

The HABLA Literacy Handbook

best practices in arts-integration and literacy development

BY KURT WOOTTON

Students in Mexico City design posters based on a Borges short story.



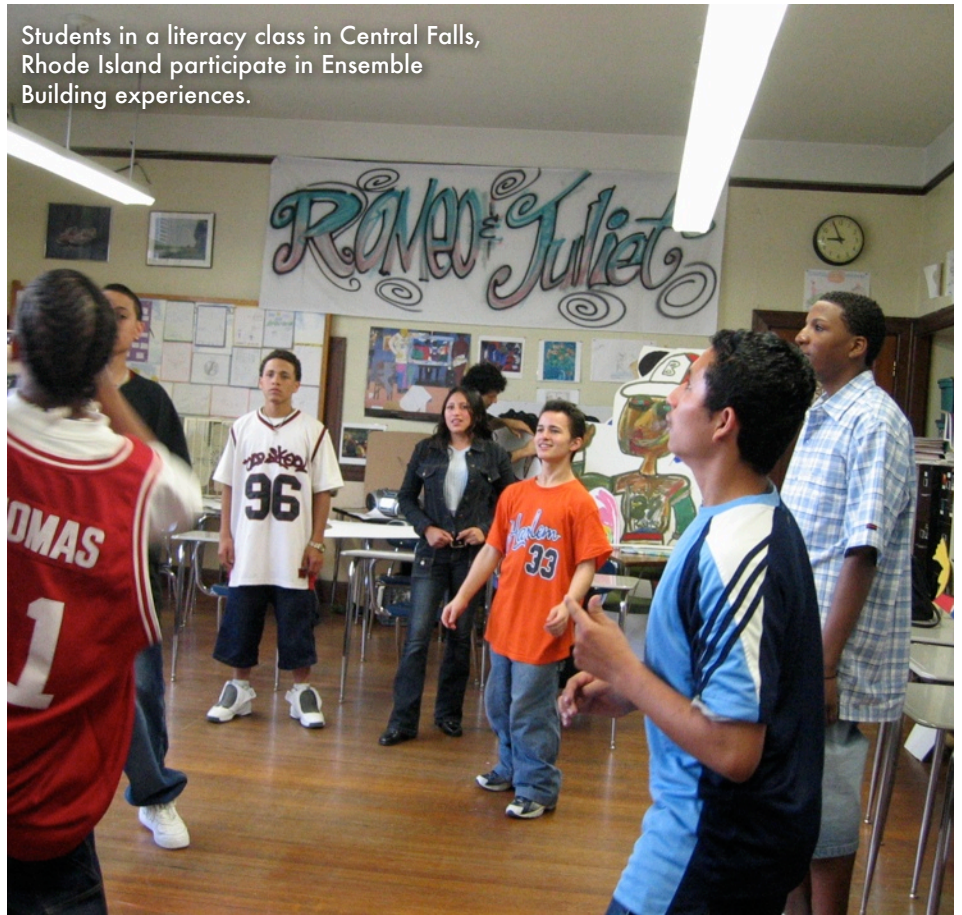
Habla
THE CENTER FOR LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

HABLA is an educational center and lab school based in Merida, Yucatan, Mexico, dedicated to fostering school environments that promote the success of all students from multiple cultural backgrounds. These collected experiences were specifically designed for teachers participating in the SmART Schools Institute in Santa Monica, California, November 2008. For more information visit www.habla.org.

Building Ensemble

BY KURT
WOOTTON

Students in a literacy class in Central Falls, Rhode Island participate in Ensemble Building experiences.



“Everybody gets a family, friends, a house, trust, and courage to live.”

This is how a student described her experience in Daniel Soares’s language school in Brazil, a school that focuses on building a strong community and integrating arts and literature into the literacy and language curriculum.

Literacy learning is a social experience. Students in our class

at Brown University—Literacy, Community, and the Arts—consistently described falling in love with reading at an early age when their parents read bedtime stories to them. Former Brown Student Sara Blakely-Cummings writes:

“Me at age five with my older brother and my twin all perched (as

I remember it) on my father’s belly while he lay in bed reading J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* aloud. If only my father’s voice could continue the story forever!”

Yet many children do not have experiences reading at an early age and they are significantly at a disadvantage from their peers

Ensemble building around the world

The ensemble building activities described here were inspired by our collaborations with and readings of: Augusto Boal, Jan Mandell, Magdalena Gomez, Viola Spolin, Ruth Zapor, Liz Lerman’s Dance Exchange, and the ArtsLiteracy Project at Brown University.

who come from print-rich backgrounds.

In order to address this learning gap we consistently work at two simultaneous goals: 1) to build a sense of community in the school; and 2) to engage students in extensive reading both inside and outside of the school.

Building a school community requires much more than participating in ensemble building activities. A supportive environment must be created for all staff and students. Successes in teaching and learning need to be celebrated and challenges need to be honestly addressed.

At the same time, engaging ensemble activities—adapted from the work of numerous organizations, theatre directors, and educators—do help to build a supportive and social learning community. Used effectively and sparingly, they activate the molecules in the air and help to create a learning environment filled with *alegria*, a Portuguese word meaning happiness and joy.

For these activities the entire class begins together. If the class is too large for the activity, the class might be divided into two groups; one observes while the other participates.

The Truth About Me

Everyone stands in a circle. One person stands in the middle and says, “The truth about me is,” and then makes a statement about herself. Everyone in the group that agrees with her will leave his/her place in the circle and rush into another one. (It’s against the rules to return back to your place.) Anyone who disagrees will stay where they are. The one left standing in circle repeats the process.

Find Alike

A “caller” develops a list of categories that might include: color of hair, type of shoes, favorite TV show, favorite author. The caller announces a category. Everyone in the room quickly sub-divides into groups based on their interests. Once students are in groups ask what the criteria were for deciding.

“Excellent”

All of the participants stand in a circle around the room and look down at the ground. The leader counts off 1,2,3,NOW. On “Now” everyone looks up and focuses immediately on just one person across the circle. Each person should keep their gaze locked only on this person. If two people look across the circle

and make direct eye contact with each other, they both yell “Excellent,” walk across the circle, energetically shake hands and introduce themselves, and then take each other’s place. The process is then repeated.

Sound and Movement to Music

Gather the group in a circle and play music in the background. As the leader, model how you might fluidly move to the music. Any kind of movement is fine. While you are moving the rest of the group will imitate you, moving in the same way, even trying to capture your personality. After a few seconds, pass the “lead” onto the person on your left by turning in their direction. The group will continue to follow the leader as the “lead” passes around the circle and returns to the original leader.

The following activities are what master theater educator Viola Spolin refers to as “point-of-concentration” experiences. Each activity calls for the entire ensemble to focus on a specific place in the environment at every moment. At first the point-of-concentration is concrete, a ball, for instance. As the activities develop it becomes more and more abstract.

Ball Toss

The best way to introduce “point-of-concentration” activities is with a simple ball toss. Begin with a rubber ball, about 12 inches in diameter, available in most toy or department stores. The ball should be lighter than a basketball, yet heavier than a beach ball. Students will each say the phrase, “Here you go [insert name],” and then toss the ball to that person. For instance Sara will have the ball, make eye contact with Pablo and she will say, “Here you go Pablo,” and then toss the ball to him. Pablo will say upon receiving it, “Thank you Sara. Here you go Suzy,” and then toss the ball to Suzy. Everyone will continue tossing the ball until all the students have received it. Students can place their hands in the air and then put them down when they have received the ball in order to keep track. Try as a group to recreate the same pattern without using the lines of “Here you go” and “thank you.” Then the facilitator might add additional balls to make the activity more complex (even eventually adding balls moving in opposite directions!)

Alphabet Ball

This activity inspires students to work together to keep the ball in

the air as long as possible. Gather students in a circle and place one student in the middle (this avoids a large gap in the middle of the room.) Toss a ball or a bunch of tape rolled into a ball into the air. Each time a student hits the ball they should say a letter of the alphabet beginning with “A.” The goal is to get to “Z”. Encourage students to work with each other as an ensemble to keep the ball in the air. When the ball goes astray, help them to not to blame each other, but rather to figure out as a group what strategies to use to keep it up in the air.

Invisible Ball Toss

Now the facilitator introduces an “invisible ball” holding it in her hands, showing its particular weight and size. The facilitator establishes clear eye-contact with a student, and tosses the ball to him. We, as a class, should be able to almost see the form of the ball in the air as it flies across the circle and lands in the hands of the next person. Continue as the ball moves around the circle. Inevitably, a student will change the size of it or lose it all together. Stop the activity, and ask, “What happens when we drop the ball?” Artist educator Fred Sullivan, would always say to his students, during performances and activities, “We have to as a class keep the ball

in the air. It is our responsibility both as individuals and as an entire class ensemble.” This activity introduces this critical metaphor for working together as a team to “always keep the ball in the air.” A variation of this activity is to allow the students to change the size and weight of the ball, stretching or shrinking the invisible ball in the air like clay. The person who receives the ball must catch the size and shape of the ball that is being tossed to him, and then he can change it again.

After taking away the concrete ball, and introducing the invisible ball, we then take the idea of a ball away entirely, and end up with a more ephemeral point we are all focused on, a kind of invisible energy that moves from person to person in each of the following activities.

Energy Pass

The facilitator begins by making eye contact with the person on his right. He and the person on his right clap at the same time facing each other. Then, the person on his right turns to the next person on her right, makes eye contact, and claps. The “energy” continues around the circle. Encourage the students to move as fast as possible. The “point of concentration” becomes the movement of the clap around

the circle, and when the ensemble is working effectively, it will seem like an invisible energy force spinning around the room.

Zip-Zap-Zop.

Everyone in the classroom, in chorus, repeats the phrase “Zip-Zap-Zop” several times. One person begins by placing one foot forward, clapping her hands aiming at another person, and saying the word “Zip.” The next person will then repeat the gesture and say the word “Zap” aiming at a new person. The third person will again repeat the gesture, aim at another person, and say, “Zop,” and the activity continues as “Zip-Zap-Zop” is passed continuously across the circle. It is important in this activity to be very clear about who you are sending the energy to; eye-contact, physical signaling, and a strong voice are all critical.

Impulse Pass

In a circle, ask the students to take each other’s hands and close their eyes. Start by squeezing the hand of the person

on your right. That person will then squeeze the hand on his right. Continue to move the pulse around the circle. Add additional pulses to increase the activity’s complexity.

Go

Students gather in a small circle of about 10-15 people. One person points to another person in the circle and says “Go” and begins walking towards that person’s place in the circle. The new person suddenly activates, points to another person in the circle, says “Go,” and begins walking towards that person’s place. The activity continues until each “Go” rapidly follows the next and the point of focus for the activity, moves quickly back and forth across the circle. This activity often takes many repetitions to move at a fast speed. Students will realize they need to pay close attention to the energy and always be ready to move.



HABLA is an educational center and lab school based in Merida, Yucatan, Mexico, dedicated to fostering school environments that promote the success of all students from multiple cultural backgrounds. HABLA offers cultural and language experiences for teachers and school leaders in an ideal space in Mexico and provides direct support on-site in schools throughout the United States, Mexico, and Brazil. For more information visit www.habla.org.

The Human Atom

BY KURT
WOOTTON

Teachers, artists, and university students in Sao Paulo, Brazil participate in The Human Atom.



The Human Atom has been one of the most popular experiences

created by the ArtsLiteracy Project at Brown University. It is based on a very simple concept. Participants push all of the chairs aside and simply begin walking around the room, to the center, to the edge, to the center, to the edge. Suddenly the classroom atmosphere changes. People aren't seated in rows listening to a lecture. They are moving in space. Looking at each other. What will come next?

What happens next is a complex interaction of activities influenced by artist educators and teachers from around the world. For ten years the ArtsLiteracy Project has been leading this activity in workshops and classrooms. We then watch and see how teachers and artists create variations and riff off the initial activity, adding their own interactive literacy activities.

What follows is a list of many of the best variations we have seen on The Human Atom as well as many we've added ourselves. Some are taken from the work of Shakespeare and Co., Augusto Boal, Jan Mandell, Liz Lerman's Dance Company and Ruth Zaporah. Others have been invented by artists and teachers we've worked with and some we've developed ourselves in classrooms and workshops.

The ArtsLiteracy Project at Brown University

ArtsLit was founded in 1998 by Eileen Landay, Kurt Wootton, and Nancy Hoffman with the goal of finding ways to develop the literacy of youth through the performing and visual arts. The ArtsLiteracy Project piloted a summer lab school at Brown University where they invited artists and teachers from around the world to develop innovative pedagogies for improving literacy. They received the prestigious *Coming Up Taller Award in 2005 from the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities* for "extraordinary work in making a remarkable difference to our nation's youth." For more information visit www.artslit.org.

The original name was coined by Mike Baron, Associate Artistic Director of the Signature Theatre in Washington DC.

Introduction

The basic movement of this activity is simple. Choose a point at the center of the room and point out that it is the "nucleus." All of the students in the room are the "electrons," they will walk around the center of the nucleus, walk to a far point in the room, back to the nucleus, and then back out to another far point in the room. The reason for walking to the center of the room is so that students don't become like a herd of cattle walking in one continuous circle around the edge of the space. If the space is large and you have only a few participants, delineate a smaller area with chairs or tape.

Another option for walking around the room is to ask the students to picture a shape in their heads and to imagine that shape is taped onto the floor around the entire room. They will walk around the space guided by the imaginary shape.

While they walk, students cannot speak. They will listen for instructions from the voice of the

instructor. They also must avoid physical contact (pushing, bumping into each other) unless it's part of the activity.

I tend to play music in the background while they are walking to contribute to the energy of the space, but not music they will recognize or dance to. My most popular selection is Ernest Ranglin's instrumental work.

The Experiences

Balance the Space. Everyone walk around the space. While they walk, they need to be aware of all the other "actors" in the space, and they work to create a balanced space, no open areas, or clumps of people walking together.

Freeze. The most essential performance skill to teach students is to freeze. Freezing means the students cannot move any part of their bodies, including fingers, and even eyes. Teaching the students to freeze right away, allows the facilitator to talk for as long as necessary explaining the next steps in the activity. Practice several times with students walking around the space and then freezing. This also will be an important skill to use later when we begin to work

with physical sculptures and tableaux.

Eye-contact/Greeting. As students walk through the space, they make eye contact with everyone they see, and offer a quick "hi." By greeting each other, we are acknowledging we are in a space together and will be working together collaboratively and supportively over a period of time.

Friendship. When students hear the word "friendship," they introduce themselves to as many people as they can. Variations on this are friendship "super-speed" or friendship in "slow motion."

Freeze/Normal/Fast/Slow. Ask the students to freeze. When they begin walking again, they will walk as fast as they can, still balancing the space, and avoiding bumping into each other. They freeze again. Now the students will walk in slow motion. Freeze again. When the students start again, they have the choice of walking: normally, super-fast, super-slow, or remaining frozen. Ask them to "change" a few times to try different speeds.

Down/Up as ensemble. Ask one person to go down on one knee. In a couple of seconds that person will stand, and another

person will go down on one knee. At any moment, only one person in the entire group can be down. The rest of the group continues walking. Feel the energy of the overall ensemble in the classroom. Do it without talking and only communicating physically. Repeat with two or three people down at one time. Then ask everyone in the classroom to go down on one knee except one person who will wander about the space. This time only one person in the room can be up at a given moment. Repeat with two or three people up at the same time.

Forming shapes as ensemble. Ask the entire class without talking to form a perfect circle. Walk around the space again. Now form a square. Now a circle in the square. Now a triangle.

The previous two activities work to build the class as an overall ensemble, working together on difficult tasks, non-verbally, communicating with a different range of senses.

Sculptures. This activity is one of the easiest ways to introduce physical sculptures to the students. It often works very well after Freeze/Normal/Fast/Slow described previously. When the music stops, students will pop their entire body and face into a sculpture, like a piece of popcorn

exploding. Try several times and encourage students to create sculptures low to the ground, high in the air, and eventually to connect their sculptures to one another.

Sculpture Variation I. Students will now walk around the space and “pop” into a sculpture anytime and freeze in that position for an extended period of time. They have a choice: they can pop into their own sculpture, or they can copy the sculpture of another person in the room, right behind or in front of them. The entire sculpture breaks when the first person who created it begins to walk around the room again. Encourage the first person who creates the sculpture to hold it for a long time, until many people accumulate copying the sculpture. Various sculptures will then emerge and disappear around the room.

Sculpture Variation II. Use the same procedure as in the above activity. This time, instead of copying the same sculpture, people will join one person and create a sculpture connected to and in response to the original person. Again, break when the first person breaks.

Throughout the Human Atom, ask students, “When the music stops, find a partner and go back-to-back.” While they are back to

back, in pairs, we give directions and physically model a variety of activities students can do in pairs.

Stare down. Explain, “Look into your partner’s eyes as long as possible, without talking, and without laughing. If you lose your focus, go back-to-back again, regain your focus, and try again.” After a couple of minutes, ask them to make eye contact with another person and, without talking, switch partners. This activity takes a long time for the class to master, but when they do, a focused silence will take over the room.

Blind trust walk. Ask the participants to choose person A and B. Person A will physically lead person B around the room, while B keeps his eyes closed the entire time. Person A needs to completely take care of her partner, making sure he doesn’t bump into anyone and feels completely safe. This activity takes place in complete silence, with gentle, ethereal music playing in the background. Model for the students different ways to lead: from behind with hands on shoulders, from the front holding both hands, from the side with arm around waist, and holding hands. Encourage students throughout the activity, to switch from one way of holding the partner to another,

almost like a dance. Repeat the activity with B leading.

Blind trust walk II. As before, but this time, the leader can leave the blind at anytime. The leader will gently indicate, without talking, with perhaps a pat on the shoulder, or squeeze of the hand, they are leaving their partner. The blind person will remain, frozen and still, in place until someone else comes to pick them up. The leaders will, once they leave their partner, without talking, find another person in the room to lead. The blind person must always keep his eyes closed, even when a "stranger" begins to lead him around the room. Instruct the all of the participants to take care of everyone. If someone is left for a long time it can be disconcerting. It is often good, as the facilitator, to participate as well and lead people who have been stranded. Be sure to reflect on the activity afterward asking questions like, "What did it feel like: to be led by different people you didn't know? to be left the first time? for a long period of time? What happens to your other senses when you lose sight?"

Mirroring. Students turn around to face each other. Throughout the activity students keep eye contact with each other ("Stare Down" listed above is good practice for this). One person slowly leads, moving in place, while the other person follows, mirroring the exact movements of the other person. Students will often try to trick each other, moving quickly so their partner can't follow. Side coach students (talk while they are participating in the activity asking them listen to your voice as if it is coming out of the woods) to move slowly, taking care of their partner. While students are in the middle of the mirroring, ask them to switch the person who is leading, fluidly, without stopping. Then ask them, without talking, to move back and forth between who is leading and who is following. After this continues for some time, ask the students to make eye contact with another person in the room, and to begin, without stopping, to mirror the movements of the new person, crossing the space to be next to them, leadership still continuing back and forth.

References and Resources

Boal, Augusto. *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*. Routledge, 2002.

Mandell, Jan and Jennifer Wolf. *Acting Learning and Change: Creating Original Plays with Adolescents*. Heinemann, 2003.

Ranglin, Ernest. *Below the Bassline*. Island, 1996.

Zaporah, Ruth. *Action Theater: The Improvisation of Presence*, North Atlantic Books, 1995.

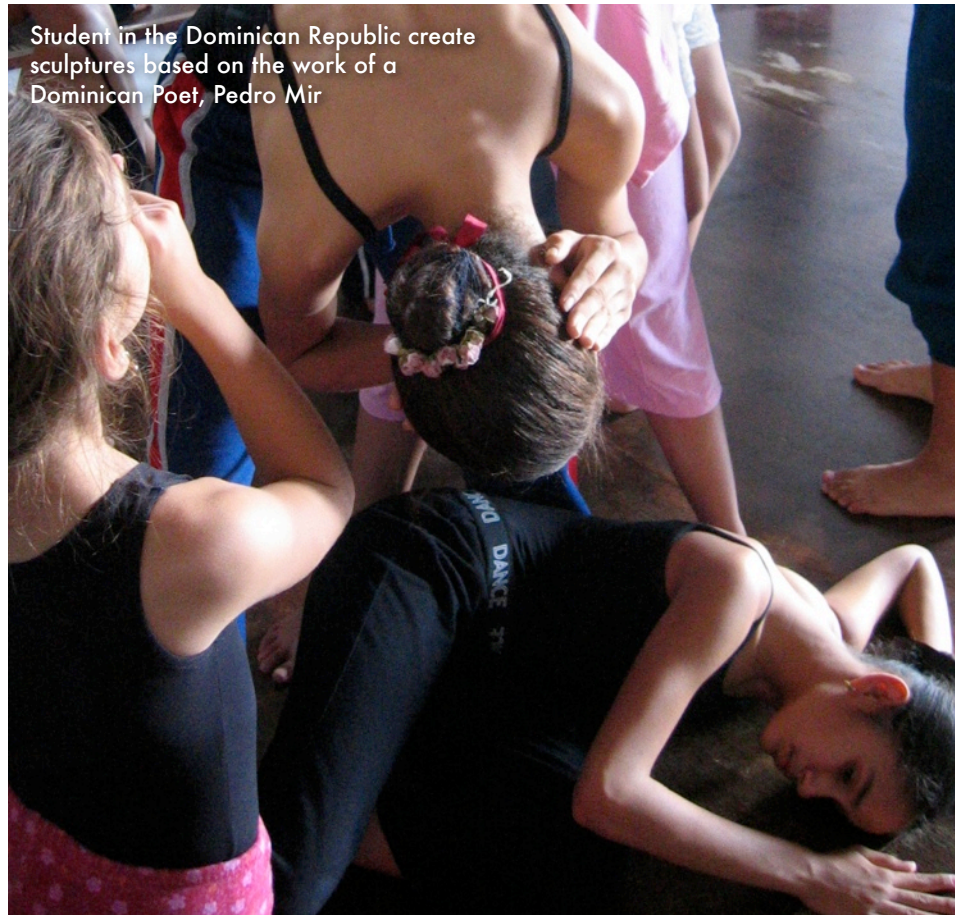


HABLA is an educational center and lab school based in Merida, Yucatan, Mexico, dedicated to fostering school environments that promote the success of all students from multiple cultural backgrounds. HABLA offers cultural and language experiences for teachers and school leaders in an ideal space in Mexico and provides direct support on-site in schools throughout Mexico and the United States. For more information visit www.habla.org.

physical sculptures

BY KURT WOOTTON

Students in the Dominican Republic create sculptures based on the work of a Dominican Poet, Pedro Mir



Physical sculptures, or tableaux, are a primary tool for exploring the

kinesthetic dimensions of text. Tableaus—frozen, physical stage moments—are used frequently in theater to cement an image in the audience’s memory. Known for their dramatic use of images, theater directors Julie Taymor, director of Broadway’s *The Lion King* and Mary Zimmerman, director of *The Metamorphoses*, frequently employ tableaux in their theatrical work. “Rehearsing is a visible thinking-aloud,” states theater director Peter Brook. Physicalizing texts is a way of

making our thinking process, in relation to text, visible. Often for our students reading is an invisible process. We see a student, deeply involved in reading a book, and we have no idea what is going on inside her head. The physical acting out of texts allows us to create a visible literacy community. We see how we are all interpreting the text in different ways. We see when students stretch their imaginations and reach beyond the words on the

page. Jeffrey Wilhelm notes the importance of “reading as seeing” when he states, “the pictures, paired with words, helped less engaged readers to visualize the action of a story and to understand how words suggest various characters, settings, and activities.”

Our role as teachers is to then help students to picture movies inside their heads when they read. Tableaus can be a critical instrument for

The ArtsLiteracy Project at Brown University

ArtsLit was founded in 1998 by Eileen Landay, Kurt Wootton, and Nancy Hoffman with the goal of finding ways to develop the literacy of youth through the performing and visual arts. The ArtsLiteracy Project piloted a summer lab school at Brown University where they invited artists and teachers from around the world to develop innovative pedagogies for improving literacy. They received the prestigious *Coming Up Taller Award* in 2005 from the *President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities* for “extraordinary work in making a remarkable difference to our nation’s youth.” For more information visit www.artslit.org.

Procedure:

1. Place students in groups of 3-6.
2. Give each group a small portion of text in writing, either a word, phrase, or, at most, a sentence or two. It's important to give the text in writing so all students have a clear sense of the text and can read it many times. By referring back to the text repeatedly, students begin to see deeper meanings in the text and begin to see the possibilities for multiple interpretations.
3. Ask the groups to create physical statues based on their assigned portion of text. First model what a physical sculpture might look like. As a facilitator state, "Think beyond what is an obvious physical representation for the word or phrase. For instance, when I say create a sculpture of sun, what we immediately go to in our minds is a formation of our hands over our heads in a

circle. How can we push our thinking to consider other possibilities of what 'sun' might look like? We are trying to move to abstract interpretations of the text, to think beyond the typical, the average, the day-to-day?"

4. Offer students the first phrase. Allow them 1-2 minutes to create their sculpture. Play music in the background. Take the music down slowly, "When the music is silent you should be in your sculptures." Walk around the room. Ask for groups to explain their sculpture. How were they trying to push their thinking dynamically? Where are the interesting formations? By pointing out what is extraordinary and creative in a few groups, the facilitator is taking the actual work of the students and developing a shared vocabulary as a class to discuss what good or creative looks like. Through this technique we are not imposing our view of what "good" art is, rather we are taking the material they

develop, and having the conversations out of their work.

5. Based on what they know now, through looking at each other's work, and having conversations about their process and product, offer each group another portion of text (For each of these "rounds" either give all groups the same word or phrase, or different ones depending on the goal of the activity. The same word or text allows for students to see open-ended possibilities for creation. Different words allows the class to hear and see more portions of the text.) Participants will have another 1-2 minutes to create. Repeat the same process as 4 above. This time begin to introduce essential vocabulary for describing sculpture, or facilitate a reflective discussion that allows the vocabulary to organically emerge from the students. The open-ended reflective question might be, "What makes a compelling sculpture?" Remember this is a



HABLA is an educational center and lab school based in Merida, Yucatan, Mexico, dedicated to fostering school environments that promote the success of all students from multiple cultural backgrounds. HABLA offers cultural and language experiences for teachers and school leaders in an ideal space in Mexico and provides direct support on-site in schools throughout the United States, Mexico, and Brazil. For more information visit www.habla.org.

question without a definitive “right” answer.

Possibilities might include:

Creative use of space.

Different physical levels, reaching up to the ceiling, flowing down into the ground. Expansive use of space, filling up the stage.

Negative space. Pushing the distance between different actors on the stage, creating tension over a great deal of space.

Physical connection. Finding ways to push physical boundaries within the group with several bodies becoming one in various formations: arms intertwined, legs crossed over one another, torsos twisted, heads connected, hands on one another etc.

Incorporation of props.

Considering possibilities with all objects in the room. Adding a nearby chair. A piece of cloth. A glass of water (even using the water itself in the sculpture, poured over a head or a hand).

Light and dark. Turning off the lights, revealing the sculpture

in a bright beam of sunlight, shining into the corner of the room. Using flashlights or even cell phones, perhaps a candle to dimly light the faces of the performers. Perhaps one stage light is plugged into a wall to brightly light up a sculpture and create bold shadows.

Fluid movement in stillness.

Often physical sculptures will connect to each other in a way to reveal the passing of time, or a bold quick movement, even though everyone in the group is frozen in a particular moment.

6. Continue developing the sculptures, repeating the process, enough times until students are thinking in dynamic ways and pushing both physical and imaginative boundaries.

Reflection

At what point did this activity “click” for you? When were you really able to free yourself in creating? How can we push this activity to the next level? If we were to do this activity again, with the same text, how might we move beyond what we just created?

Resources

The following works were cited in the introduction.

Brook, Peter. *The Empty Space: A Book About the Theatre: Holy, Rough, Immediate, Touchstone*, 1995.

Taymor, Julie. *Playing with Fire*. Abrams, 2007.

Wilhelm, Jeffrey, “You Gotta Be the Book” *Teaching Engaged and Reflective Reading with Adolescents*. Teachers College Press, 2007.

For more sculpture ideas

Visit the ArtsLiteracy website at www.artslit.org and click on “Handbook”

call and response

BY KURT
WOOTTON

Students perform poems and music by Brazilian poet and musician Vinicius de Moraes in the City Hall in Inhumas, Brazil



The students are never loud enough!

In our work with performance we have heard this phrase often over the years. What is not effective is yelling at the students while they are on stage, “Louder, I can’t hear you,” or telling the students in the classroom over and over again to, “Speak up.”

One summer, at our lab school at Brown University, Brazilian educator Daniel Soares and I

placed the students in a standing circle. Daniel took out his guitar and began to play a rhythmic melody. I called out lines from Walt Whitman’s “Song of Myself,” the text we were studying that summer. “Come travel with me” I invited. The students repeated, “Come travel with me” without much enthusiasm. I stepped into the middle of the circle, “Yell the line

out. Top my energy . . . ‘I sound my barbaric yawp.’” This time the students responded. Soon the room was booming with student voices. This activity became our ritual every morning and students asked to be the callers. The night before we would elicit a volunteer. The volunteer would read the text and prepare the lines they wanted to use in the Call and Response. Eventually

An Habla Activity

This activity was developed by Kurt Wootton and Daniel Soares as a way of teaching literacy and second languages. It is now a key activity used both in Habla partner schools in Brazil and Mexico as well as several school districts in the United States.

this became our opening of our culminating performance for the community.

For that performance, our students had no problem projecting their voices across the auditorium. I think it was largely due to the call and response ritual we started every day with.

This activity has many other benefits besides helping students to read with gusto. For struggling readers, it provides them an opportunity to make connections between the words on the page, and the way the words sound when read fluently. They practice this sound/symbol relationship by calling the text back in chorus instead of being forced to uncomfortably read a difficult text in front of the class.

The nature of the call and response links to traditions in the African-American church and hip hop concerts where vocal participation is encouraged. It helps students see the aesthetic nature of text and feel it as a lived experience in the classroom rather than a set of empty words on a static page.

Preparation

Before class, develop a list of key phrases or sentences from the text students will be focusing on. Lines work from virtually any texts: poetry, plays, novels, or short stories. The best lines carry an emotional or aesthetic punch.

Procedure

1. Gather the students in a large circle around the room. Make sure everyone in the room is included in the circle and can see each other's eyes.
2. Ask students to pull their shoulders back, take their hands out of their pockets, and avoid crossing their arms during the vocal warm-up. This will help them to open their voices and speak with conviction and clarity.
3. Walk into the center of the space and call out lines of text. The students will repeat the lines back in chorus. Add emotion and physicalization. Make the readings of the lines bigger and bigger and push the students to

match your energy level. Repeat each line 3-4 times. Then, point to individual students and ask them to repeat the lines after you, as loud or louder than you. The warm-up continues with many lines, moving back and forth between the teacher, individual students, and the entire class.

4. This activity can become a daily ritual in the classroom. As students become comfortable ask them to become the callers and call out lines to the rest of the students.

Extending the warm-up. In the final performances for the community, this call and response became our opening event. An entire class stood on the stage in a U formation. In the middle of the U, three of the students volunteered to be the callers. They would yell out punch lines from Whitman with the quality of ministers or MCs performing in front of an audience. The class, and eventually the entire auditorium, yelled out lines in response. We added a choral melody between the calls and responses with a guitar, "I celebrate myself . . . and sing myself."



HABLA is an educational center and lab school based in Merida, Yucatan, Mexico, dedicated to fostering school environments that promote the success of all students from multiple cultural backgrounds. HABLA offers cultural and language experiences for teachers and school leaders in an ideal space in Mexico and provides direct support on-site in schools throughout the United States, Mexico, and Brazil. For more information visit www.habla.org.

vocal mosaic

BY KURT
WOOTTON

Students in Inhumas, Brazil practice a vocal mosaic performance using the poetry of Vinicius de Moraes.



a literacy activity and a powerful way to end a performance

When we were working with Whitman's poetry in our lab school at Brown Summer High School, we gave the students copies of a portion of "Song of the Open Road" with all of their parts assigned. We asked them to take the places on the stage, and stand and read their lines, in order. We rehearsed it three times in class until the students were able to perform it quickly

and fluidly. We then asked the students to go home and memorize their own line, and the line that came before it, the "cue" line. The next day in class we practiced it again twice, and then the following day the students performed it in front of an audience, lines memorized, perfectly.

Our rushed version of the activity was far from ideal, but it did give our class the closing to the performance it needed.

The next time we tried this technique, in the rural city of Inhumas, Brazil, we asked students to read a range of poems written by Brazilian poet and song writer Vinicius de Moraes. The students found their

An Habla Original Activity

This activity was developed as a way of teaching literacy and second languages. It is now a key activity used both in Habla partner schools in Brazil and Mexico as well as several school districts in the United States.

favorite lines, committed them to memory, and performed a vocal mosaic to open their performance in the city hall.

Preparation

The most important aspect of the activity is text preparation. We've used a variety of texts for the performance. The first option is to give an open-ended prompt. We were studying literature about memory and childhood and we asked the students to, "Describe an image from you childhood." Another possibility is to have students read a range of poems and choose their favorite line.

Procedure

1. **Setting the Stage.** Ask the ensemble to "fill up the stage" with each person standing facing the audience. Ask the class to spread out to avoid leaving any gaps or holes in the space. The space will be completely balanced with all ensemble members equidistant from each other. After practicing the first

portion of Human Atom, "balancing the space," the ensemble will be skilled at this and will be able to fill and balance the stage quickly.

2. **Text.** Give each student a portion of text: a line or two. For a performance, ask the students to memorize the text. The text might come from an open-ended prompt the students have responded to on notecards, relating to a central text studied in the classroom. The text can also be a poem or monologue or even a page of a historical document like the *Bill of Rights* or *The Declaration of Independence*.

3. **Stance.** Ask all of the students to go down on their right knee and freeze, facing forward. One student will begin, stand, read her line, and remain standing. Each person, then in succession, will pop-up, read his/her line, and remain standing, until all of the members of the ensemble are facing forward. If the performance is of a poem or pre-determined text, then the order might be assigned ahead of time. If the text is personal

responses, the students can "feel the energy of the room" and stand to read when they feel it is right, keeping the pace fluid and forward-moving. (See the activity under Human Atom, "Down/Up as Ensemble" for practice with this technique.)

4. **Choral ending.** When the entire group has read their lines, the whole ensemble, as a chorus, will say a line together three times in a row to punch the ending. The line might be the title of the poem, "SONG OF THE OPEN ROAD! SONG OF THE OPEN ROAD! SONG OF THE OPEN ROAD!" or it might be a phrase from the prompt they were asked to write, "WHEN I WAS A CHILD, WHEN I WAS A CHILD, WHEN I WAS A CHILD."



HABLA is an educational center and lab school based in Merida, Yucatan, Mexico, dedicated to fostering school environments that promote the success of all students from multiple cultural backgrounds. HABLA offers cultural and language experiences for teachers and school leaders in an ideal space in Mexico and provides direct support on-site in schools throughout the United States, Mexico, and Brazil. For more information visit www.habla.org.

cordel

BY KURT
WOOTTON

Teachers and artists in Mexico City create a cordel of stories based on the work of Argentinean writer Jorge Luis Borges.



A vehicle for publishing original writing from Brazil

Students must see writing as a process they commit to both for themselves and for an audience. In schools writing is generally for the teacher, and this results in a guarded writing that lacks all passion and conviction and is only for the purpose of getting a good grade, pleasing the teacher, and completing the course. If we are to encourage a

more vital writing, we need to find multiple ways for publishing writing for a larger audience. In Brazil, writers have been publishing their work in alternative ways for centuries in the form of a cordel. "Cordel" in Portuguese means "cord" which writers would hang in public areas, like parks or town squares. On these cords, with

clothes pins, they displayed their written work. At times their public writing took the form of small chapbooks: cheap printed pamphlets, often with a drawing on the front. Other times they simply wrote on a piece of paper and posted it on the clothesline. Community members wandered by, read the work, and often purchased it for a

Daniel Soares, Brazilian Educator

In Daniel's school in Inhumas, the teachers and students have a permanent cordel hanging in the hall. Daniel explains, "I teach three different classes, and anything they produce, instead of handing it in for a grade, they hang it on the cordel in the hallway of the school. It has become a ritual in the school. It allows for conversation between classes."

community, directly, without having to be bothered by publishing houses, or reviewers deciding what is acceptable work. Many artists also collaboratively worked together on cordel editions of books or on exhibits where many writers might share their work with the public. Photocopied editions even jumped from cordel to cordel, from community to community, from city to city, as authors shared their work with each other and sold each other's work in multiple cities.

In the same way the cordel was an ideal medium for artists to publish their work in communities, the cordel serves the same purposes in the classroom: a) it is an inexpensive medium, all it requires is paper, clothesline, clothespins, and pencils; b) it allows students to make their work public when they are ready; c) as students are developing their writing, they might go to the cordel to seek inspiration in the work of other students; and d) the cordel is never finished, work can constantly be added and taken down, revised, and replaced. The cordel then serves a democratic means of publication and a symbol of how writing is a social process.

Cordel: The Event

Description: Students have the opportunity to publicly publish their original work on cordels.

Location: Cordels can be used on an ongoing basis in the classroom. Brazilian educator Daniel Soares keeps the cordels up in the main hallway of the school throughout the entire school-year. Every Wednesday the old work is taken down and given back to the students, every Friday new work is published. Cordels are also used beyond the walls of the school. In Central Falls, Rhode Island, students hung cordels around the entire high school when one of the students in the school was murdered. Students created poetry on strips of cloth that blew in the wind. A cellist played a solo on the front steps of the school. Similarly, students in rural Brazil, constructed a cordel around the lake of their town, with over 5000 pieces of work, all on the theme of peace, since there were many murders in their community that year.

Materials: Since a wide range of work can be exhibited on a cordel, the materials for the specific project will vary. The only essential materials for the cordel are clotheslines and clothespins.

Procedure:

1. Hanging the cordel. Before the workshop, class, or event, hang the cordel in the space. It can often be a complicated process to achieve the correct height and to ensure the clothesline is secure. The clothesline needs to be hung at a height, just above eye level, so that students can comfortably read the work posted.

2. Creating the work. The cordel is a fluid medium. Students hang drafts of work several times before they publish their final work. The cordel then serves as an aid in the writing process, helping students to share their work, and elicit feedback, from other students in the classroom. Practically any kind of work on light paper can be hung including: stories, poems, photographs, drawings, designs, small murals, and mobiles.

3. Cordel Discussions. At times students and guests look at the displayed work in silence, reading the poems, or carefully studying the photographs. In other circumstances, it is useful to more carefully structure the browsing, especially for students that are

A cordel encircles the lake in the town of Inhumas, Brazil.



sharing early drafts of their work. A possible structure for reflecting on work might be:

Place students in groups of pairs or groups of three (larger groups will make it difficult to navigate the space.) Ask each student to show the others his/her work on the cordel. Explain a) what do they like most about their work, what is their favorite idea; b) what might they change if they were to do another draft. Other members of the group ask factual questions only about

what they see. Repeat for the other members of the group.

This structure for sharing helps students to be self-reflective about their own work. It is important in this process to avoid judgement and critical assessment of each other's work. This might occur later in the class when the community has learned to offer critique supportively, but earlier in the process it's important to create a social atmosphere for displaying and discussing original student work.

5000 Students Speak

There had been over twenty drug-related murders in the small, rural Brazilian city of Inhumas in only a few months. Daniel Soares and his high school students decided to enlist the aid of all the public school students in the city and create a cordel around the lake to respond to the violence in the city. Over 5000 pieces of student work—stories, paintings, photographs, and poems—were hung on clothes lines around the lake. The announcer on the local radio said, “The Bible says ‘And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.’ It was necessary for the students in the city to speak, so the mayor would take action.” The mayor did take action. The following year there were no murders.



HABLA is an educational center and lab school based in Merida, Yucatan, Mexico, dedicated to fostering school environments that promote the success of all students from multiple cultural backgrounds. HABLA offers cultural and language experiences for teachers and school leaders in an ideal space in Mexico and provides direct support on-site in schools throughout Mexico and the United States. For more information visit www.habla.org.

mapping literature

BY KURT
WOOTTON



CAPE project director Mark Diaz demonstrates maps Kindergarten students created in Chicago Public Schools.

In 2007, The Museum of Natural History of Chicago curated an exhibit called *Maps: Finding Our Place in the World*. One section of this exhibit that caught my attention was called *Maps of the Imagination*. Several of these imaginative maps took the form of literary maps, that visually display works of literature using text and imagery. One map of the classic American novel *Moby*

Dick tracked the Pequod's voyage around the world. Overlaying the world map were images of events in the novel that were particularly striking: Ishmael clinging to a rafter from his ship, or Ahab on deck pursuing the great white whale. On the left side of the map were factual images about the history of whaling as a profession.

The Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE) launched a project based on this exhibit, called *Mapping: Cartographies of Learning*, in which local Chicago artist worked with teachers and students in eight public Chicago schools to create various maps of their schools, their communities, and their own lives. They exhibited a vast array

Chicago Partnerships in Arts Education (CAPE)

CAPE is one of the leading organizations in the United States partnering public schools with arts organizations throughout the city of Chicago. Creative Director Arnold Aprill describes CAPE's concept of arts-integration, "Our students are postmodern citizens. They grew up with, are interested in, and actively participate in contemporary art forms (technologically based arts, interdisciplinary arts, popular arts, multicultural and intercultural arts) in ways that mirror the most innovative thinking of contemporary artists, and often with greater skill and content knowledge than that possessed by their teachers."

of student maps for the larger Chicago community.

What struck me about both these experiences was how powerful mapping fits with literature and interpretation. How might students create a map of their reading of a work of literature? The maps of literature I viewed in the Museum of National History, were aesthetically beautiful, but at the same time, they were fairly obvious. The *Moby Dick* map charted the movement of the ship around the world and the *Huckleberry Finn* map tracked Huck and Jim's boat trip down the Mississippi.

How much more original might students be at mapping a text? How can we explore ideas about a text, emotions felt in response to a story, as well as characters, plot, and the complex interaction of themes? What would students view as important in a text and how might they convey this to another person visually?

Furthermore, mapping asks students to demonstrate cognitively not only what they read but *how* they read. What processes of reading do a map reveal? How can students push beyond the obvious—mapping of plot—to the more elusive and abstract qualities of reading and representation? Mapping a text, for those students that have difficulty reading, provides a structure they create for comprehending and interpreting

the text. The visual connections parallel and make concrete the cognitive moves necessary for making meaning of print.

Mapping also creates the space for possibility of interpretation. I want students to free their minds, to try to think beyond the realm of the models, to other kinds of maps and encourage them to create the map that they want to create. I therefore, avoid lists of what you "must" include in your map: plot, characters, a key, text, image, and, instead, I let them roam freely in their creation. I want their artistic products to be filled with what Whitman refers to as "original energy." So without guidelines, how do students achieve any kind of quality? First, the students are required to do multiple drafts. When students re-draft their writing, they often recopy the original text with perhaps a few grammatical changes. The re-drafting of the maps necessarily involves starting over again with a blank piece of paper. They hold the conceptual idea of their map, and perhaps some key elements in their head, but they need to re-conceive of the map over and over again, improving on and adding to the previous drafts. Their work then develops, improving with each draft. Furthermore, throughout the drafting process, the students find inspiration from each other's work. They see the kind of innovations and bold ideas other students are employing in their

maps. By the end they each have a map that is of a quality each student feel represent their best work.

What are the essential pedagogies embedded in this mapping process?

1. Look at models for inspiration.
2. Emphasize a value on both surprise and original energy.
3. Require multiple drafts.
4. Facilitate a collaborative space for looking at each other's work and exchanging ideas.
5. Exhibit final products professionally.

Process

1. Learning with the end in mind. Share with the students an overview of the process. Explain they will be reading a text (short story, novel, or poem) and creating an imaginative map of the text. After plenty of time for reading, creating, and revising the maps, they will exhibit their maps for other classes or for their parents in a gallery space.

2. Sharing models for inspiration. There are many models of various kinds of maps on the Internet as well as in numerous publications. Bring some of your favorite models to class and share with students. Also allow them time to surf the internet and find new models to

show to the rest of the class. As a teacher, archive new models to share with students in future years. If you have worked on this project show students some of your most innovative maps from past classrooms. This allows students to see that they can achieve high quality results, and that not all the maps that have been created are from the hands of professionals.

3. Journaling. As the students read the text, ask them what are the possibilities for mapping. What kind of map do they want to create? They need to begin to form an idea of this early on in the process so they can take notes and track how this idea develops as they read. For instance, if they are tracking change in characters, how might they use quotes and images of characters as they read? What are the moments in the book when the characters undergo the greatest challenges or changes? If a student decides to follow the colors of a book (in *The Great Gatsby* for instance) how will they keep track of the various colors and what they symbolize, and how do the colors develop with the characters and the plot throughout the text? Other

students might opt for an even more abstract map—the moments when a Marquez text lifts of the ground of reality and floats in the air—how will they document these moments and capture them in a map? Students will want to keep a journal of their ideas for their maps. In this journal they might include sketches, quotes, freewrites, and even early rough drafts of what their map might look like.

4. Conceptual Sketching. On a small sheet of paper, each person drafts a conceptual sketch of their literary map. Ask them to share their sketch with multiple peers in their classroom, not to elicit advice, but rather to help them think through the design of their own map. They might also think about what materials they need to create the next draft of their map; will it be digital, three dimensional, in black and white, in color?

5. Drafting. At this stage students create multiple drafts of their literary map. Each time they need to start from scratch again, holding the overall ideas of the map in their mind and developing them with each draft. The numerous drafts will be

governed by how much time there is available in the class for the project as well as the will and patience of both the teacher and the students. For each draft, ask students to identify a peer coach who offers the student ideas, feedback, and advice. Provide many opportunities for students to present their work to the class and refine their ideas. This creates an environment where students are seeing the development of each other's work, and ideas begin to flow from student to student, improving the quality of all of the projects in general.

6. Exhibiting. When the students have reached the final draft of their work, exhibit the work in a high quality format. It is important that the quality of displaying the student work is in concert with the time students spent creating the work. Typed titles and nameplates beside the work, attention to lighting, space, and an exhibit title and overview are all important. Quotes or phrases from the original text can be interwoven throughout the exhibit so the audience gets a feel for the text and sees the relationship between the student work and the original.



HABLA is an educational center and lab school based in Merida, Yucatan, Mexico, dedicated to fostering school environments that promote the success of all students from multiple cultural backgrounds. HABLA offers cultural and language experiences for teachers and school leaders in an ideal space in Mexico and provides direct support on-site in schools throughout Mexico and the United States. For more information visit www.habla.org.