reasons. First, like *Soprano*, the play allows students a chance to enter into what McLaren refers to as "discourse analysis," the exploration of symbolic formations and how meaning is "coded, decoded, transmitted, deployed, circulated, and received in the arena of everyday social relations" (McLaren 29). As Coe suggests, the Pupil "disintegrates stage by stage before our eyes beneath the sheer weight and impact of meaningless syllables" as the play unfolds (Coe 62). Students could, for example, analyze the Pupil's breakdown. In particular, they could focus on how the Professor overpowers her with words, how her identity is affected

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by language, and how the Professor uses hegemonic discourses to sustain and reproduce social, sexual, and political hierarchy. Second, *The Lesson* presents a bold statement on power and control in education. Sure, it is likely that Ionesco did not have institutionalized education exclusively in mind when he wrote the play. Nevertheless, as Lamont observes, the Professor's increasingly bizarre, violent, and sadistic behavior does draw attention to the playwright's concern with the "headiness of absolute power" (Lamont 48). Specifically, Lamont suggests that *The Lesson* works as a "powerful

political statement,” and that the “teacher-student” relationship in the play works as a “cogent parable for the complex network of controls established by a tyrannical ruler over his people” (50). This said, why not use this relationship -- this parable -- as the basis for transformative pedagogy that tackles the injustice, enforced silence, and hegemonic comfort in today’s educative system?

More to the point, in the context of critical pedagogy the student-teacher relationship in *The Lesson* could be used to draw students’ attention to larger issues related to schooling, power, and cultural identity in America. For instance, a case can be made that the Professor personifies conventional schooling’s narrow-mindedness and its intolerance of diverse opinions, change, or students who fail to do as they are told; the Pupil’s death at the end of the play could serve as an appropriate metaphor for how conventional education controls, violates, and destroys autonomy. Examining the parable in this way relates the text to students’ lives. Interpreting the socio-political articulations surrounding the Professor and the Pupil could draw attention to society’s student-culture: the culture most likely to be affected by education and the dominate “ethical and political lineaments” that inform “subjectivities and identities” through course-work, classes, curricula, and teacher-student relationships (Giroux 158). As important, evaluating the parable

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in this fashion could also help to make students more aware of how schools are shaped by society, and how schools and society are “inextricably linked to a larger set of political and cultural processes” that not only “reflect the antagonisms embodied in such processes but also embody and reproduce them (Giroux 130). Frankly, it makes good pedagogical

sense that discussions involving *The Lesson*, knowledge, language, and power processes in American society should also include critical thoughts on schooling, particularly the “relations between culture and power” in education, and how schools are “implicated in reproducing oppressive ideologies and social practices” in America (130).

In a college class that I am currently teaching, a class filled with future teachers, I make a point of asking students to consider society’s views of teenagers, women, Black Americans, Hispanics, the poor, and others who, for whatever reason, continue to struggle for power, equality, and identity. In short, the goal of the class is to challenge college students to evaluate and look for ways to change oppressive belief systems strangling society. Because there is a need to broaden young minds and leave students with a heightened sense of themselves and others, I see no reason for secondary language arts teachers not to pose the same challenge to their students. Unquestionably, Ionesco’s absurdist sensibilities and his fascination with using farce to examine the human condition and contemporary issues can be connected to the spirit of critical pedagogy described throughout this paper. Hopefully, as a result of making plays such as *The Bald Soprano* and *The Lesson* a part of a critical language arts learning experience, young adults will gain a heightened sense of awareness when it comes to critical social justice issues. As important, perhaps they will also leave school with a deeper appreciation for helping those who, regardless of their sex, religion, or color, continue to search for an equal voice in our society.

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