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Dramatic Themes:  
Active Learning and Thematic Teaching in the Theatre History Classroom

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at  
Virginia Commonwealth University.

By:

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BA – Christopher Newport University, 2014  
MFA – Virginia Commonwealth University, 2019

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Virginia Commonwealth University  
Richmond, Virginia  
April, 2019

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## **Abstract**

Dramatic Themes: Active Learning and Thematic Teaching in the Theatre History Classroom

Brandon A. LaReau, BA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2019

Committee Chair: Jesse A. Njus, PhD, Department of Theatre

This thesis explores major texts dealing with pedagogical theory and active learning in the context of a theatre history class. By comparing a class which is taught in the traditional, chronological format relying heavily on lectures to a class taught in a newer, thematic format utilizing active learning the thesis defines what student-centered learning means. Active learning, its benefits, and its implementation are explained and explored, along with the advantages and benefits of teaching thematically instead of chronologically. All of this is applied to a theatre history class in the resulting syllabus in chapter three. The syllabus creates a curriculum which uses themes to teach theatre history, while incorporating active learning activities and assignments throughout, to the benefit of the student. Ultimately, student-centered learning and its importance are explained and demonstrated using research, observation, and creation.

## Introduction: “*ars longa, vita brevis*”

Certain paradigm shifts are barely felt, and others have the ability to change everything. In the world of academe these can occur more slowly than necessary. The teaching of theatre history is no different. Studies show that we have reached a point in time where our students are more informed and savvier than ever before<sup>1</sup>. The diversity of the world is reflected in our classrooms, and the students are begging for that diversity to be included in our curricula. In order to better provide for our students, and for the sake of creating better informed theatre artists with a more comprehensive theatrical world view we must begin incorporating not only new information, but new ways of disseminating said information to our students. The solution to this is a joint venture between a gradual shift from chronological instruction to thematic instruction, and the incorporation of active learning techniques in the classroom.

The purpose of this paper is to better equip educators to help facilitate the critical thinking necessary for students to come to those conclusions on their own after being presented with primary and supporting information. This paper will explore and provide solutions to this pressing issue by proposing and explaining not only a more effective style of pedagogical approach, but exciting active learning exercises which will invigorate the classroom and ensure true learning not just memorization. By reorganizing our theatre history curricula to utilize a thematic syllabus rather than a chronological one will allow for greater inclusion of new material from diverse and understudied parts of the Anthropocene. Thematic teaching allows for more material to be covered in the allotted class times by arranging the material in large pods based on a variation of a single theme<sup>2</sup>. By including specific and dynamic active learning activities in the classroom as opposed to a completely

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<sup>1</sup> Haxhiymeri, Valentina, PhD, and Florinda Kristo, PhD. "Teaching Through Lectures..."

<sup>2</sup> White, Rodney M. "How Thematic Teaching..."

lecture based structure the students will engage with the material in a more individual and personal way, while drawing conclusions and making connections on their own. Suggested thematic bundles will be explored throughout, in addition to suggested specific exercises which will allow students to take greater ownership of the material and apply the themes in numerous situations.

These are not new ideas, and none of these theories are groundbreaking. In point of fact, Ben Franklin first acknowledged the dilemma of chronological teaching in his 1749 essay *Proposals Relating to the Youth of Pennsylvania*. In his paper, Franklin bemoans the fact that a proposed change to the education system at the time would require students to learn “all that is ornamental and all that is useful.”

The word pedagogy, or some derivative thereof, has appeared many times already. Rest assured it will appear many times more to come. However, it is possible that the word, or the thought behind the word, pedagogy could have multiple meanings. Theatre pedagogy is unique, because unlike a math equation or a chemical reaction, there is not a single way to approach or assess the material. How do you teach something which, at its essence, has no right or wrong answers? The answer is simple, by creating a student-centered environment where each individual student decides what the answers mean to them as individual theatre artists. In the scope of this paper pedagogy is defined as being the “theory and practice of education<sup>3</sup>.” Throughout this paper several different pedagogical approaches and theories will be explored at length. There are three widely accepted pedagogical approaches:

- Critical Pedagogy – is an approach that is always in conversation with the world around it. This is the idea that pedagogy is fluid, and shaped by history, politics, technology, and the need of students. This approach is critical of itself, and of other pedagogical approaches. The

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<sup>3</sup> “Definition of Pedagogy” merriamwebster.com. Retrieved 2/15/19



cornerstone of this approach includes understanding that students already possess knowledge and interest and using these opinions and perspectives in class, making connections between the classroom, the material, and the community, and challenging students in ways that encourage them to question assumed knowledge and understandings. Educators acknowledge that they hold a position of authority and exhibit this authority through their actions in ways that support and encourage students<sup>4</sup>.

- Student-Centered Learning – shifts the focus of the education from the educator to the student. Extremely applicable in interdisciplinary ventures this pedagogical approach is characterized by methods of teaching which aim to promote learning in communication with educators and other learners, and which take students seriously as active participants in their own learning and foster transferable skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and reflective thinking<sup>5</sup>. By empowering the students to take ownership of their education, they are more easily able to find opportunities for learning and continued education in their day-to-day life. For obvious reasons, this pedagogical approach is more easily applied in higher education than in a k-12 setting.
- Dialogic Learning – is learning which takes place through conversation and debate. Often linked to the Socratic dialogues but is found in many other cultures and traditions as a way of learning. These dialogues work best on the assumption that all debate is based on validity and not on a need to “best” another student<sup>6</sup>. This pedagogical approach has been influenced by many philosophers, including Habermas, Freire, and Bakhtin, but at its heart it is one of the most elemental forms of learning. The implied meaning of this pedagogical

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<sup>4</sup> Kincheloe, Joe L. *Critical Pedagogy: Primer*.

<sup>5</sup> Hoidn, Sabine. *Student-Centered Learning Environments in Higher Education Classrooms*.

<sup>6</sup> Kincheloe, Joe L. *The Praeger Handbook of Education and Psychology*.

approach, for the duration of this paper, is most closely aligned with the theory of Paulo Freire. Freire understands human nature itself to be dialogic, and that everything is in a dialogue with itself and with others. Freire believes that through this dialogic process we create and recreate ourselves many times over. Educators, he says, “in order to promote free and critical learning should create the conditions for dialogue that encourages the epistemological curiosity of the learner<sup>7</sup>.”

This paper will be in conversation with all three of them, but will prove definitively that a student-centered approach is the only practical option for academic sustainability and success. Some of these theories have been adopted in small parts by various classrooms but never to the extent which is necessary to be helpful to the student.

This paper will examine two distinctly different practical pedagogical theories, and their relationship with student-centered learning. In theatre history classrooms, there are two practical pedagogical theories:

- Chronological Pedagogical Theory – is the most widely accepted and used way to communicate historical information in classrooms<sup>8</sup>. There are many thoughts as to why this is the most prevalent theory, for starters it is the most obvious upon first inspection, and secondly, most educators base their classroom style and layout around their experience as a student<sup>9</sup> (subsequently, this is the number one reason for hesitant adoption or even exploration of any other theory). Because the chronological pedagogical theory already presents a basic unit structure, the repeated use of this theory allows for tired lectures and lazy educators who fail to innovate.

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<sup>7</sup> Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

<sup>8</sup> White, “How Thematic Teaching...”

<sup>9</sup> Haxhiymeri and Kristo “Teaching Through Lectures...”

- Thematic Pedagogical Theory – is not new in the sense that it was just developed, or new in the sense that it is proprietary, but is new in the sense that a vast majority of educators have not heard of or do not use this pedagogical theory. One of the many advantages to this theory is simply the scope. In a sixteen-week semester, only so much material can be covered; it is a race-against-the-clock with chronological theory, but thematic theory allows you to cover twice as much material in the same amount of time by grouping like with like and allowing the students' dialogues to fill in the blanks. The educator has the freedom to determine what themes are relevant at the time, or what themes coincide with current productions, research interests, or student demographics and then build the course around those interests. The major advantage of this pedagogical theory is that it allows for the greatest development of critical thinking possible. By giving the students room to make meaningful connections with the subject matter the students will approach learning in a more holistic fashion, putting everything in a more useful context<sup>10</sup>. When the students have taken ownership of their education, the educator's role becomes that of a moderator between the student and the material, rather than just a mouthpiece for the material.

All of these approaches and theories go into the creation of a curriculum. The missing key to making all of this work in the classroom, in addition to technology, is the tool which puts it all together:

- Active Learning - is student-centered, not teacher-centered, and requires more than just listening; the active participation of each and every student is a necessary aspect in active learning. Students must be doing things and simultaneously think about the work done and the purpose behind it so that they can enhance their higher order thinking capabilities<sup>11</sup>.

Active learning involves engaging every student in every way possible. This naturally lends

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<sup>10</sup> White, "How Thematic Teaching..."

<sup>11</sup> Bonwell, Charles C., and James A. Eison. *Active Learning...*

itself to Thematic pedagogical theory in the way that Bonwell and Eison describe different approaches to active learning, and exercises that utilize their delineated different functions.

The current theatre history curriculum uses almost a completely chronological syllabus and is deeply rooted in lecture-based teaching. I am arguing that theatre history curricula should be taught thematically, with a strong emphasis placed on incorporating active learning techniques to facilitate a student-centered environment. We can all agree that the primary focus of higher education is to a) educate students in a manner both comprehensive and efficient, b) arm our students with an armory of tools they can adapt and use in any situation they encounter, and c) update our world views to be able to meet the students “where they are” so that everyone has an even playing field regardless of background or prior experience. By implementing a few difficult, but necessary changes, educators can begin to revolutionize the way that theatre history is taught by the educator and understood by the student.

There are several words which will appear throughout this paper, it is necessary to agree on what they mean in the context of this thesis. First, the difference between active learning and experiential learning needs to be stated; over the course of this thesis ideas related to active learning appear at every turn. Active learning, for this paper, is defined as a teaching style characteristic of workshops, activities, and projects that allow the student to engage with content rather being lectured to or shown the content. This differs from experiential learning, which, while similar, is more similar to an apprenticeship or internship in the sense that the student learns by doing a task first hand that is often skill based rather than specifically based on new content. Many aspects of a theatre education include elements of experiential learning, however active learning is a better technique for combining new information with student interaction. Another word which will appear many times throughout this thesis is metacognition. In the scope of this paper, metacognition refers to the way a student thinks about how they think about content. This includes examining all of their

individual preconceived notions and personal biases and looking at how those affect and impress on the way individual students react and interact with new content.

The first necessary change this paper will explore is to switch from a chronological pedagogical theory to a thematic pedagogical theory. This change will be felt by the students and the educators and will lend itself to a more pleasant classroom experience as well as measurable increase in knowledge retention. The second change outlined, equally as important as the first, is to incorporate active learning techniques into the classroom on a daily basis. Using these two ideas in tandem will allow for higher education at large, but specifically theatre history classrooms, to come in to a new era of pedagogy. An era where the students are placed first, above all else, and educators work tirelessly to ensure that their curricula are as diverse and multifaceted as their students. The redesign of the way theatre history is taught begins with the willingness of the educator to understand and demonstrate the necessary changes.

This paper will serve as the multipurpose blueprint for this redesign. As it progresses, an argument against chronological pedagogical theory will form, and it will be made clear why thematic pedagogical theory is superior. As a suggested theatre history curriculum is outlined in a thematic style, Bonwell and Eison's active learning techniques (among others) will be woven in, presenting innovative classroom activities to accompany each of the newly suggested thematic bundles. As more and more theatre history educators scratch their heads as they sit in their offices wondering why their students are not connecting with the material, they will be faced with two choices: update the way they run their classroom or become obsolete. This paper will clearly outline the necessary changes for long term sustainability of theatre history education, through thematic teaching, active learning, and a student-centered environment.

## Chapter 1 : *Themata in Tempore*

Prior to my enrollment at Virginia Commonwealth University I had never sat and pondered the state of theatre history curricula. The long-term effects good teaching can have on students was not lost on me, but I had not thought of ways that information delivery could be improved. In fact, my passion for theatre history is something that did not fully present itself until my time at VCU began<sup>1</sup>. Over the course of my time in residence at VCU working on my MFA, I had the pleasure of being the teaching assistant for two different sections of the same course, THEA 307, Theatre History Part 1 (Ancient to Renaissance). What made my experience so unique, and what began as the catalyst for this thesis, is that each semester I was in the classroom the course was taught by a different instructor, each with a vastly different teaching style and approach. This is not to say that one was better than the other, both women are intelligent and entertaining, and able to keep their students engaged and focused because of their personalities and their experience as educators; both classes communicated, for the most part, the same, or similar, information to the students. What made the two classes equally different and formative in my development as an educator were the ways in which they were taught: one section followed a strict chronological pedagogical theory, utilizing brightly colored PowerPoints with GIFs and memes to keep the material relevant to the students modern sensibility and attractive to their relatively short attention spans; the other section followed a formatted thematic pedagogical structure, which relied less on PowerPoints and memes and utilized active learning techniques and hands-on, lab style learning. While the grades<sup>2</sup> were not dramatically different from one section to the other, the feel in the classroom and the measurable expansion of general knowledge was dramatically different. This knowledge was tested through homework assignments, tests, and in-class group work, all of which will be discussed in more depth

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<sup>1</sup> I had taken a gap of nearly three years between the completion of my BA in 2014 and the start of my MFA in 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Each section has a Blackboard portal which is still accessible, and contains the grades received for each assignment as well as final grades for the class.

in later chapters. The thoughts, ideas, and observations examined and explored in this thesis are the results of my observation of both classrooms. At the end of this thesis a new syllabus is outlined. This syllabus uses the research gathered for this thesis and uses the best of all relevant ideas. It is with this syllabus that it becomes clear than a thematic style syllabus which incorporates active learning techniques is key to achieving a student-centered classroom.

I am proposing a radical shift, already begun on a small scale by “early adopter” faculty. Those educators who have yet to be exposed to the idea of a thematic curriculum rather than a chronological one seem to, after looking through multiple sources and aggregating their observations, fall in to two major categories: those who are simply unaware of a new way of doing things, either because they base their teaching style on how they were taught, or because there is no textbook written in a thematic style; or those who are aware of a new way of doing things, but choose not to, either because they realize there is a bit more extra work with a thematic curriculum and active learning techniques, or because they don’t want to be the only ones in their respective departments doing something different. Out of the many studies examined in this thesis, general findings on why the status quo never changes are the same, that in the absence of educational development, teachers in higher education tend to base their teaching on their own experience as students<sup>3</sup>. The research supports a shift to a thematic pedagogical theory with active learning techniques, and it is having a profound effect on student success<sup>4</sup>.

In order to understand why one pedagogical theory works more efficiently than another, we must first examine the two curricula side by side. First, a tour of a chronologically structured syllabus, and then second a tour through a thematic syllabus; both for the same class and covering

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<sup>3</sup> Haxhiymeri, Valentina, PhD, and Florinda, Kristo, PhD. “Teaching Through Lectures...”

<sup>4</sup> Vanessa Campagna’s undergraduate class from Monmouth College will serve as a more recent example of this. After implementing changes in her class that incorporated active learning she noticed a huge spike in attendance and grades got exponentially better.

similar material, there are a few big differences that will become evident immediately, and others will require more subtle nuancing to make themselves known.

### Chronologically Structured Syllabus<sup>5</sup>

Just upon first observation the syllabus [these observations are based only on content and objectives, and not the layout or style of the actual document itself] is different in its requirement of a textbook, the *Norton Anthology of Drama*. This sparks a whole new debate, which will be largely avoided in this paper, about the requirement of textbooks; the Norton website lists the anthology with an MSRP of \$80.00. While not the most expensive textbook on the market, there has been a great deal of discussion about the way that requiring a textbook can make success elitist by not making the same educational experience accessible to all students from all backgrounds, regardless of financial insecurity. Most schools or departments combat this by having several copies, either on reserve in the campus library, or available for loan from department (it is worth nothing that when I was the teaching assistant for this course I was given a brand new, still-in-the-cellophane copy of the anthology, which I then returned to the teacher of record at the completion of the semester). One of the other things that immediately makes this syllabus different from the opposing one is its first objective. The syllabus says, “this course will trace the history of theatre from its origins through the European Renaissance...<sup>6</sup>”, this statement, while not entirely sacrilegious, implies that there is a single point of origin for all theatre and that everything that came after it was an “advancement”. The implication that “A” comes first and inspires “B” and then “C” incorporates elements of “A” and “B” until finally “D” comes along and uses elements of the first three, is misleading and not at all how theatre, or anything for that matter, developed. In reality it is a lot more like “A”, “B”, and

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<sup>5</sup> McCracken, Shaun. THEA 307: History of Theatre, Part 1; Antiquity through the Renaissance. Virginia Commonwealth University, Department of Theatre. Fall 2017. Appendix 1:1.

<sup>6</sup> McCracken, 1.



“C” are happening at the same time, likely independently of each other, and then through trade and other forms of cultural diffusion, “D” uses elements of “B” and “C” while “E” is developing independently of any outside influence.

### Thematically Structured Syllabus<sup>7</sup>

Immediately this syllabus feels different. There is no required textbook, all of the readings will be provided online through the Blackboard portal. The instructor does require the students to purchase a copy of Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*, a much simpler, and far more economic option for students than a full textbook. This goes a long way in removing an economic roadblock for some to education, in fact it may eliminate it all together, since all of Shakespeare’s works are available as PDFs online. Another major difference in the syllabus is the implied learning objective. “At the end of this class, you should be prepared to deal with any performance you encounter in the world and better prepared to create your own<sup>8</sup>.” This objective is supported by much of the pro-thematic research, teaching classes in a thematic way enable the students to develop strong critical thinking skills which enables students to understand important subject matter content in a meaningful and useful context<sup>9</sup>. This is certainly the goal of every class, but research supports that using thematic pedagogical theories and active learning techniques are much more effective ways of achieving these goals.

While not fully outlined in the syllabus, the structure of this class consisted of, on average, one day a week of lecture/presentation/discussion and one day a week of hands-on activity or active learning engagement. Although there is a loose timeline, the layout of the content is much more circular than the linear layout of the content in a chronological syllabus. The course is divided,

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<sup>7</sup> Njus, Jesse. THEA 307, Theatre History Part 1. Virginia Commonwealth University, Department of Theatre, Fall 2018. Appendix 1:2.

<sup>8</sup> Njus, 1.

<sup>9</sup> White, Rodney M. “How Thematic Teaching Can Transform History Instruction.” *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas* 68, no. 3 (January/February 1995): 160-62. Doi: 10.1080/00098655.1995.9957220.

roughly, into three “supra-themes” and eleven “sub-themes”. Each of the sub-themes is then divided even further with the explanation of the weekly breakdown. There are also overarching themes which are relevant to the entire course. Music features heavily in the course, as one of those overarching themes, it is discussed in all eleven of the sub-themes and plays a big part in the overall context of the material. Physical or “slapstick” comedy is another of the overarching themes which is relevant at many levels of the course material and helps draw connections between cultures. The three supra-themes are: Masks, Chorus, and Puppets. These supra-themes work with the overarching themes to illustrate the similarities between all of the studied cultures and performance styles; by highlighting the similarities and discussing the differences our students are able to gain the essential analytical skills necessary to not only succeed in this class but apply in all areas of their academic careers.

The course calendar in the chronological syllabus begins with an introduction day, what the students call “Syllabus Day”, which was a shorter-than-usual class where the syllabus is passed out and discussed. The next two weeks of the class are set aside for “Ancient Theatre”, this includes everything that happens during the introduction and preface of the Norton anthology. This is a ‘catchall’ space which could easily turn in to virtue signaling but does provide a space for the diversification of the curriculum. Taking in to account that almost every theatre history class, and almost every theatre history textbook I have encountered begins with something along the lines of “*in 600BCE Thespis invented theatre...*”. By including a space for Ancient Theatre, you are able to touch on many aspects of the underserved parts of theatre history, it was in this space that I delivered my lecture on Ancient Egyptian dramatic traditions, and the instructor was able to discuss other African dramatic traditions, along with pre-Colombian South America. The incorporation of African and South and Central American dramatic traditions in the syllabus is a major step forward in terms of diversity and inclusion. It is a small way that slowly, the curriculum we present is as

diverse as the classes we are presenting it to. The next two weeks on the syllabus are for Greek Theatre, a relatively broad subject to present in just two weeks, the first week of the topic was a general discussion of the history and mythos of Ancient Greece, focusing on political structure, socio-economic merit, and Global power. The second week was a discussion of Greek theatre, and how the world around it was represented in plays and festivals. The subsequent two weeks went to Asian Theatre of all forms, everything from Sanskrit drama, to Chinese Opera, Bunraku, and Kabuki. By placing this unit between the Greece and Rome units allows for the students to understand how different things were developing at the same time in different places. Having just finished reading *Medea*, the students are then asked to read *Little Clay Cart*, which allows for a comparison of story structure and narrative between the infamous Greek tragedy and the ten-act Sanskrit opus which is often overlooked. Only one week is spent on Roman Theatre. Rather than discussing many of the Roman plays (by recognizing that they are almost all riffs on Greek themes) this unit is more focused on sport and other performative aspects of Ancient Rome. Gladiators, the Coliseum, lion fighting, etc., are all put into context as new forms of public entertainment. Rome is put into context as being a Global superpower, which explains the Nation's diversity of thought and of people. The first mention of Shakespeare occurs putting *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra* in conversation with Roman political fervor and Ptolemaic Egypt. The next class period is devoted to a game of "Jeopardy" designed as a midterm review; the midterm is a take-home test which is distributed at the end of class that day.

The first day of class in the thematic syllabus is the same as with the other. An introduction day which is shorter than the rest as the syllabus is passed out and discussed. The first of the eleven sub-themes is "Ancient Athenian Tragedy" during this week the students read *The Bacchae* and discussed a brief history of Greece, including political structure and the origins of theatre festivals and who would be attending them. The second of the sub-themes is "Ancient Athenian Comedy"

and the students are asked to read *Lysistrata*. For the active learning portion of these lessons, the students don masks (similar to the ones you find at Party City or a comparable store around Mardi Gras time) and are asked to act out scenes from the plays, working as a chorus and using body language to communicate scenes, like the Bacchae dancing furiously in the forest, or Pentheus being lured up a tree and decapitated.

The last sub-theme solely under the supra-theme of Masks is “Medieval Japanese Noh”. During this unit, the students are asked to read *Tomoe* and following some of Zeami’s writing during the active learning portion of this unit the students practice some of his acting notes. The students experience using a fan, walking like a traditional Noh actor would walk, as well as taking on some different characterizations (like old man, etc....) according to the rules Zeami set for the actors studying under him in Medieval Japan. During this time the first graded assignment is due, the title “On Masks” indicates that this is testing the students’ abilities to apply the skills and understandings learned in the Masks supra-theme. The students must design a mask for any character we have encountered so far, and write a brief response detailing their choices and why they made them. By giving the students complete creative freedom this assignment becomes a unilaterally engaging activity that works to the strengths of every student in the class, regardless of specific writing skills or test-taking ability. The class was made up of approximately 50% design students and stage management students and the remaining 50% were performance students, all of the students had varying levels of competencies and skills; by creating such a freely interpreted and individually creative assignment to gauge the practical application of the material covered so far an environment is established in the classroom which gives all students a certain level of equality that occasionally standard essay writing and traditional test taking can be prejudicial<sup>10</sup>. The next supra-theme is

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<sup>10</sup> Weir, Kirsten. "Inequality at School." *Monitor on Psychology*. November 2016. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2016/11/cover-inequality-school>.

Chorus, however unlike the previous supra-theme, Masks, this one builds upon its predecessor. The first sub-theme is “Pre-Colombian Americas” and begins with the *Rabinal Achi*. Students are asked to read the *Rabinal Achi*, and selections from an analysis. The reading and classroom discussion and examples are focused around the use of the chorus in the Mayan drama, comparing and contrasting its use in this situation to how the students have seen it used previously. The following sub-theme is “Post-Colombian Americas” and the students encounter Cruz’s *Loa for the Divine Narcissus*. Also discussed in this unit is Camp, and a scholarly article is read by the students as classroom discussion centers around what Camp is and how it is present in many different manifestations of art in both expressly political and inherently political ways. The Camp discussion focuses on how a community can act as a chorus, as well as highlighting the politicism of all the different forms of art discussed to this point. The final sub-theme of this section is “Early Modern China” and the students are asked to read Xu Wei’s version of *Mulan*. The students are able to see the differences between Medieval Japan and Early Modern China by drawing their own conclusions through a loosely structured discussion about what makes Mulan and Tomoe different, both the characters and the plays. Mulan serves, for this class, as a breakaway point where serious discussion about gender, gender roles, expressed masculinity, and butch/femme symbiosis can be discussed intelligently using many aspects of nearly every previously covered unit.

This is one of the extra benefits of structuring a class in a thematic way. A skilled and experienced instructor is able to identify where certain topics will come up, when they can be put off until a later time, and when the class needs to discuss them. The close and careful crafting of this syllabus allowed the instructor to know exactly when the gender roles/sexuality discussion would arise, and by structuring the readings and discussions in the order that they were covered allowed the students to have many different examples to use when they finally started asking these questions. I do not see an easy or non-controversial way to have that discussion in a classroom following a

chronological pedagogical theory syllabus. Rather than be able to have the conversation once and have it cover everything that has happened already, AND everything that will come up later, a chronological class would have some version of that conversation every-other week. This is a further example to the point that using a thematic pedagogical theory syllabus saves time in the classroom allowing for more content to be covered<sup>11</sup>.

The assignment for this supra-theme is called, simply, “On the Chorus”, and is comprehensive to everything covered so far. The students are engaged in the assignment by applying outside knowledge of the theatre field with knowledge gained in the classroom. By putting what they know through practice in conversation with what they have learned challenges the critical thinking skills that a thematic syllabus foster. The students are asked to choose a scene from a modern musical which uses a chorus, and then complete an analysis of said chorus, analyzing its role in the story as a whole, while comparing it to the use of a chorus in *The Bacchae* or *Lysistrata*. Most of the papers featured the O’Keefe/Benjamin musical *Legally Blonde, the Musical* due to the fact that the school had just produced this musical (which features a Greek style chorus) the year prior. The students engaged with the chorus of *Legally Blonde, the Musical* in different ways depending on what their role in the production was, which allowed them to personalize the assignment. This style of assignment goes hand-in-hand with active learning techniques and allows for much more ownership of the material by the students than a standard one-size-fits-all assignment as popular in chronological classrooms.

Following a class period dedicated to an interactive review for the midterm, the students completed a midterm which was comprised of short answer, long answer, and essay questions. While the exam itself follows the traditional midterm model, the questions allowed for high levels of self-expression, individuality, and creativity; often some kind of drawing or rendering would be

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<sup>11</sup> White, “How Thematic Teaching...”

appropriate to partially satisfy an answer. Exams structured in this fashion pair perfectly with the classroom environment to create student-centered learning. Student-centered learning is in stark contrast to instructor-centered learning, and involves the instructor working harder to accommodate the students at all levels for all needs, it is the essential understanding that students all learn in different ways and need different types of ways to communicate their ideas and retain information. A thematic classroom is inherently student-centered<sup>12</sup> and therefore a more comfortable environment for students to be in, both in general, and when it come to the exchange of ideas. In classrooms where students feel comfortable, they will more freely contribute to discussion and feel less scrutiny and fear of being incorrect when sharing ideas and thoughts.

When the chronological class resumes after Fall break, the first week back is devoted to Medieval Theatre. Passion Plays and Morality Plays are the main topic, the students are asked to read *Everyman*, and while discussion turns to Hildgarde of Bingen and Hrosvit, most of the material covered was an explanation of the Church's role in Medieval politics and society. Pageant wagons are discussed, as the material makes a smart return to the influence of ritual and religion on theatre, calling back to much of what was discussed in the first few weeks of class. The Italian Renaissance is given one week, which it must share with Commedia Dell'arte. During this week, Italian politics and its relation to the Church are discussed, as well as stock characters and masks. Much of the focus is placed on how the Italian Renaissance became the format for other renaissances and the need for cheap entertainment for lower-class citizens. There is a strong emphasis placed on technical theatre and the advancements which begin to be made in that field. The English Renaissance is given one week, Shakespeare is treated like a dirty word and barely mentioned at all. The focus instead is on the other playwrights of the period, often stuck in Shakespeare's shadow such as Kyd, Marlowe, Webster, and Johnson. The students are asked to read *The Duchess of Malfi* rather than a Shakespeare

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<sup>12</sup> Haxhiymeri and Kristo, "Teaching through lectures..."

play, which they all delighted in reading something other than a work by The Bard. Popular entertainment was discussed as well, everything from Bear-baiting to court Masques; however, a large part of the unit was devoted to understanding English history and politics, succession, and the start of their rise to a Global superpower through Colonization. The Spanish Golden Age was given one and a half weeks, and mostly focused around Zarzuelas and other forms of public entertainment, the students were asked to read *Fuenteovejuna*. A lot of time is devoted to the discussion of Spanish politics and its relationship to other European countries, the Muslim occupation, and the beginning of Spanish exploration and Colonization. The class concludes with French Neoclassical Theatre, which is also given one and a half weeks of class time. While most of the discussion is about acting companies and their managers (the class really seemed to enjoy *Gros Guillaume*) advancements in scenery and stage technology were emphasized. Ballets were discussed as popular entertainment, which led to a discussion on the similarities of Commedia, Masques, Zarzuelas, and Ballets. Time was devoted to Moliere and other influential playwrights, but before long the semester was over. The last class consisted of a “Jeopardy” game similar to the midterm review for the purpose of preparing the students for the final exam, which was also a take-home test.

Just like that the chronological pedagogical theory-based syllabus is finished as quickly as it began. There are some major strengths to this layout, chief among them is that students are used to learning in a chronological way. There already exists a framework which an instructor may follow to lay out their class in a simple and linear way that provides for smooth transitions from one unit to another<sup>13</sup>. Most textbooks follow a similar structure, so with a chronological layout of your semester you would be able to use just about any textbook without dramatically reshaping your syllabus (this

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<sup>13</sup> Tew, Daniel J. “Pedagogy of Teaching History: Comparing the Chronologic and Thematic Approaches.” Bachelor’s thesis, Western Oregon University, 2014. June 2014.



can be a positive or a negative depending on your viewpoint, as stated earlier some people consider the requirement of textbooks to be an obstacle to equal-opportunity learning and an impediment to accessibility). This course has a clear beginning and a clear ending based on the timeline and can be tempting for teachers to follow. There are major disadvantages also, most obviously is the pressure to cover everything. With a syllabus laid out in a chronological way, the instructor is presented with a roadmap that they must follow, in the attempt to hit all of the milestones, major chunks of vital information can be skipped or reduced down to tiny blips on the radar. When you follow a set layout in the textbook, the instructor has a lot less work to do themselves, rather than designing fun classroom activities that engage critical thinking and active learning all the instructor has to do is assign a reading from the book for homework. This removes any chance for an individualized classroom experience, and provides very little opportunity for discussion of topics “off-the-beaten-path” and does very little favors for the students in terms of allowing them to make connections on their own, and to develop the critical thinking skills needed to apply the themes they learn in this class to other aspects of theatrical training. Another major issue with teaching in this chronological way is that it can leave too much room for editorial narrative. When things are presented in this chronological and complete way, their understanding is that what they are being taught is exactly true 100%, and while often it is, teaching in this way leaves a lot of room for omissions or inclusions of things not relevant or germane, but important to the instructor. This could be seen as a pitfall in educational ethics, in which we, as educators, are driven to present all the information as unbiased as possible (usually by recognizing that we all have inherent biases) to allow the students to draw conclusions and create connections on their own. Chronological pedagogical theory allows for greater “spin” and administrative control over what is taught in the classroom, which is another major con for this style of teaching. Now, let us examine a syllabus which follows a thematic pedagogical theory.

After Fall break in the thematic class, the first supra-theme following the midterm is Puppets, which is also the name of the heading of the sub-theme. Students are introduced to Bunraku plays and asked to read selections from *Yoshitsune and the Thousand Cherry Trees*—specifically the section known as “The Fox.” Students are introduced to “puppet theory” and many different styles of puppet by looking at examples from *War Horse* and various parts of Basil Twist’s career. The next sub-theme is “Medieval Japanese Kyogen” during which the students are introduced to three different Japanese comedies and encouraged to explore both of the overarching themes music and physical comedy/slapstick. These Japanese plays, which also use masks, allow for students to make connections between the different time periods and the different styles (in this case, specifically Japanese theatre over time). By comparing these Kyogen plays to the Bunraku plays they have just read, the students are able to see how different styles of theatre technique can be applied to differently effect the story. By teaching this concept thematically the students are free and fully prepared to make their own conclusions without being spoon-fed the information or being forced to see things that they don’t understand. For the active learning portion of this unit, the students were tasked with using an item of theirs as a puppet, first figuring out how the item was oriented, then discovering how it “breathes” and looks around. Once the students had an idea of how their puppet interacted with the world around it, they then were asked to interact with other puppets. The students moved through the room, engaging with each other via their puppets, telling stories and becoming acquainted with what a puppet can do. By using inanimate objects like a wallet or a pen as puppets, the students were still able to ascribe thoughts and feelings on to the objects, thus demonstrating the transformative nature of a puppet and how it is able to achieve so much on stage. The lessons learned in this applied lesson are ones that would be nearly impossible to teach in any other way, puppets are relatively misunderstood and it can be very difficult for students to understand the effects that puppets can have on the audience unless they have to opportunity to

engage and experience this first-hand. For the assignment for this supra-theme, the students are asked to pick one character from any one of the plays covered in class so far, they are then to replace that character with a puppet of some kind (anthropomorphic or otherwise) and then write a response explaining their choices. This assignment, again, allows the students to use their talents and practical skills in ways that a simple writing assignment would not allow them to do, by creating a design for a puppet (or in some cases actually making the puppet) the students are able to also understand the technical limitations and constraints that using a puppet provide.

The next several sub-themes fit in to multiple supra-themes. “Medieval Comediennes” introduces the students to Hrosvit and *The Passion of the Holy Virgins Agape, Chionia, and Irena* and segues into the larger discussion of physical comedy and *lazzi* as a whole. The slapstick violence and repeatable “bits” of *lazzi* incorporate many of the concepts the students have already encountered thus far, while simultaneously preparing them for Commedia dell’Arte, Moliere, and Shakespeare. The students next engage with Moliere’s *Tartuffe*, and the paper fans make a reappearance as some of the more easily demonstrable examples of *lazzi* from Moliere’s text are acted out by the teaching staff for the students. While not specifically active learning for the students, by engaging them in a clever way, and having the instructors act out comedic scenes from the play causes the students to pay special attention at the scenes exhibited. Commedia dell’Arte is introduced to the class, and, since *lazzi* have already been covered, the conversation features more on the use of stock characters and improvisation. Because many of the students are involved with the on-campus improvisation teams, they interact with this section well, and understand it deeply.

Everything covered in the class so far becomes relevant as the students turn their attention to the last of the sub-themes, “Shakespeare”. The students engage with the text from *As You Like It*, so chosen because the instructor of the course had just directed a production of the play at the university, which all students in the class were required to attend. Having had to opportunity to see

the play while they talk about it in class becomes an active learning technique on its own, the students instantly have a new depth of understanding that would be hard for them to have attained just by reading the text. By being able to see how music, physical comedy, puppets, etc. interact with each other on stage in *As You Like It*, the students can more easily comprehend the cross-cultural application of the themes they just spent a semester discussing.

For their final project, the students are divided into groups. The final consisted of two parts: a group presentation, and an individual research paper. The prompt<sup>14</sup> for the assignment was:

### GROUP PROJECT

1. Choose a play that we've read in class.
2. Decide if your group is producing/designing a modern adaptation or an original production.
3. CHOOSE the specific elements of your production. Are there masks? Puppets? Movement/lazzi? Is there a chorus? Cross-gender casting?
4. DIVIDE your group into individual RESEARCH roles based on the elements involved in your production. Who is responsible for costumes? Who is responsible for the set? Masks? Puppets? Music? Character type? Casting? Movement? Choreography? [YOU WILL BE RESEARCHING these elements NOT performing them. For example, the person researching choreography does NOT have to BE a choreographer.]
5. MAKE SURE your group has a UNIFIED VISION of the production.
6. The **FINAL WEEK** of class, every group will present their production concept to the class along with the individual research. Each individual should have an artifact to present. If you do not wish to speak in front of the class, bring a poster or flyer or other visual that can be handed out to the class or that the class can look at. A performance can be **part** of your presentation.

### INDIVIDUAL PAPER

1. This is a RESEARCH PAPER on the element of the production for which YOU are responsible.
2. **YOUR ASSIGNMENT** is to write a research paper, backing up **your argument** with primary and secondary source material.
3. **YOUR ARGUMENT** is the choice you made about your production element. Justify your choices!
4. Your paper should begin with a **THESIS** statement. A thesis statement is your ARGUMENT. A **thesis statement** is usually the first or last sentence of your introductory paragraph.

This assignment allows each student an equal opportunity to flourish using their specific skillset and based on the practical knowledge they have gained in their other classes and through general experience. This allows the scenic students to do a set design, the costuming students to create a

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<sup>14</sup> Njus, "Final Paper/Project" prompt. Fall 2018.

costume design, etc. By designing a final presentation around the concept of letting each individual student shine in their own way is the epitome of student-centered learning and guarantees that each student will walk out of the classroom with a strong and lasting relationship to the material.

## Reflections

The observations gleaned from these two, very different, versions of the same class present a vivid and clear picture of the reasoning behind what this thesis is arguing. A shift from a chronological pedagogical theory based syllabus to one that is based in a thematic pedagogical theory is necessary. The way that a thematic syllabus is not only more inclusive, but more accommodating to the individual needs and talents of the specific students is reason enough; however the fact that a thematic design allows for the seamless interpolation of active learning techniques indicated that not only should this change be desired, it should be required. If the goal of higher education is to make the information educators are attempting to communicate engaging and compelling, then it becomes increasingly relevant that a thematic pedagogical theory is the superior way to do that.

If we think back to the three major pedagogical approaches outlined in the introduction of this thesis, it becomes increasingly apparent that the chronological classroom outlined above is able to engage with the Critical Pedagogy approach and the Dialogic Learning approach, but inherently fails to engage with the Student-Centered approach. The Student-Centered approach is characterized<sup>15</sup> by the ease of ownership of one's own education, allowing the students to become active participants, and fostering skills like critical thinking which are easily transferrable to other programs. Because of its ability to engage all three of the widely accepted pedagogical approaches, a thematic classroom is the obvious better choice for the theatre history classroom. The short-term benefits of this change have been seen<sup>16</sup> to increase student engagement in other classes, as well as

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<sup>15</sup> Hoidn, Sabine. *Student-Centered Learning ...*

<sup>16</sup> Haxhiymeri and Kristo, "Teaching through lectures..."

improving grades across the board. In theatre history classes where this style of learning is applied the results are dramatic. At Monmouth College, once their faculty began teaching thematically and incorporating active learning techniques and activities in their classrooms, in Fall of 2018 they reported that [specifically] their undergraduate theatre history course had no absences for the duration of the semester, and that none of the students required a midterm grade warning<sup>17</sup>. The long-term benefits of this shift will be felt over time, as absences go down and grades go up, theatre history instructors are not the only educators who will reap the benefits of these trending changes. Students will eventually learn how to be self-starters and apply these new techniques to their other classes in an effort to make learning more enjoyable and permanent. As absences go down and grades go up in STEM classes, the higher education system as a whole will be forced to adapt to keep the positive trend happening. These changes will change the relationship between student and teacher, and bring us into a Golden Age of higher education; because of its inherently interactive subject matter, and cyclical timeline, theatre history studies classes are the perfect place to initiate the change from a lecture-style, chronological pedagogical theory based syllabus to an active learning-style, thematic pedagogical theory based syllabus.

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<sup>17</sup> Campagna, Vanessa. "Embodied Knowledge: Shifting Praxes in Theatre History", Mid-America Theatre Conference, 3/7/2019.

## Chapter 2: Active Learning, Thematic Teaching, and their Application

The purpose of this thesis is to explain how active learning works, and why its use is essential in the teaching of theatre history. So, what is active learning? Well, in the scope of this thesis, active learning is defined as instructional activities in which the students engage in higher-order thinking through analysis, synthesis, and evaluation<sup>1</sup>. This loops into the one of the major focuses in Bain's *What the Best College Teachers Do* (2004) in which Bain outlines the idea of "metacognition", characterized by the student's ability to think about their own thinking, to reason with concepts and information they encounter by using the information widely and relating it to previous learning and experience. Metacognition is inherent in a classroom which makes use of active learning techniques in the way that these techniques allow the students to read, write, discuss, and be engaged in problem solving. All of these activities require the students to use deep thinking to relate themes and content to each other across disciplines by drawing connections.

In terms of how to implement these active learning techniques on a broad scale, Bonwell and Eison offer some highly curated ideas; some of which are far more practical than others and would be easier to implement in a theatre history class. One of the most discussed way to modify a lecture to include more active learning is "Pausing for Enhanced Retention and Comprehension<sup>2</sup>." This theory would have instructors pause for two-minute intervals as many as three times during their lecture, during which time the students would work in pairs or small groups to consolidate their notes and identify major themes and concepts from the preceding portion of the lecture. This has shown success in other implementations<sup>3</sup> where students are given time for a free recall at the end of the lecture to write down everything they could remember. Students who were being taught

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<sup>1</sup> Bonwell and Eison, "Active Learning..."

<sup>2</sup> Bonwell and Eison, "Active Learning..."

<sup>3</sup> Ruhl, Kathy, Charles Hughes, and Patrick Schloss. 1987. "Using the Pause Procedure to Enhance Lecture Recall" *Teacher Education and Special Education* 10: 14-18.

in classrooms where the Pause Procedure was in effect tested better than students in traditional lecture classrooms. Despite the overwhelmingly positive results in both short-term, lecture to lecture recall<sup>4</sup>, and the long-term results seen in free recall and term examinations<sup>5</sup> implementing the Pause Procedure may not be practical in all classes. While there is a foreseeable benefit to using this method in theatre history classes, this technique would offer the most benefit to students in a traditional class, such as that of the chronological syllabus presented in Chapter One. For example, if there was an instructor who wished to continue teaching using a chronological syllabus, the Pause Procedure would be an excellent way to enhance the class. Students would be able to begin to draw conclusions and see similarities over each unit as they were allowed time during each lecture to discuss the lecture notes in small groups. This would allow for students to begin identifying themes which are the same from culture to culture, as they progressed chronologically through their coursework. Although not the ideal way to teach, and not endorsed by this thesis, incorporating the Pause Procedure into a chronological, lecture style class would be a great way for educators who are hesitant of switching to a thematic curriculum to begin adding active learning techniques into their classroom and facilitating a student-centered approach.

One of the major differences between the chronological syllabus and the thematic syllabus outlined in Chapter One is the way in which the instructors use assessments as a metric of students learning. While most educators can agree that some type of assessment is necessary, it is the style of exam or assessment that draws the most heat. The chronological syllabus uses multiple choice and true-or-false style assessments, with very few short answer or essay questions. From the get-go this sets the students up for a learning environment where the emphasis is placed on memorization

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<sup>4</sup> Bonwell and Eison, "Active Learning..."

<sup>5</sup> Ruhl, Hughes, and Schloss, "Using the..."



rather than deep thinking and metacognition. Even as early as the 1930's<sup>6</sup> have these trends been identified and studied. When asked how they study for exams, students who knew the exams they would be given were in a multiple choice or true-or-false format openly admitted that they only studied to learn the facts or memorize and not to attempt to get a general concept from the material<sup>7</sup>. While this may seem like an obvious response, it seems to have done little to change the way exams are given, or assessments taken. The underlying problem is that classrooms that do not fully embrace active learning techniques will always fall-short in terms of long-term comprehension. When the students recognize that their assessments will not be testing their comprehension of themes in a broader context, evidence<sup>8</sup> suggests that they do not think of the material in terms of a broader context. The assessments given in the class which used the thematic syllabus utilized short and long answer questions which facilitate the necessary deep thinking that active learning is attempting to achieve. The questions on the assessment allowed for high levels of self-expression, individuality, and creativity; often some kind of drawing or rendering would be appropriate to partially satisfy an answer. Exams structured in this fashion pair perfectly with the thematic classroom environment and active learning techniques to create student-centered learning. A thematic classroom is inherently student-centered<sup>9</sup> and therefore a more comfortable environment for students to be in, both in general, and when it comes to the exchange of ideas. Because the students will be comfortable with the content, active learning and student-centered classrooms could be the key to eliminating a majority of the texting anxiety that students have when they feel underprepared. Essay examination create a desire within students to be able to understand not only

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<sup>6</sup> Meyer, G. 1935. "An Experimental Study of the Old and New Types of Examination: Methods of Study." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 26: 30-40.

<sup>7</sup> Meyer, "An Experimental..."

<sup>8</sup> Bonwell and Eison, "Active Learning..."

<sup>9</sup> Haxhiymeri and Kristo, "Teaching through lectures..."

the details of the content, but the larger themes as well<sup>10</sup>, which engages the metacognition necessary for cross-concept applications.

Bonwell and Eison outline how demonstrations can be one of the most vital active learning techniques an educator can incorporate into their classrooms<sup>11</sup>. Demonstrations work exceptionally well in a theatre history classroom, and this fact is well reflected in the thematic syllabus examined previously. In addition to providing first-hand experience, demonstrations stimulate a student's curiosity and improves their understanding of conceptual material. This is good news for the students in thematic class, as almost every subtheme included a demonstration. All but one of the demonstrations actively involved the students' participation, as will be explained later in this chapter. Bonwell and Eison cite<sup>12</sup> a 1988 study done by two Kenyan researchers, N. Okpala and C. Onocha, in which students who actively engaged in the demonstrations had a much easier time learning specific principles than students who merely observed a similar demonstration during a lecture class. By engaging the students in the demonstrations, the thematic class explored in Chapter One sets the students up for an easier time learning the material and allows them to, not only apply it in other coursework, but to engage in metacognition and form opinions which are in conversation with the themes and concepts. The students are even capable of mentioning and incorporating themes and concepts explored in the sample class in other classes<sup>13</sup>, proving that they do not simply memorize the information only to forget it later, but that when students are engaged in active learning in a student-centered classroom they retain the material long term and use it in other scenarios. The fact that students who are now taking a class with the same instructor who taught the thematic syllabus are incorporating ideas and themes from a semester ago into their current course work is a huge win

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<sup>10</sup> Meyer, "An Experimental..."

<sup>11</sup> Bonwell and Eison, "Active Learning..."

<sup>12</sup> Bonwell and Eison, "Active Learning..."

<sup>13</sup> Njus, 2019. Personal communication, March 26.

for advancing the ideas and principles of active learning. Exhibiting the fact that students who engage with this material in hands-on and exciting ways almost always retain the information better than students who are only exposed to the information in a lecture style format.

### Feed-Back Lecture

Among Bonwell and Eison's other suggestions are three different types of alternative lectures. The first of which is called the "feed-back lecture". This format, which Bonwell and Eison do not take credit for<sup>14</sup>, calls on the instructor to structure class in two sections of minilectures, each followed by small group discussions. Although similar to the Pause Procedure, this format advocates for longer breaks and group discussion rather than just a partner. While the "feed-back lecture" has been proven 99% useful among students who interacted with this style of learning<sup>15</sup>, it has some limitations, due to the fact that it requires extensive planning and preparation on the part of the instructor to ensure that the minilectures are timed appropriately and that the group discussions have a specific question to answer or theme to ponder. While not extremely practical, the "feed-back lecture" style teaching seemed to generate a lot of buzz among the students, 88% of students not in a "feed-back lecture" style course said they would have been interested in taking that course over a traditional lecture style course<sup>16</sup>. In terms of the application of this style to a theatre history course, there are benefits, but also considerable obstacles. One of the biggest issues with a traditional theatre history course is that there is so much material to cover that time becomes a very hot commodity. Using the "feed-back lecture" style teaching plan requires even more careful planning of time and less time devoted for the introduction of new concepts. I do not see a feasible way to teach a class

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<sup>14</sup> Although they do advance the idea and add not only necessary context to it, but commentary based on other studies, the original idea for this type of lecture style is attributed to Dean Osterman, Mark Christensen, and Betty Coffey in their paper "The Feedback Lecture" which came out of the Kansas State University Center for Faculty Evaluation and Development.

<sup>15</sup> Bonwell and Eison, "Active Learning..."

<sup>16</sup> Bonwell and Eison, "Active Learning..."

chronologically while using the “feed-back lecture” style and still manage to cover all of the material necessary. To counter this argument, one of the biggest advantages of thematic teaching is that you are able to cover more material in the same amount of time<sup>17</sup> by grouping themes together. While there could be potential benefits to incorporating the “feed-back lecture” into a thematic classroom, there are far more engaging active learning techniques which allow for more hands-on learning. This is not to say that there will never be the opportunity for a mid-class robust group discussion, in point of fact, this often happened in the thematic class explored in this thesis, but to say that the course followed this format would be a misrepresentation of the work put in by the instructor to create demonstrations and activities for student involvement.

### Guided Lecture

Another type of lecture Bonwell and Eison present is the “guided lecture”. This style of teaching is characterized by giving students lecture objectives at the beginning of class, and then asking them not to take notes during the lecture. Following the lecture students are asked to write down all that they remember and then discuss that information in small groups, engaging with the instructor only when unanswerable questions arise. While this method, too, bears similarities to the Pause Procedure, such as the free recall period, this places the same strain on the instructor to have extensive timing and preparation work done before the class to allow for this process to work smoothly. Major benefits of the “guided lecture” method include the synthesis of information. It is one thing for a student to grasp a concept, but when a student is able to create examples of said concept with little input from the instructor that shows a deep level of thinking and metacognition that active learning strives for. The synthesis of lecture information, followed by discussion in small groups presents a very useful, if unorthodox, layout for a classroom. And while no quantitative

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<sup>17</sup> White, “How Thematic Teaching...”

data<sup>18</sup> was sourced for this style of teaching, it is recognized as having a greater benefit to the students than a traditional lecture and notes style course. While there could be a benefit to using this style of lecture in a theatre history class, specifically on a first day overview or as a wrap up towards the end of the semester, this style of teaching presents the same issues in a theatre history course as the “feed-back lecture” style does.

## Responsive Lecture

The third style of lecture<sup>19</sup> recommended in Bonwell and Eison’s guide is called the “responsive lecture”. This lecture counts on the students to take an extremely active role in the classroom setting. Students generate and submit questions to the instructor revolving around the current unit of study, the class then, as a group, puts the submitted questions in order and the lecturer goes through the list of questions answering them and lecturing to string them together. For obvious reasons this style of teaching has not caught on, it creates an unsurmountable level of work for the instructor, require them to be an expert in every area or every aspect of their field, and assumes that the average group of students is interested enough in learning to create and submit questions for discussion. An alternative is added in an attempt to make this style more manageable, by suggesting that students submit questions prior to the next class which serves as a way to check reading comprehension and as a way to limit the scope of the questions<sup>20</sup>. Although little practicality is presenting in the “responsive lecture” style of teaching as a whole, there are aspects of it and its iterations which have useful applications. In the thematic class that this thesis has been exploring, following every reading a comprehension check would be given, and time devoted to discussion. This layout does manage to incorporate one of the basic tenets of the “responsive lecture”, using

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<sup>18</sup> Bonwell and Eison, “Active Learning...”

<sup>19</sup> Once again Bonwell and Eison refined the idea here, but the major credit for this type of lecture goes to John Cowan and his 1984 article “The Responsive Lecture: A Means of Supplementing Resource-Based Instruction” originally published in the *Educational Technology* journal.

<sup>20</sup> Bonwell and Eison, “Active Learning...”

submitted questions as a metric for student comprehension<sup>21</sup>. After the students had completed the brief comprehension quizzes, time would be devoted to discussion of the answers to the questions, presenting the students who answered the questions correctly with the opportunity to share their reasoning with the class, and allowing students who answered incorrectly the opportunity to ask questions and have the concept presented in a way that they were then able to understand. That format is as close to the “responsive lecture” style that a theatre history class could responsibly get, not only due to the large number of varied topics and time periods that are covered in a theatre history class, but because these classes tend to be some of the largest classes offered by a theatre department and the size of the class, in many cases, would be prohibitive from allowing the full benefits of a “responsive lecture” style to be felt. Although solutions for dealing with larger classes have been presented, mostly the answer for how you deal with a large class seems to be divide them into small groups<sup>22</sup>. While there is some benefit to small group work, it can become repetitive if it is the only solution offered to the problem.

## Demonstration

The most effective of the active learning techniques explored in Bonwell and Eison’s text is demonstration. Without a doubt, demonstration is the easiest way to engage the students in a way that allows them to achieve deep thinking and metacognition. Demonstrations are a far more practical way of engaging large classes, as well. A classroom fully committed to active learning will inevitably encounter and make use of all of the different techniques explained, the one most heavily relied on will be demonstration. This is clearly represented in the thematic syllabus used as an example in Chapter One and is deeply under-utilized in the chronological one. The fact that, with a

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<sup>21</sup> Although the class ventured away from having the students submit their own questions and had the Teaching Assistants submit questions based on their reading which the Teaching Assistants though highlighted important concepts or themes the students should be aware of.

<sup>22</sup> Frederick, Peter 1987. “Student Involvement: Active Learning in Large Classes” *Teaching Large Classes Well*, Jossey-Bass

chronological syllabus, instructors have trouble incorporating active learning techniques, either due to time constraints or lack of opportunity proves that a thematic syllabus is the superior method of teaching theatre history. When the instructor engages with a thematic syllabus and incorporates some iteration of active learning techniques into their classroom, they will feel the shift from instructor-centered learning to student-centered learning, which will positively redefine the student-teacher dichotomy.

### Assignments and Assessments

Teaching style aside, the assignments and assessments of each of the classes clearly work for or against the notion of student-centered learning. The class which followed a chronological syllabus simply does not provide the students with enough opportunities for active learning and metacognition to create a student-centered learning environment. The course is primed to do so, and upon first glance at the syllabus there is the hope that the class will inspire this metacognition; one of the listed course objectives is that students will develop critical and analytical skills in terms of understanding and making connections between historical events and theatrical influences<sup>23</sup>. This statement is consistent with the goals of active learning, and signals the benefits of student-centered learning, however, the course never embraces active learning techniques full enough to say that without a doubt this objective was achieved. Over the course of the semester, the class was led in an exclusively lecture format, every class meeting followed the same format, with the exception of the exam review days. As already established, there is nothing terribly wrong with lectures, and many variations of such have already been outlined in this thesis. The chronological class did not, however, make use of any of these variations. To the instructor's credit, the slideshow presentations were formatted in an engaging way, which never felt repetitive or tired; often including popular

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<sup>23</sup> McCracken, Appendix 1:1.

“memes” or GIFs they were written in an informal way which met the students where they were and sometimes incorporated slang and vernacular to make the students less intimidated. The lectures were strictly structured in the form of longform lecture notes, which were used to keep the lectures on track, while a general outline or some form of notes are essential, by reading off of prefabricated lecture notes there is no room in the class period for discussion or student interaction. For exam review sessions, the instructor made use of a Jeopardy style game, which divided the class into two teams and pitted them against each other in an attempt to gain the most points. This is without a doubt active learning and engages the students with the material and on a more animalistic competitiveness. The questions on the Jeopardy game would be arranged in increasing order of difficulty and depending on how the group breakdown was, there would be a pretty robust game of back and forth. The questions were taken word-for-word from the exam itself, which allowed the students to become familiar with the wording and style of question prior to being given the exam. As great and interactive as this activity is, the class falls short by only engaging in this type of active learning behavior twice during the semester, once before the midterm, and again before the final examination. Although on a small scale this does show that there are ways for active learning to be engaged in a chronological classroom, but where this style of class really falls short is in the style or assessments given. Assessments have the opportunity to be a major way to engage active learning and allow students to participate in their own growth<sup>24</sup>. However, this statement is only proven true when the instructor understands the principles of active learning in a way that allows them to structure their assessments and examinations in a way that activates learning. As stated before<sup>25</sup>, when students know that they will only be tested on material in a multiple choice or true-or-false style exam they place an emphasis on short-term memorization rather than deep comprehension and

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<sup>24</sup> Bonwell and Eison, “Active Learning...”

<sup>25</sup> Meyer, “An Experimental...”



long-term rationalizing. It is in the very structure of a multiple-choice question this becomes evident. Multiple choice questions ask the students to make a selection either using a definition or a missing word. By presenting students with a familiar “stem” and four possible answers the students become conditioned to look for key words and kinesthetic triggers in their notes as a way of memorization and not comprehension<sup>26</sup>. These style exams present many other flawed ways of gathering metrics, mainly in the fact that if a student does not know the answer and makes a guess there is the possibility that they could have chosen the correct answer accidentally. Because of this, there is no way for an educator to know for certain if their students actually grasp all of the content, or only made lucky guesses, which doesn’t not provide the educator with the information needed to determine if more time needs to be spent on certain aspects of the content in future classes. The major flaw with multiple-choice style examinations, however, is that they provide no way for the instructor to see how well the students grasp concepts and critical thinking. These types of tests do not have a way to reflect a student’s critical thinking, analytical skills, or metacognition. Because of this, multiple-choice style assessments are inherently the enemy of active learning. It is interesting to note that in the book *Active Learning Strategies in Higher Education*<sup>27</sup> in all of the classrooms studied, not a single one reported the use of multiple-choice style assessments. All eleven of the classroom case studies presented in the book use some form of project, presentation, or other creative metric as a way to gain an understanding of the students’ comprehension. Further evidence that in a classroom which has fully embraced active learning assessments and grading metrics must evolve to be more interpretive allowing for a greater demonstration of deep thinking and metacognition. To the credit of the instructor of the chronological class, both the midterm assessment and the final assessment contained a short-answer essay portion which afforded the students an opportunity to demonstrate

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<sup>26</sup> Kehoe, Jerard 1995, “Writing Multiple-choice Test Items” *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluations* 4: 9.

<sup>27</sup> Misseyanni, Lytras, Papadopoulou, and Marouli, “Active Learning Strategies...”

their ability to understand and string together the concepts and theories discussed in the class. Overall, the class was not at all useless or a waste. The students were able to engage with texts and concepts presented to them in a chronological way which built upon each previous unit in a manner similar to nearly every other class the students have taken. There is no doubt that the students left the class at the end of the semester having gained a knowledge of theatre history and a working understanding of some of the major themes throughout the timeline; however it has been proven and studied<sup>28</sup> that students have a better chance of retaining information in the long term, and being able to think back to concepts learned in class upon completion of that class when they learn the themes and concepts in a classroom that engages in active learning. If the goal of a class is to impart knowledge of a particular set of concepts and themes and to contextualize them in the greater sense of the world providing relevance, the evidence clearly supports that the most effective way to achieve this goal is by engaging in active learning. This class clearly provides the students with the information they need but falls short of unlocking its most useful potential by engaging the students into taking an active part in their own education.

### Viability in the Theatre History Classroom

When comparing the thematic class however, it becomes clear that active learning is achievable in the theatre history classroom. The learning outcomes at the beginning of the syllabus already signal a change, it is apparent that an emphasis will be placed on deep thinking and metacognition. The syllabus says that by the end of the course students will be able to analyze performance and literature within historical contexts, critique scholarly arguments, demonstrate the ability to compare global performance techniques, and think critically about a wide variety of performance elements<sup>29</sup>. This is far more complex and signals to the students that higher order

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<sup>28</sup> Bonwell and Eison, "Active Learning..."

<sup>29</sup> Njus, appendix 1:2

thinking will be necessary to succeed in this class. The structure of the class is heavily focused on demonstration; already established as the most effective of Bonwell and Eison's active learning techniques, demonstration allows for the students to gain hands-on, primary knowledge of concepts and activities they normally would only read about. By arranging the content thematically, the students are presented with opportunities for demonstration which allow them to not only wrestle with each concept but see how each of the sub-themes relates to the other establishing an overall sense of context. Since the structure of the thematic class allowed for so many opportunities for demonstration and interaction, the classroom became inherently student-centered. A student-centered classroom provides the opportunity for the students to be involved in their own learning, and that is one of the areas where the demonstrations, activities, presentations, and assessments in this specific class excelled in a way that only a classroom with a dedication to active learning would be able to achieve. By reading and interacting with primary sources, and then putting the theories and concepts into practice through a group workshop or demonstration allows the students to not only have a theoretical knowledge of such things, but a practical one. Upon the completion of the Masks supra-theme, students were given masks and allowed to interact with each other and the mask, this provided them with a first-hand knowledge of what it is like to wear a mask, and how it feels to walk around in one and interact with each other wearing masks. This activity eliminates the "other" in this lesson and masks no longer become some foreign thing of the past or a Halloween novelty. The benefit to the students of having them read from Zeami's teachings can be accepted and understood in both active and passive learning classrooms. However, when students read from Zeami's teachings, and then have the opportunity to attempt some of the actor training he outlines not only brings the ancient text into a contemporary understanding but allows the students to feel and experience Zeami's teachings with their full body. It is once again this shift from theoretical knowledge to practical knowledge that becomes the hallmark of active learning. As mentioned

earlier in this chapter, all but one of the demonstrations accompanying each unit were interactive. The only demonstration which was not interactive for the students was one which accompanied the Moliere/*Tartuffe* unit, and involved the instructor and both teaching assistants to act out important moments from the text which demonstrated the greater idea of *lazzi* and physical comedy. This demonstration needed to be done by the instructors only so that the students could see how these scenes work in a fairly accurate sense. This specific demonstration did, however, build upon a previous demonstration which engaged the students in acting out traditional *lazzi*, as well as creating some of their own. Following a class period dedicated to an interactive review for the midterm, the students completed a midterm which was comprised of short answer, long answer, and essay questions. While the exam itself follows the traditional midterm model, the questions allowed for high levels of self-expression, individuality, and creativity; often some kind of drawing or rendering would be appropriate to partially satisfy an answer. Exams structured in this fashion pair perfectly with the classroom environment to create student-centered learning. The instructor of the class was keenly aware of the demographics of students in the class, divided between scenic designers, costume designers, lighting or sound designers, stage managers, and performers. At every available opportunity, the instructor would provide opportunities for each type of student to use their practical knowledge, interests, and skills in a way that would complement the classroom environment. Nowhere was that more obvious than with the final assessment. Rather than a traditional style examination, or even a more active one similar to the midterm, the final assessment for the class was a project. Each student worked in small groups but were graded individually. The groups had to perform a dramaturgical analysis on a play of their choosing from the syllabus, and then reconceptualize the play by designing a production of it. By designing a final presentation around the concept of letting each individual student shine in their own way is the epitome of student-centered learning and guarantees that each student will walk out of the classroom with a

strong and lasting relationship to the material. This allows the scenic designers to design a set for the play engaging with the group for the purpose of continuity and engaging with the text and the concepts covered in class in a way that is uniquely personal to that student. Not only will that student be more passionate about the project because it allows them to do what they love, but the student will feel less self-conscious because they get to do something, they are good at. When students are in situations where they feel comfortable and in control, they are more willing to take risks<sup>30</sup>. When students take risks, instructors are better able to see and understand how well a student has grasped a certain concept by seeing how a student is making connections between that concept and other disciplines or content units. By allowing the students to work as a group but be graded individually also alleviates much of the anxiety and stress which accompany assessments. Students enjoy working on assessments as a group because it gives them an opportunity to test their ideas and bounce them off of others, but students also prefer to be graded as individuals so that they can have full responsibility for their work, and that the work of others does not affect their grade<sup>31</sup>.

By constantly engaging the students at every level, the thematic class used as an example in this thesis is able to achieve not only active learning, but a student-centered learning environment. By allowing each student to use their unique interests and skills as a way to provide to class discussions, assist with demonstrations, and be evaluated on assessments the students become the focus of the student-teacher dichotomy. Not only does this provide us with evidence that student-centered learning environments are possible in a theatre history classroom, but it shows us that the way to achieve that student-centered learning is by incorporating active learning techniques into all levels of the curriculum. The question to ask of instructors is: do you want to create a classroom environment where students take a vested interest in the course material, asking deep questions and

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<sup>30</sup> Haxhiymeri and Kristo, "Teaching Through Lectures..."

<sup>31</sup> Misseyanni, Lytras, Papadopoulou, and Marouli, "Active Learning Strategies..." Ch. 7. Eva Rimbau-Gilabert, "Active, Cooperative Learning in Online Higher Education"

using their personal experiences and knowledge to enhance discussions to better grasp the concepts and themes of the content units? If the answer to that question in any way is “yes” then it is obvious that the only way to facilitate that ideal form of classroom utopia is by engaging in active learning techniques as often as possible, providing the students with as many opportunities as you are able to engage with the material on a hands-on basis, this will create an environment in the classroom where students of all skill levels and backgrounds can comfortably share their experiences and practical knowledge via assessments and discussions creating a student-centered learning classroom.

There has been a rash of opinion columns in Great Britain, relatively recently, which express utter disdain for thematic teaching. One complaint bemoans that dates lose their value in a thematic classroom, and while to him 1605 means the Gunpowder Plot, to his son it means he is running five minutes late for games<sup>32</sup>. Coincidentally, two years earlier a similar complaint<sup>33</sup> ran, however pushback from the academic community criticized the condescending tone of the argument<sup>34</sup>. Either way, there is certain division, world-wide, about teaching chronologically compared to teaching thematically. It would be unfair to say that thematic teaching resolutely equals progress, much in the same way it would be unfair to critique chronological teaching as being outdated. There are advantages and disadvantages to both styles of teaching, and a certain style may work far better with one discipline than with another. In the context of theatre history curricula, a thematic approach is the best way to inspire deep thinking and metacognition, while facilitating the inclusion of active learning techniques thus resulting in a student-centered classroom.

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<sup>32</sup> Viner, B. “Teaching History Without the Facts? That’s Just Sociology.” *The Guardian*. 2012

<sup>33</sup> Ferguson, Niall. “Rid Our Schools of Junk History.” *The Guardian*. 2010

<sup>34</sup> Asthana, Anushka. “Niall Ferguson ‘Rid Our Schools of Junk History’.” *The Guardian*. 2010

## Disadvantages to Teaching Chronologically

There are several disadvantages which present themselves when teaching chronologically. Undoubtedly the most widely used teaching format for any type of history class, it makes sense to may instructors to start at the “beginning”. In an effort to go from the beginning of the content to the end of the content, inevitably instructors will rush through certain units, or be forced to skip some altogether. It would be impossible for an instructor to know at the start of the semester what units their students would need more time on, or where they might have to slow down to facilitate better comprehension. This lack of time and unpredictability is a major reason why it is so difficult to incorporate active learning techniques into chronological classrooms. Even the most well-meaning educators with a long history of studying active learning and classroom best practices would find it difficult to find the time and places to incorporate active learning techniques into a classroom slowly marching forward from begging to end. This is primarily true in k-12 public education where standards and parameters are set by the government dictating what you must cover and when you must cover it. In fact, in public k-12 schools, the biggest obstacle to active learning is governmental interference. In higher education instructors and departments have a certain degree more of control over the scope of the class and the content to be covered. This would allow for a classroom at a college or university to teach chronologically and still find ways to incorporate active learning techniques, however the next obstacle that presents itself is the reliance on textbooks. As mentioned in chapter one, most classes (including the chronological class studied in this thesis) utilize a textbook of some kind. Because chronological teaching is the dominant theory, textbooks are designed to align with the flow of a chronological syllabus. Textbooks have a duty to be as widely applicable as possible, while still portraying the subject matter; a thematic textbook would be adopted by so few classrooms at this time, there is no financial upshot to publishing one at this time. The availability and prevalence of textbooks creates an irresistible temptation to teach directly from

the book. In the busy lives that educators lead, occasionally there may be opportunities to make sacrifices, unfortunately, all too often, that sacrifice ends up being creativity in the classroom. Rather than designing innovative, new, active learning activities and projects for their students, an educator could just assign a reading from the textbook. As discussed in chapter two, many chronological classrooms use multiple choice style assessments. In some cases, the “teacher edition” of the class textbook comes with pre-made quizzes and assessments. This perpetuates the cycle of learn-test-forget that is the downfall of assessments which do not engage the student creatively or encourage deep thinking. Students will continue studying just to pass the exam<sup>35</sup>, not for the purpose of understanding the concepts and theories. This is detrimental to the overall comprehension of the whole class, but especially to students with learning disabilities and those who have trouble just remembering names and dates. Teaching chronologically in this fashion stifles creativity and does not take into consideration the specific needs of individual students; consequently, student-centered learning practically unattainable. This is another major disadvantage to teaching chronologically, that this style of teaching is almost exclusively teacher-centered. The hallmark of teacher-centered learning is that the style of class makes it easier for the educator to instruct the class, rather than student-centered which makes it easier for the students to receive the information<sup>36</sup>. While opportunities are present for students to provide input and share their opinions, teacher-centered learning will keep following the structure and rarely diverge to focus on topics of special interest to the students. This can be limiting if the students are tasked to write an essay on a certain event in history, if there are four similar events in other cultures which would enhance the student’s essay (and their greater conceptualization of the event) but those events had not been covered yet. The average student brings a limited amount of extant knowledge into a theatre history classroom, and

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<sup>35</sup> Meyer, “An Experimental...”

<sup>36</sup> Jones, “Student-Centered...”



will most often write about the limited scope of the prompt, unless they have also been presented with various versions and themes relating to a single concept which they could then add context to in the greater sense allowing for critical thinking. For example, if the students are tasked to write an essay about the use and relevance of masks in theatre, but all they have covered in class so far is Ancient Greece, while they will be able to write a sound paper, they are not able to write about masks in the greater sense by contrasting Greek masks with Japanese masks or even *Commedia* masks. A student in a thematic classroom would be able to write a much more comprehensive and detailed essay on the relevance and use of masks, because masks from all different cultures and time periods would be taught together, allowing the student to see cultural influences and revisions due to practicality, overall enhancing their understanding of theatrical concepts in a sense that is specific to each culture and general to the use of masks.

### Advantages of Teaching Thematically

The advantages to teaching thematically start with the way this style of teaching allows for similar themes and concepts to be viewed from multiple perspectives. While it is indeed possible to include multiple perspectives in a chronological classroom, it can severely limit how far on the timeline the class is able to go, if it doubles back on itself to examine the same event from a different perspective. This problem does not occur in a thematic classroom because the themes taught are broad enough to include multiple and non-traditional perspectives. It is easy for students to lose interest in certain topics, or to be so disconnected from them that they are unable to find a way to relate to them<sup>37</sup>. While teaching chronologically does not offer many solutions to these issues, a thematic classroom is a sort of educational playground where students may explore all aspects of a theme from every perspective and from opposing cultures until they find a viewpoint which, not

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<sup>37</sup> Kaiser, Christopher. "Redrawing the Boundaries: A Constructivist Approach to Combat Student Apathy in the Secondary History Classroom." *The History Teacher* Feb. 2010 223-32.

only allows them a way in enabling comprehension, but contextualizes the theme in a sense that presents the students with the relevance in a personal context. If a student complains about their failure to see the relevance of a content unit to their lives, there is little that can be done in a chronological classroom. However, in a thematic classroom, instructors have the freedom to explore elements of each content unit that appeal to individual students. This draws the students in and gets them to take an active role in their education. It is because of this that it is so easy to incorporate active learning techniques into a thematic classroom. A thematic classroom is inherently student-centered because the interest of the students can be used in developing the lessons and quidding the discussions. Students will feel more comfortable in class, which will allow for less fear of ridicule and greater participation in discussions and day-to-day activities, resulting in a more robust classroom culture<sup>38</sup>. By encouraging deep discussions and higher order thinking students will enjoy participating in class AND see the long-term benefits of the material covered.

### Disadvantages of Teaching Thematically

Having said all of that, there are a few disadvantages to thematic teaching which should be addressed. Because of its open-ended approach, and the way that thematic teaching can more freely from time period to time period and region to region, it can be difficult to establish cause and effect in a thematic classroom<sup>39</sup>. Cause and effect can be valuable in the teaching of any type of history because it allows the students to see how each culture has an effect on the other, either through direct interaction or cultural diffusion. While an argument can be made that it would be exponentially difficult to teach any type of history class devoid of clear analysis of cause and effect<sup>40</sup>, that simply is not true. I argue that by allowing enough time when covering each theme and content

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<sup>38</sup> Haxhiymeri and Kristo, "Teaching Through Lectures..."

<sup>39</sup> White, "How Thematic Teaching..."

<sup>40</sup> Baker, J. "The Importance of Chronology in Teaching History." *Social Studies Review* Winter 1995, 24-27.

unit, students develop a better sense of cause and effect by identifying it on their own than they would have if they had been shown the cause and effect clearly. By giving the students the tools they need to be critical and do their own analysis, and then getting out of the way, students will inevitably find the reasons for change within each theme and content unit with little to no guidance from the instructor. The nature of a thematic classroom places more preparative work on the instructor than a chronological classroom does. Occasionally a transition from theme to theme might not be as obvious as it would be in a chronological class, which means that a greater degree of care and consideration is needed when structuring a thematic syllabus and placing various themes in order. Not only does the instructor have to identify which themes to cover based on the desired goals and takeaways from the class, but then they must determine what order in which the themes will be taught. A great deal more of research can be needed in a thematic classroom because there is no textbook to specifically guide the discussions and content. The educator will have to do enough outside work to be able to answer higher order questions on just about any variation of the theme which arises in classroom discussion. This creates a larger amount of extra time needed outside of the classroom to prepare each lesson and design activities and assignments which engage the students actively. Unfortunately, this is the very reason why fewer instructors take this approach than a chronological one. Until there is a textbook developed thematically which can be widely adopted by theatre history classes, teaching chronologically will remain the standard.

## Conclusions

While both chronological and thematic teaching have advantages and disadvantages, it is clear that a thematic teaching style is the better way to teach theatre history courses. Yes, students would be able to learn and grow from either style of class, but the chronological classroom does not present the student with the same opportunities for critical thinking, analysis, and metacognition as the thematic classroom does. While it is more challenging to incorporate active learning techniques

which result in a student-centered learning environment in a chronological classroom, it is not technically impossible. Regardless of the approach the educator takes, the most important thing is to make sure that learning is happening in the most engaging ways possible. If the goal of teaching theatre history is to create critical thinking and analytical skills related to metacognition which allow the students to apply the themes and concepts they are dealing with in their practical work as theatre artists, then the answer is simple. The clearest way to achieve all of the goals for teaching theatre history is by teaching it thematically, from theme to theme, allowing students to explore each content unit as it applies to them, and giving them an opportunity to contribute to discussions based on their personal interests and practical knowledge. Teaching in this fashion allows for the incorporation of active learning techniques which inspire students to take a vested interest in their own education. The culmination of combining thematic teaching with active learning is the student-centered classroom, which give the students full empowerment in the educational setting, this removes any individual obstacles that students may encounter, and frees them for unencumbered exploration of the concepts, themes, and content units.

Now that the benefits of active learning techniques have been fully explored and explained, and the logic behind shifting from a chronological to a thematic curriculum has been outlined, the next chapter of this thesis will put forth a sample syllabus. This syllabus, based on research and observations, will attempt to marry active learning techniques and thematic teaching in a way that maximizes the student experience, resulting in student-centered learning.

### **Chapter 3: Proposed Theatre History Syllabus**

This thesis so far has outlined why thematic teaching is better than chronological teaching, and has highlighted the differences between active learning and, its opposite, passive learning. The way that thematic teaching and active learning combine to create a student-centered learning environment have been explored and explained. This chapter is the marriage of those ideas to a theatre history curriculum. For ease of reference, the proposed syllabus is included at the end of this chapter rather than in the Appendix. The following is an abbreviated explanation of the logic and rationale behind some of the curricular choices. This syllabus is based on an upper-level introductory class and is fictionally listed as a 300 (or Junior-level) course, however in my experience the class is usually populated with Sophomores, Juniors, and Seniors in both instances where TA experience was applied no Freshmen were in the class.

The syllabus very clearly outlines in the Overview section that it is built around three overall themes: Music, Religion, and Politics. These themes were chosen because of how much of an influence on performative culture, the way each of them has driven change in dramatic tradition will be explored, and each will be analyzed through the lenses of several subthemes: Shape, Masks and Chorus, Puppets, Physical Comedy, and the Age of Exploration. The syllabus also makes it clear that there is no official textbook for the course, readings are assembled from various existing textbooks and sources, and all readings and plays will be made available for the student at no extra cost on the internet learning portal used by the school (e.g. Blackboard, Scholar, etc.). Each week of the class will include at least one play, and usually another reading relevant to the topic. Like almost every class at this point, the first week of meeting, a short week, is reserved for an overview of the syllabus and an explanation of the course's structure to students not likely to have been in a class so committed to teaching thematically and incorporating active learning. Week two of the class is an in-depth overview of the ideas the class will explore through various perspectives including

anthropology, ritual, oral history, composition, and adaptation. The first day that week the students will be discussing the assigned Schechner reading<sup>1</sup> and discussing what performance is, how we study it, and how it is recorded. As part of their homework before the course began, the students were each tasked with writing two solid discussion questions on the topic of theatre and how it relates to music, religion, and politics various of these questions will be chosen and discussed during this class meeting, these questions serve as the first graded assignment. For the second meeting of this week, students are reading *The Eumenides*. This play will serve as their introduction to looking for themes in a play, by looking at the recreated music, the use of masks and a chorus, and the tragic structure. The themes of the play itself, revenge, justice, order, the law, etc. are all themes that will appear throughout the course in other plays, which makes it a good choice in the “canon” of the classroom. Week three explores the subtheme of Shape, and how it applied to the physical structure of a text, the plot structure, and even the scenery and theatre space itself. The first meeting that week will incorporate the Zarrilli reading<sup>2</sup> on the origins of language, text, and plot as the students explore narrative structure. The students will apply their new understanding of written language and the recording of thoughts and ideas by engaging with several scripts and texts in their original languages and exploring the shape of words and a text they cannot read. For the second meeting of the week, a discussion of Fairman’s translation<sup>3</sup> of *The Triumph of Horus* will lead to a discussion on how writing developed and evolved, as well as looking at the highly subjective nature of translation. Students will engage with Linear B, Sanskrit, Hieroglyphs, Aramaic, Greek and Latin. Week four is a continued exploration of Shape, starting with the Carver reading<sup>4</sup> which comes from a stagecraft

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<sup>1</sup> Schechner, Richard. *Between Theatre & Anthropology*, 1985, University of Pennsylvania Press. Ch.1, 3-34.

<sup>2</sup> Zarrilli, Philip, & Bruce McConachie, Gary Jay Williams, and Carol Sorgenfrei. *Theatre Histories: An Introduction*, 2006, Routledge. Introduction, 1-15.

<sup>3</sup> Fairman, H.W. *The Triumph of Horus, An Ancient Egyptian Sacred Drama*, 1974, University of California Press. Ch. 4, 77-120

<sup>4</sup> Carver, Rita. *Stagecraft Fundamentals, A Guide and Reference for Theatrical Production*, 2019, Routledge. Ch. 1, 2-10.

textbook and explores the architecture of theatre spaces through history. Students are reading the sections about oral traditions and ritual spaces, as well as the architecture of a Greek theatre. As we progress through the semester, the Greek theatre will be used as a baseline as we explore what changes happen from culture to culture as performance spaces evolve. The second day of this week the students are reading *Lysistrata*, which serves as a bridge between the theme of Shape and the theme of Masks & Chorus. Following a student-guided discussion about *Lysistrata*, the students will design a set for the play which modifies the theatre space in some way, applying information from the Carver reading to the play demonstrating an understanding of how the shape of the space can influence the production. Their designs will be turned in for a grade as the second graded assignment of the class. During week five, the students are starting a new thematic section, Masks & Chorus. For the first meeting students are reading *The Bacchae*, which will allow them to continue to explore how masks are used and how the chorus enhances the story. They will be able to compare *The Bacchae* to *Lysistrata* and see how chorus are used in both comedies and tragedies. Students will discuss the use of music in each of the plays, and how they relate to politics and religion, in addition to understanding the Greek use of masks on stage. For the second meeting, a guest instructor will divide the students into small groups and give them masks to wear, in their groups they will explore the modified acting needed for mask work, as well as how to work together like a chorus. The goal of this workshop is to get the students to recreate scenes from either *Lysistrata* or *The Bacchae*. Week six takes us to Japan, for the first meeting, the students are reading excerpts from Ancient Japanese impresario Zeami Motokiyo. After an overview of Noh theatre and a discussion on its use of masks and a chorus, the students will attempt to put Zeami's tips for actors into practice, by applying his teachings to their portrayal of several characters. The second day that week, the students will read the Noh play *Tomoe*, and look for ways to apply Zeami's teachings to the text. Week seven takes us to Central and South America, where the students are reading the Mayan *Rabinal Achi* and excerpts

from the *Popol Vuh* creation story. Students will discuss the use of masks and chorus as they are applied to the performance in this new context, in addition to discussing the ways that religion and Colonialism are used to both preserve and corrupt cultures and their traditions. Students will discuss how masks influence costume design in preparation, and design costumes based on their concepts of the *Rabinal Achi* and *Popol Vuh*. Week eight takes the class to India, where they start with a reading of excerpts from the *Natya Shastra*. A discussion about the acting style described in the *Natya Shastra* and how it compares with other acting texts we have read will guide the students to a discussion about music and movement, the students will draw comparisons between this text and the Zeami text. Students will compare the masks and costumes to other masks and costumes we have looked at so far. The remainder of the class will be spent attempting to learn some of the Kathakali mudras and an appreciation for the difficulty of the art. The second meeting that week the students will be reading the Sanskrit play *Little Clay Cart* and exploring how the *Natya Shastra* applies to the text. Week nine is the midterm, which will consist of short answer questions, essay questions, and a design question.

Week ten begins our unit on puppets, the students are reading “The Fox” excerpt from Izumo’s *Yoshitsune and the Thousand Cherry Trees*. This discussion of various forms of Bunraku puppetry will lead to the class experimenting with everyday items they have with them in an attempt to understand how puppets interact with other actors. For the second meeting, students are reading the Brandon excerpts<sup>5</sup> which discusses the Indonesian practice of Wayang Kulit shadow puppets. This will facilitate a discussion on the different types of puppets and how shadow puppets are used, including the gamelan orchestra that accompanies Wayang Kulit. This will allow students to compare music from seven different cultures at this point and allow them to see how they are all used in different ways to facilitate performance. Week eleven takes us back to Egypt, this time to

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<sup>5</sup> Brandon, James *Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre*, 1993, Cambridge University Press



discuss Ibn Daniyal and his erotic shadow puppets. This will give students something to compare Wayang Kulit to, as well as allow for an opportunity to talk about religion and censorship. For the second meeting, students are watching video clips of various different types of puppet to better understand how they can be used as a story telling device. The class will conclude with small groups of students using everyday items as puppets to put on brief, original puppet shows for the class, either Bunraku style or shadow puppets. Week twelve takes us back to Japan as we look at physical comedy. The students are reading three Kyogen plays for the first meeting, which will also include a workshop on the physicality of Kyogen comedy and a retelling of the stories by. The students in small groups. The second meeting will be a discussion of physical comedy, *Commedia*, and *lazzi*. Following this discussion, the students will participate in a comedy and improv workshop where we will engage in short form improv games. Week thirteen is a busy week, which packs a lot of information into a short period of time. For the first class, students have read Hrosvit's *The Passion of the Holy Virgins*. To better understand medieval drama, and to get an understanding of the spaces which influenced these plays, the class will be meeting in a cathedral. This will allow for the students to feel inspired by the space, and will facilitate the second part of our discussion on how religion factors in to the preservation and appropriation of stories. The second meeting is very busy, as students are asked to read *Tartuffe*. Our discussion on the play, and its use of *lazzi* and physical comedy will also lead to its Alexandrine verse, which will set up our discussion on verse, prose, and meter. Week fourteen takes us to England, where the students engage with Shakespeare's *King Lear*. All of this week is devoted to a discussion of *King Lear*, verse and prose, Shakespeare, Elizabethan theatre, and Shakespeare's contemporaries. Week fifteen is devoted to Jonson's *Volpone*. Giving students something similar to compare Shakespeare to will allow them to more easily find the underlying similarities in all types of plays. Both *King Lear* and *Volpone* contain similar themes and make use of inheritance and disguise, and both take a look at suffering and death in different ways

(*Lear* through tragedy and *Volpone* with a comedic approach). The two plays also premiered at similar times, which allows for a deeper look at what was happening politically and socially in England around 1606. The final week of class, week sixteen, the first meeting is devoted to Lope de Vega's *Fuenteovejuna*. Including this play gives the students an opportunity to see a play from the same time period as Shakespeare, that does not come from an English perspective. *Fuenteovejuna* fits in to the overall themes of Religion and Politics as well and makes use of themes explored in Shakespeare's other plays, as well as the plays of his contemporaries. The second meeting that week is a discussion and wrap up of the second half of the class, and a chance for students to ask any questions they have which may be helpful for their completion of the group final project and research paper. On the designated exam day, the class will meet, and each small group will give their presentation to the class, these presentations will be based on a play, and be similar to the final presentation highlighted in the thematic syllabus in chapter one. Individual students will be required to turn in a process paper, outlining their process and contributions to the group project. This works as a way to grade each student individually, as well as serving as an accountability measure for the students to ensure equal participation in the final project.

This syllabus has been carefully curated to find specific ways to engage the students in active learning to inspire metacognition and deep thinking. By applying critical and analytical thinking skills to the in-class discussions, the students will strengthen their deductive reasoning skills, and become more passionate about learning new information, these will have a long-term benefit on each individual student's other coursework and their career as artists. Because of the fun engaging nature of thematic teaching and active learning techniques, greater attendance and greater classroom engagement is expected. Teaching theatre history thematically while finding ways to incorporate active learning techniques creates a classroom environment completely student-centered, in which students are able to flourish. As education, like so many other fields, continues to evolve and adapt

in order to stay viable, syllabi like the one proposed here will slowly become the norm as educators realize the full interdisciplinary benefits of thematic teaching using active learning techniques in a student-centered classroom.

# Proposed Theatre History Syllabus

THEA 3##

## **Overview:**

This syllabus is designed to examine all aspects of performance from the start of time to approximately 1700 by viewing theatrical events in different time periods and regions through their relationships with each other and the rest of the world. This is achieved by examining the similarities and not the differences. The overall themes we will be using to guide our exploration are: Religion, Music, and Politics; by using these themes as a foundation, we will efficiently move forward and backwards through the theatre history timeline to develop a robust and comprehensive overview of performative action and its effects on the world. This class will engage students in both modified lecture formats and actively through workshops, activities, and projects. Each student will be given opportunities to explore their personal interests and skillset by applying themselves to each of the assignments.

## **Learning Outcomes:**

This class should challenge all preconceived notions of “what is theatre” and “what is performance” by adding complexity to your understanding of how historic dramatists viewed the world. At the end of this class you should be better prepared to recognize historic themes in works of modern theatre and understand them in ancient or historic works. Students should be able to analyze not only the text of a play, but the context in which it was written and its impact on the world. By demonstrating the ability to compare and contrast performance styles and techniques from all around the globe, students will be able to think critically about every aspect of performance. Students will continue to develop their critical thinking skills as well as engaging with their own through process in a way that allows them to incorporate their personal interests into this classroom and apply these skills in other classes.

## **Texts:**

While there is no textbook required for this class, students will be reading excerpts from various textbook and articles as the discussions from day to day influence the direction certain content units may go. All of the scripts and other required readings will be posted online or otherwise made available for the students. Occasionally, students will be asked to print out parts of the text and have it with them in class.

## **Weekly Breakdown**

### **Week One: Introduction**

1. Explanation of the Syllabus and course structure

### **Week Two: Themes**

1. READ: Schechner, *Between Theatre & Anthropology*. Chapter 1, pp 3-34
2. READ: Aeschylus, *The Eumenides*

### **Week Three: Shape (Egypt)**

1. READ: Zarrilli, *Theatre Histories*. Part 1: Introduction, pp 1-15
2. READ: Fairman, *The Triumph of Horus*

### **Week Four: Shape (Greece)**

1. READ: Carver, *Stagecraft Fundamentals*. Part 1: Chapter 1, pp 2-10 (Ritual Spaces & Greek)
2. READ: Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*

### **Week Five: Masks & Chorus (Greece)**

1. READ: Euripides, *The Bacchae*
2. Mask and Chorus workshop with Guest Instructor

### **Week Six: Masks & Chorus (Japan)**

1. READ: Zeami, *Teachings on Style and the Flower*. Pp. 4-17 & 43-63
2. READ: Anonymous, *Tomoe*

### **Week Seven: Masks & Chorus (Central & South America)**

1. READ: Mayan *Rabinal Achi*
2. READ: *Popol Vuh* (excerpts)

### **Week Eight: Masks & Chorus (India)**

1. READ: Bahrata Muni, *Nataya Shastra* (excerpts)
2. READ: Sudraka, *Little Clay Cart* (excerpts)

### **Week Nine: Midterm**

1. Midterm
2. Fall Break

### **Week Ten: Puppets (Japan & Indonesia)**

1. READ: Takeda Izumo, *Yoshitsune and the Thousand Cherry Trees*. Act IV, scene V: “The Fox”
2. READ: Brandon, *Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre* pp. 118-141

### **Week Eleven: Puppets (Egypt)**

1. READ: Ibn Daniyal, *The Shadow Spirit*
2. Puppet Theory and Creation workshop

### **Week Twelve: Physical Comedy (Japan)**

1. READ: *Thunderbolt, Mushrooms, and Delicious Poison*
2. Comedy Workshop

### **Week Thirteen: Physical Comedy (Germany & France)**

1. READ: Hrovit, *The Passion of the Holy Virgins*. Class meets in the Cathedral.
2. READ: Moliere, *Tartuffe*

**Week Fourteen: Elizabethan/Jacobean England**

1. READ: Shakespeare, *King Lear*
2. Student Guided Discussion

**Week Fifteen: Elizabethan/Jacobean England**

1. READ: Jonson, *Volpone*
2. Student Guided Discussion

**Week Sixteen: Spanish Golden Age**

1. READ: de Vega, *Fuenteovejuna*
2. Discussion and Wrap Up

Group Presentations will be given during our exam time \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_.

## **Review of the Literature: Bespoke Bibliography**

There is endless writing on pedagogical theory, especially regarding how pedagogical theory relates to higher education. In conducting a review of the literature, I came to the conclusion that most of the sources which exist on the topic of thematic teaching, active learning techniques, and student-centered learning are broad humanities texts, and very few specifically deal with theatre history education in general. All of the texts are in some way adaptable to serve the purpose of this thesis, by applying the themes explored in a broader sense and specifying them for the theatre history classroom. Other than the syllabi used in chapter one, the texts which influenced my thinking over the course of this thesis can be broken down into three major categories: Active Learning Texts, Pedagogical Theory Texts, and Student-Centered Learning Texts. This review will discuss the texts by arranging them into those three headings.

### **Active Learning Texts**

The eventual conclusion that I came up with on the subject of active learning texts, is that active learning is far more popular, and its benefits are studied more in European classrooms. Some of the most formative texts in this category come out of European universities, illustrating a widely held belief that European education often takes a more holistic approach than the American Education system. In “Applying Active Learning Methods in Higher Education,” Gemma Abio and Alexandina Stoyanova outline a study done as part of the International Conference in Experiences in Active Learning in Higher Education. This article, published by the University of Barcelona, was originally published in Spanish, the translation I used is certified by the authors. This study begins to demonstrate the prevalence of active learning techniques in European classrooms and how successful they [active learning] have been, specifically at the University of Barcelona. While discussing the effects of the digitization of education, at the first ever International Conference in Experiences in Active Learning in Higher Education, several business and economics classes were



studied to determine what factors have the biggest effects on students. The results come as no surprise, the conference found that motivation is essential for both learning and personal development. The article goes on to say that it is important to find stimulating environments to capture the student's attention and use teaching techniques which harness that motivation to get students actively involved in the classroom. The article goes in to great detail about the positive effect the students have when learning via active techniques in favor of passive lecturing. The conference allowed for educators from all over Europe to meet and discuss their research and application of active learning methodologies in their classrooms; this article is the result of that dialogue. This article pairs well with others I used, largely because this article approaches active learning from a STEM point of view rather than a humanities point of view, which provides a more well-rounded discussion in my thesis. While it never specifically mentions student-centered learning, this article sets the stage for those discussions as well, by discussing the benefits of active learning techniques in the classroom. The article makes an excellent point, which is references often in my thesis, that active learning techniques provide the students with translatable skills that they are able to apply to all of their classes, making them overall better students.

In "Teaching Through Lectures and Active Learning in Higher Education," Valentina Haxhiymeri and Florinda Kristo discuss the results of a large-scale study done by the Educational Science faculty at Elbasan University in Albania. The context of the study is an evaluation of teaching styles and measured learning with a sample size of 300 students and 11 classes. At the completion of each of the classes the students were gives surveys to mark the number of times certain strategies were used in the classroom. All of the classes were education based, and the students all came from different disciplines at Elbasan University, however, were all completing coursework for the degree of "Master in Teacher." The professors were categorized based on several different factors, each explored individually, including age, years of teaching experience, and

declared teaching strategies. The article attempts to explore the reasons why lectures are not the most effective way to teach students anymore, by concluding that student attentiveness is the highest the first twenty minutes of class, then drops off exponentially. By sticking to a strict lecture format, students are automatically disadvantaged, a fact which reappears in the quantitative data displayed in the tables. Once again, this article doesn't specifically mention student-centered learning, but does conclude that active learning techniques shift the focus from teacher to student. Of the 300 students who participated in the study, 204 (68%) were female and 96 (32%) were male, with the average age being 22.7 years. The demographic breakdown of the educators who participated is very interesting. Of the professors who participated, 5 (62.5%) were female and 3 (37.5%) were males, the average age was 41.3 years. Two of the educators have the title "Professor", 2 have a PhD, and 4 are PhD candidates; what is perhaps most interesting is that the shortest teaching appointment among those studies was 2.3 years, while the longest was 18, with over half of the educators having been in their position for 15 years or more. The specific results of the study show that the most reported teaching strategy was "I lectured during the entire class period." Teaching strategies which occurred half as often as that include "I assigned small group presentations" and "At least 15 minutes of class time was dedicated to discussion." Some of the phrases which never appeared include "I assigned an activity that was followed with more than 15 minutes of class time dedicated to discussion" and "I assigned a laboratory/hands-on exercise that was done by students." All of this supports the general conclusion of the article which is that in the absence of educational and professional development, most educators base their classrooms on their own experiences as students which is how the lecture-based classroom is perpetuated. Besides being attractive to me for offering quantitative data, this article provided me with additional sources which proved to be very helpful. The general conclusion is that younger educators are going to be more open to new and non-traditional ideas, which is why the classrooms of younger educators tend to incorporate active learning techniques more frequently

than the classrooms of older educators, whether this change is due to the newly available educational development training new educators now have access to or if the new educators are modeling their classrooms based on the experiences they wanted to have rather than what they were given is left ambiguous.

In the book *Active Learning Strategies in Higher Education: Teaching for Leadership, Innovation, and Creativity*, the teaching faculty at the School of Education the American College of Greece, Anastasia Misseyanni, Paraskevi Papadopoulou, Christina Marouli, and Miltiadis Lytras, have compiled a diverse group of texts. The book is divided into three sections and compiles essays, articles, and studies done in nearly every academic discipline. Continuing the narrative that the rest of the world is ahead of American universities in this case, twelve essays in the book come from other countries, and only three of the fifteen are from American universities. The first two chapters are “Toward and Epistemology of Active Learning in Higher Education and Its Promise” and “Designing for Active Learning: A Problem-Centered Approach,” both of these chapters deal with the specific theories and pedagogical theories behind the need for the implementation of active learning in higher education classrooms. Chapters three through thirteen are “Active learning Stories in Higher Education: Lessons Learned and Good Practices in STEM Education,” “Concepts and Communication in the Early Stages of an Environmental Science Degree: A Case Study of Formative Activities and Tasks,” “Active Learning Strategies: Stories and Lessons Learnt [sic] – Studying Environment in the Field,” “Online Learning as the Catalyst for more Deliberate Pedagogies: A Canadian University Experience,” “Active, Cooperative Learning in Online Higher Education,” “Engaging the Non-Art History Student: a Tale of Five Football Players in Roman Art,” “Preservice Teachers and Active Learning in Technology-Enhanced Learning,” “Intercultural Talent Management Model and its Application as an Active Teaching and Learning Strategy,” “Active Learning in Practice: Techniques and Experiences in Information Systems Courses in

Brazil,” “Using Socrative App for Accounting Students in Higher Education,” and “Enhancing Learner Autonomy and Active Learning Using Digital Portfolio.” Each of these eleven chapters offers a specific example of one educator’s use and adaptation of active learning in higher education classrooms, and the problems that they ran into and how they solved them. The final two chapters are “The Pedagogical Legacy of Dorothy Lee and Paulo Freire,” and “A New Vision for Higher Education: Lessons from Education for the Environment and Sustainability.” These two chapters reconcile modern pedagogical theory with a vision for the future. In many ways, the last two chapters proved the most helpful, as a lot of Freire’s ideas from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* which influence parts of my thesis and are explored in these chapters. Overall, the book does a good job contextualizing the possibilities of education if these techniques are adopted wholeheartedly on a large scale, while envisioning a future where the humanities become the underpinning of all other studies based on their unique skills to apply active learning techniques in a more immediate and accessible way. The biggest strength of this book is that it compiles numerous different educators’ experiences in one place and contextualizes them in a larger, global conversation. While each of the chapters have their differences, they are marked with one major similarity, that active learning enhances and improves their classrooms every time.

American professor Ed Menta’s article “I Finally Saw the Greek Theatre: Impressions on Teaching Undergraduate Theatre History” compiles the reflections of a late-career theatre history professor who had never been to Greece. After having taught for more than thirty years, he finally had a chance to go to Greece, and his experience there opened his eyes to how poorly he had been communicating these ideas to his students over the years. The article is half observations on theatre history from Greece, and half development of active learning and new techniques he can use to present these ideas to his classes from now on. Upon his return from Greece, Professor Menta completely revamped the way undergraduate theatre history was taught at Kalamazoo College, by

developing a photo tour that he uses when he teaches and incorporating discussion and workshops in class in a push towards active learning. The major strength of this article is that it shows how different the classroom dynamic can be when active learning techniques are applied, even to the same curricula taught by the same faculty members.

Perhaps the most influential of the texts in the active learning category is Charles Bonwell and James Eison's text *Active Learning: Creating Excitement in the Classroom*. This text examines the nature of active learning at the higher education level, the empirical research on its use, the common obstacles which give faculty resistance, and how faculty and staff can implement active learning techniques. The intro establishes a definition of active learning and looks at its current [1991] implementation and climate surrounding the topic. The largest section, "The Modified Lecture" offers ways that teachers can incorporate active learning into their lectures. The section after that is all about classroom discussions and explains the conditions and techniques needed for the most useful types of exchanges; it also describes visual learning, writing in class, problem solving, computer-based instruction, cooperative learning, debates, drama, role playing, simulations, games, and peer teaching as other ways to facilitate discussion and promote active learning. The last section details the obstacles to implementing active learning techniques and conclusions, which outlines the roles that each group within the university can play in order to encourage the implementation of active learning strategies. Some of the most interesting things are the similarities this text has with the others mentioned, chiefly its conclusion that there are essentially four major reasons why faculty don't immediately shift to active learning classrooms: the influence of educational tradition, faculty self-perception, anxiety at change, and limited incentives. While the text agrees with most others that active learning does require more prep time than lecture style courses, it raises problems that are swiftly solved with the additional shift to thematic teaching. This text lays a strong foundation for the idea that active learning and thematic teaching work best together to create an entirely student-

centered learning style which will allow your students to succeed in multiple disciplines by applying their skills across their studies.

### **Pedagogical Theory Texts**

Pedagogical theory has been studied and expounded upon since ancient times. Every time there is a paradigm shift, there are always early adapters and those who hang on to the traditional way for as long as possible. Through my research process, this has without a doubt been the most inconclusive topic area. Everyone has a theory that they think is superior, and while many have been colored by others, often they branch out in new directions. One of the first texts consulted in the formation of this thesis is Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The first chapter explores how oppression has been justified and how it is reproduced through a mutual process between the "oppressor" and the "oppressed." Examining how the balance of power between the colonizer and the colonized remains relatively stable, Freire admits that the powerless in society can be frightened of freedom. According to Freire, freedom will be the result of praxis when a balance between theory and practice is achieved. The second part of the book explores what Freire calls the "banking method", in which students are seen as bank accounts where the teacher may deposit information. This is rejected by Freire as he concludes that this perpetuates oppression. Freire calls for a mutual experience, leading to the co-creation of knowledge, rather than a simple deposit. The last part of the book is focused on dialogues, and how a dialogic approach can be taken as a way of freeing the oppressed. Freire insists on dialogues between the dichotomies created by structure, including colonizer-colonized dichotomy and, of course, student-teacher dichotomy. Freire's overall approach has been incorporated into many different versions of pedagogical theory, and fundamentally calls for a constant examination of the student-teacher dichotomy in the classroom, and how the student-society dichotomy can be informed and influenced by the teacher.

Another text on the subject of pedagogy, one which puts pedagogical theory in conversation with active learning is “Teaching Without Telling: Contemporary Pedagogical Theory Put into Practice,” by Preston Feden. Many thanks to Dr. Feden for providing me with the full text of his article personally, as I was unable to access the full text online. This article is a conversation with many different studies comparing active learning techniques to purely lecture based ones. This is all in an attempt for Dr. Feden to understand why American universities have pushed back so hard against updating their pedagogical practices when there are thousands of pages of research supporting a new approach. In the article, Dr. Feden creates a course, and then explains how active learning would be used to communicate each point to the students rather than by lecturing at them. The article also explores student comments and reviews from the completion of several courses using different styles of learning techniques. This article contextualizes the need for active learning in our classrooms, while reinforcing the theme that European classrooms are way ahead of American ones in terms of applying updates to pedagogical theory. A large focus of Dr. Feden’s work is a look at Bain’s *What the Best College Teachers Do* (2004) and applying the theories and concepts explored in Bain’s article to a broader variety of courses. Bain’s buzzword is “metacognition”, characterized by the student’s ability to think about their own thinking, to reason with concepts and information they encounter by using the information widely and relating it to previous learning and experience. The example course created by Feden is called *Medicine in America: from Witch Doctor to Which Doctor* and is taught without using any lectures. The course is made up completely of hands-on activities and discussions. The students are given primary and secondary sources which they use to inform their conversations and influence the execution of the activities they are doing. Feden includes some visual representations of work from the students over the course of the class, and the student reviews upon completion of the course are used as metrics of the course’s success. Overall, the course is received well, the only negative comments are all

variations of “the workload was too heavy at the end of the semester,” but the aggregate of the results from these reviews proves that students want to be stimulated in other ways, and, in fact, not only enjoy it, but thrive in environments where unconventional learning tactics are put in place.

Dave Powell of Gettysburg College writes the article “Brother, Can You Paradigm? Toward a Theory of Pedagogical Content Knowledge in Social Studies” which deals with theories in teaching k-12 social studies courses. Coincidentally, this is the second text consulted to credit Benjamin Franklin with the first major shift in the pedagogical paradigm. The article explores research on pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) and how social studies teachers have been largely ignored in previous studies. Pedagogical content knowledge is defined by Powell as the notion that “deep knowledge” of content is crucial to effective teaching and cannot be taken for granted. The article expresses the grievances that many teacher candidates take separate content knowledge and pedagogy courses, rather than pedagogy courses which are based around their content courses. The article explores Powell’s ideas behind why teachers of social studies have not been able come to a consensus on the aims and purposes of PCK. Powell calls for a more coherent conceptualization of teacher education in social studies and says that such reconceptualizing would help social studies teachers contribute to the knowledge base on PCK. What this article does for the sake of this thesis is contextualize how all levels of educators and all different disciplines are begging for change. It is not a revolutionary idea that, when educating teachers, their education should include pedagogy courses designed around their content courses. Powell’s idea that social studies teachers would take “social studies pedagogy” courses and science teachers would take “science pedagogy” courses highlights the industry’s interest in a shift away from traditional one-size-fits-all teacher preparation. While he does not necessarily identify them as such, he is proposing the same changes be made to k-12 social studies curricula that all the other articles are proposing happen to university level history curricula. With a traditional model, where you learn what you are teaching, and then you learn how



to teach it, lecture style courses will always be prevalent because teachers are not receiving the training that they need to fully incorporate active learning techniques into their classrooms. By suggesting the use of PCK educators will not only have a deep understanding of the content in their field but will be able to incorporate active learning techniques and create a more student-centered classroom by preparing the educators not just for teaching, but for teaching their specific subject. A more custom way of training the educators means a more custom education for the students; what this translates to is a classroom environment where everyone feels equal and the students are in the best position to learn because their teacher has all of the necessary skills to communicate the course material in an engaging way.

Rodney White's "How Thematic Teaching Can Transform History Instruction," has proven to be one of the most influential texts on this thesis. Although it is not a lengthy article, White clearly and concisely lays out the benefits of teaching using a thematic pedagogical theory instead of a chronological one. By explaining the issues with the current pedagogical paradigm (and while quoting Ben Franklin) this article uses a hypothetical religion class as an example for outlining how a thematic classroom would work. White carefully explains how additional content can be covered with thematic teaching and outlines the ease with which active learning techniques can be applied to a thematic classroom and how they can sometimes present a challenge in the chronological one. The strength of this article is its careful tone never to blame the students for the need for a paradigm shift, while referring to articles which have done so, but rather removes blame completely and explores that updating the pedagogy is the result of shifting students, educators, technology, and the constant addition of new knowledge. White is one of the few texts which specifically mentions technology as a reason behind the pressing need for a shift to a more engaging, thematic classroom. While it does not recognize metacognition in the way that other texts do, White emphatically mentions that a thematic classroom enables students to understand important subject matter content

in a meaningful and useful context, by putting all of a student's education and extracurricular experience in conversation with each other.

Steve Tillis' article "The Case Against World History" plays devil's advocate with itself. In an attempt to find the underlying problems and address needed pedagogical shifts, the article presents seven arguments against a global approach to theatre history followed by a rebuttal. The seven arguments are: manageability, detail, reliance, Western dominance, Western relevance, Western inevitability, and metanarratives. Tillis uses his point-counterpoint structure to reestablish world theatre history as a subject of study, while clarifying the methodologies and goals of its study. At the end of the article, Tillis leaves the reader with a sense of completeness, having open and shut every possible argument anyone could make about the perceived issues with teaching world theatre history and their solutions. While the focus is on the field as a whole, and not specifically dealing with the implementation of some of the proposed changes, this article presents a clear path for active learning techniques and a student-centered classroom; especially when it comes to hot-button topics right now, like the problematic, Eurocentric narratives prevalent in many theatre history textbooks, and the need for more inclusive course work. In the context of this thesis, this article largely added credibility to the claim that these pedagogical theories discussed in other articles dealing with content from other humanities (and in some cases, sciences) can be applied to theatre history. By showing that these issues are not just limited to one subject, but are sweeping and prevalent throughout the entire higher education system.

### **Student-Centered Learning**

Student-centered learning is the natural occurrence at the intersection of examining pedagogical theory and active learning. The idea broadly encompasses methods of teaching that shift the focus of instruction from the teacher to the student. Student-centered learning aims to develop

learner autonomy and independence by putting responsibility for the learning path in the hands of students by giving them skills and metacognition which are applicable across all aspects of life. Student-centered instruction focuses on skills and practices that enable lifelong learning and independent problem-solving. Student-centered learning puts individual students' interests and needs first, acknowledging the student's voice as central to the learning experience. This is in contrast to traditional education, or "teacher-centered learning", which situates the teacher as the primary or "active" role while students take a more "passive", receptive role. In a teacher-centered classroom, teachers choose what the students will learn, how the students will learn, and how the students will be assessed on their learning. In contrast, student-centered learning requires students to be active, responsible participants in their own learning and with their own pace of learning, usually resulting in assessments which are more creative and expressive rather than more traditional metrics of success.

In his "booklet on student-centered learning," Leo Jones challenges all of the objections to this empowering new way of teaching head-on. Jones expounds that a student-centered approach helps students to develop a "can-do" attitude. By taking the stance that it is effective, motivating, and enjoyable, this booklet sets out to discuss how this approach can be implemented. According to Jones, student-centered learning develops skills which help students communicate with the real world, by teaching them how to work with others to solve problems and how to successfully delegate tasks and leadership skills. By conditioning students to be used to presenting in class and public speaking it will enable them to be better members of the workforce, and make them more comfortable not only speaking extemporaneously, but not panic when they are put on the spot. The added benefit of this, according to Jones, is that students will feel more confident and comfortable and will therefore be more active in the classroom without the fear of making mistakes or "losing

face”. The major outcome of student-centered learning, in Jones’s opinion, are students who are supremely self-reliant. By arming students with the skills that they need to be able to think deeply and critically the students will be better prepared to make connections and conclusions on their own without an educator guiding them or just giving them the information. A proper student-centered learning style classroom does not end at the conclusion of class but extends into every aspect of a student’s life and into their other classes, which allows them to understand each content unit in a greater context. Jones is careful to note that not all students or classes will respond well to a fully student-centered learning style classroom. Its success varies from class to class, and some classes may not respond well to the autonomy and will need a greater portion of teacher-led activities. A balance is essential, and that balance will change based on the personalities of each class. That is the beauty of student-centered learning, is that it is always different and tailor-made to not only each class, but each student. Students become more involved in the learning process and become committed to the course work, in Jones’s case an English class. As the students take more ownership of their individual work, they will find ways to assist other students who may be having a slower time developing these skills. Students get more time for discussion, as the educator presents major themes and allows the students to parse out the relevance on their own; student-centered activities are enjoyable and stimulating, by hearing different points of view, sharing experiences, brainstorming, reacting to other students, and working together students will have a better understanding of the course material and be able to apply it in all situations.

Mark Foster, Wade Hollingshaus, and Branislav Jakovlevic published “Financializing of Education: Teaching Theatre History in the Corporatized Classroom,” in *Theatre Topics* journal. This article is the result of a University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, initiative entitled: “Promoting Student Learning in Large Classes.” The study follows the experience of a Professor, his teaching assistant,

and a student as they explored how different teaching procedures worked in classrooms with over 70 students. The initiative lasted for nearly three years, until the composing triumvirate went in different directions; the balance of the article are their blog postings on their thoughts of the initiative and how they were using the tactics and exercises explored at the universities where each of them ended up. The article specifically addresses how to make each student feel like they are getting their money's worth out of their education while still being able to manage a classroom of 70+ students; largely thanks to active learning strategies. As the article is comprised almost entirely of blog postings and email correspondence between the three leading the study and the students participating in the study, the casual informal feel is an easy facilitator of the real thoughts of those involved. While the authors make very clear that they do not want this article to be read as a how-to text, the blog postings and personalized student interaction achieved is the pinnacle of student-centered learning. Over the course of the blog posting and correspondence, the instructors are given real-time feed-back on how their class is doing and responding to the information and activities. The overall purpose of the study was to study the process of learning as it took place in the class, identify any problems, and then work with other teams of three in other disciplines to find interdisciplinary ways to begin solving these problems. As the trio works to come up with solutions for the issues the students were reporting, usually related to too much content being taught too quickly, or that they were having trouble identifying what was important, the trio inadvertently began incorporating a more active learning style to their teaching by adding groupwork and more discussion. Although they do not identify it or deal with it in this article, the inclusion of a thematic curriculum would solve many of the problems that the students identify in their correspondence. With large classrooms, in this case around 70 students, but at many larger universities introductory survey classes can reach 500, active learning will always be difficult to achieve. By shifting to a student-

centered learning style classroom and incorporating elements of thematic teaching into the curriculum, opportunities for active learning will present themselves organically.

Bill Nave's book *Student Centered Learning: Nine Classrooms in Action* is a highly curated account from nine different k-12 educators and how they work within the confines of public education to create student-centered learning environments, allowing them to better reach every student and lay a foundation for a life of continuing education. This book argues that it is possible for all teachers, no matter what setting they teach in, to become extraordinary and for students to develop and realize their own unique personal goals. Over the course of this book, it is shown that student-centered learning requires deep knowledge of the subject to be taught, a repertoire of instructional approaches, the ability to respond when one approach is not working, and the trust of their students; the book helps facilitate all of this in an empowering way by allowing the nine educators to share their tips and tricks which the reader may use and incorporate into their personal classrooms.

Rebecca Wolfe, Adria Steinberg, and Nancy Hoffman are the editors for the book *Anytime, Anywhere: Student-Centered Learning for Schools and Teachers*. According to the book itself:

“Educators have argued that students should be at the center of learning, constructing new knowledge based on what is interesting to them and receiving guidance in classrooms—or anywhere they may happen to be—from adults with whom they have positive relationships. Now, with the advent of new technologies, researchers are confirming the value of this approach by showing how the human brain and memory work in response to different environments, and how digital tools give students powerful new ways to express what they’ve learned.”

This book takes a critical look at current existing research and puts it all in conversation with each other. The theme of the book can be reduced down to the idea that in order for students to grasp complex ideas and concepts, educators need to ensure that students have a deep vested interest in their own learning. The book supports the movement from the current one-size-fits-all system, overwhelmingly driven by time, to a more tailored approach, where the primary driver is learning, to meet students where they are. While we must set the same high standards of achievement, we must also provide different routes, environments, and pacing for each learner to get there. By changing the way, we understand how well a student has mastered a skill or understands a concept, we will find more diverse ways of measuring classroom success. Student-centered learning puts the student-teacher dichotomy under a microscope, but it does the same with the student-community dichotomy. By explaining and demonstrating to students how their classroom experiences and skills relate to their practical skills and interests, their industry, and the world as a whole, they will be more interested in developing and growing in the classroom. By tackling most student's first complaint "I will never use this" or "how does this relate to me", a student-centered classroom uses every opportunity possible to show each student how they fit in to each concept, and how each concept fits in to their daily lives.

"Interactive Student-Centered Learning: A Cooperative Approach to Learning" is an article by Edward Spooner published in 2015 in the journal *Principal*. This article thrives upon the concept that there is no, and will never be any, set way of teaching, that it is constantly evolving and will do so forever. Over the course of six sections Spooner takes readers through the history of different learning and teaching styles (from traditional to constructivist), ending with what he feels is the best way to learn and teach: interactive, student-centered learning. The first section, "The Learning Process," is a review of what Spooner considers the prominent pedagogical theories, which he says are "similar to the philosophy of education courses we took in college". Spooner, being a long-time

secondary teacher himself, uses his own research and personal experiences as an educator to discuss the pros and cons of the traditional views of teaching and learning by comparing it to student-centered learning. In the next section he discusses the most used student-centered learning methodologies, among which are active learning techniques and dialogic pedagogy. In each of these chapters, the instructor's role is addressed in conversation with the role of the student, striving for a balance. Spooner even predicts issues and problems which may occur by implementing some of his ideas and offers suggestions on how to overcome them. In the fourth and fifth sections, Spooner takes a deep dive into student-centered learning. The chapters give educators ideas and ways in which they can actually implement student-centered learning into the classroom, explaining the process and including hands-on, unconventional assessment ideas. He explains that research has proven that in recent years, students do not truly learn from a "sit and get" model, but need to talk about, write about, and apply what they are learning to make it relevant and to retain the information. Spooner's ideas loop in to the main theme of most of the literature cited here, and the theme of the thesis itself: that students need to have a vested interest in their learning in order for them to understand and apply complex concepts to their education. Like most of the research here, Spooner's work is written using k-12 as its primary source material and is designed to be used primarily by k-12 educators, however the concepts and principles of student-centered learning techniques can be easily translated and applied to a higher education classroom model.

Overall, the literature compiled above presents a unified front, and assists the narrative of this thesis as a whole. By presenting clear ways that student-centered learning has a huge benefit for the students and facilitates active learning, the purpose of this thesis becomes clear. That a shift towards a student-centered classroom allows for the easy incorporation of active learning techniques and ultimately better primes each student for individual success. By shifting theatre history curricula to a thematic syllabus structure, educators will find that they have the freedom to facilitate



discussions and incorporate these student-centered ideas into their courses without being worried if time will run out before they cover all of the units. The body of this thesis will borrow from and honor these sources heavily, as I strive to present a plan for a redesigned theatre history class which seamlessly incorporates a thematic syllabus, active learning techniques, and creates a student-centered classroom.

# Appendix

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1:1

## Chronological Syllabus



# THEA 307: History of Theatre, Part I

## Antiquity through The Renaissance

Instructor: Shaun McCracken  
 Email: [smmccracken@vcu.edu](mailto:smmccracken@vcu.edu)  
 Fall 2017, TR 11:00 – 12:15  
 Academic Learning Commons, Room 1105

### Required Texts:

\*Various Handouts (via Blackboard)  
 and:

“History is not about dates and quotes and obscure provisos. History is about life, about change, about consequences: cause and effect. It’s about the mystery of human nature...the mystery of time.” — David McCullough

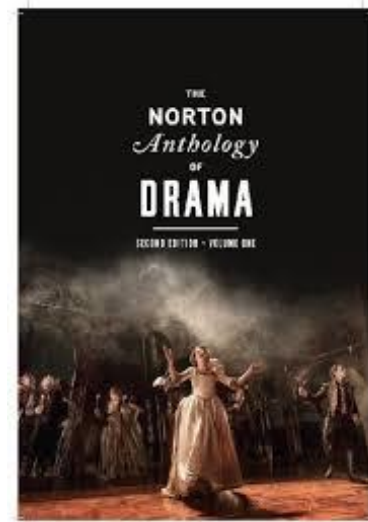
### Grading

Your grade will be based on a combination of written work, exams, and class participation. Your final grade will be based on a 500 point total.

- . **A 100-90% (450-500 points)**
- . **B 89-80% (400-449 points)**
- . **C 79-70% (350-399 points)**
- . **D 69-60% (300-349 points)**
- . **F 59% and Below (0-299 points)**

### Course Objectives

- This course will trace the history of theatre from its origins through the European Renaissance, focusing on our theatrical past and its relevance to today’s theatre practice.
- Students will develop critical and analytical skills in terms of understanding and making connections between historical events and theatrical influences.
- Students will demonstrate their understanding of theatre history through participation in written exams, projects, classroom exercises and discussions.



**Play Report=100 points**  
**Midterm Exam=150 points**  
**Final Exam=150 points**  
**Participation=100points**  
**=500 points Total**



**\*Students are allowed 1 (one) D'oh Day in addition to their two unexcused absences.**

**You can use your D'oh Day if you:**  
**1). Totes forgot to sign in, or**  
**2). You just need a mental health day (and the very idea of coming to Theatre History is too much).**

## **Attendance**

- By the department attendance policy, students are allowed TWO unexcused absences. For each additional unexcused absence, you will lose a full letter grade for the class\*.
- Excused absences must be cleared by the instructor in advance. TAs may not excuse absences.
- Failure to sign in with your TA will result in the student being marked “absent” for that class period.
- Students arriving more than 20 minutes late to class will be considered absent.
- Every two late arrivals will count as an unexcused absence for grading purposes (**a student is considered “late” if they arrive to the classroom after the lecture has begun—I usually begin the lecture at 11:02**).

**Disabilities**--If you have any visual, auditory, ambulatory or cognitive disabilities **it is your responsibility to inform me on the *first day of class*** so that I can try to accommodate your needs. See the *VCU Resource Guide* for details.

**Religious observances**--In accordance with university policy, if you wish to observe a religious holiday you must provide advance written notification by the end of the fifth day of class (Thur. 9/7) so that I may accommodate your needs.

**The University requires that cell phones and electronic devices must be turned off while you are in the classroom. For a full listing of University syllabus statements, please see: <http://go.vcu.edu/syllabus>**

**\*\*Students who are found to be accessing Facebook or Twitter (or any site not course-related) in class will be asked to leave and will be counted absent for the day.\*\***

## Course Calendar (REALLY subject to change!)

### AUGUST

- R 24 What is Theatre History and why do we study it? Introduction to the course and overview of syllabus
- T 29 Ancient Theatre: **Ancient Theatre Reading #1 (Blackboard)**  
**(W 30: Last Day to Add or Drop Courses for Fall 2017)**
- R 31 Ancient Theatre

### SEPTEMBER

**(M 4: Labor Day: University Closed)**

- T 5 Ancient Theatre: **Ancient Theatre Reading #2 (Blackboard)**
- R 7 Ancient Theatre
- T 12 Greek Theatre: **Greek Theatre Reading (Blackboard)**
- R 14 Greek Theatre
- T 19 Greek Theatre
- R 21 Greek Theatre Group Discussion: *Medea* (Norton Anthology)
- T 26 Asian Theatre: **Asian Theatre Reading (Blackboard)**
- R 28 Asian Theatre

### OCTOBER

- T 3 Asian Theatre
- R 5 Asian Theatre Group Discussion: *Little Clay Cart* (Norton Anthology)
- T 10 Roman Theatre: **Roman Theatre Reading (Blackboard)**
- R 12 Roman Theatre
- T 17 Midterm Review—Midterms distributed at end of class
- R 19 No Class—Reading Day
- T 24 Medieval Theatre--**Midterms due by 11am!**
- R 26 Medieval Theatre Group Discussion: *Everyman* (Norton Anthology)
- T 31 Italian Renaissance: **Italian Ren./Commedia Reading (Blackboard)**

## NOVEMBER

R 2 Commedia Dell'arte

(F 3 **Last Day to Withdraw for Fall 2017**)

T 7 English Renaissance

R 9 English Renaissance Group Discussion: *The Duchess of Malfi* (Norton Anthology)

T 14 Spanish Golden Age: **Spanish Golden Age Reading (Blackboard)**

R 16 Spanish Golden Age

T 21 Spanish Golden Age Group Discussion: *Fuenteovejuna* (Norton Anthology)

R 23 No Class—Thanksgiving Break

T 28 French Neoclassical Theatre

R 30 French Neoclassical Playwrights/Acting Companies/Scenery—**Play Report due by 11am (start of class)**

## DECEMBER

T 5 French Neoclassical Tragedy: **French Neoclassical Reading (Blackboard)**

R 7 Final Review—Finals distributed at end of class

R 14 **Final Exams due in TA's mailbox by 12noon!**

1:2

## Thematic Syllabus



**THEA 307 Fall 2018**  
**Theatre History**  
**T/R 11:00am-12:15pm in MCALC 1105**

*Instructor:* Jesse Njus

*Contact:* janjus@vcu.edu

*Office:* Main Theatre Office (second floor)

*Office Hours:* 2:00pm-3:00pm M/W

**Overview:**

What is Theatre History? Theatre history does not exist solely in the past, to be dusted off and presented as a series of dates and archaic societal practices. The history of performance remains not only relevant but contemporary as techniques that have existed for thousands of years resurface in modern performance. Incorporating masks, music, dance, puppets, or theatre-in-the-round into contemporary performances (to name only a few staging elements) is often considered a hallmark of modern drama while it actually represents the reintroduction of historical components. The theatrical masks of the Greeks, Romans, and Commedia dell'Arte, South- and East-Asian puppetry, the use of music and dance in Classical Greek theatre, and the Elizabethan thrust stage are all examples of historic practices that continue to remain vital to theatre. Yet as these elements revitalize modern performance, we often forget how extraordinary and multi-faceted they were in their original contexts. As we challenge the modern boundary between theatre and performance, we forget that we are simply rediscovering the intricacy that existed in performance for thousands of years. Hopefully, this course will complicate your relationship to history as well as your relationship to theatre and performance. At the end of this class, you should be prepared to deal with any performance you encounter in the world and better prepared to create your own!

**BOOKS:** Almost all articles and plays will be available on Blackboard. PURCHASE any edition of Shakespeare's *As You Like It* by or before November 15.

**ASSIGNMENTS:** All reading is to be completed by the day assigned. Bring your text to class! There will also be weekly quizzes, 4 response papers (various lengths), a midterm exam, a final project, and a final research paper based on your final project (5-6pp). Late papers will be accepted, but **for every day the paper is late (including weekends) the grade will be lowered 1/3** (i.e. from a B+ to a B or from a B to a B-). There is no extra credit.

**ATTENDANCE:** Attendance is mandatory. You may miss 2 classes. **For every extra class you miss, your overall course grade will be lowered.** Excessive tardiness will also lower your grade.

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: Honor System: upholding academic integrity**

The VCU Honor System policy describes the responsibilities of students, faculty and administration in upholding academic integrity, while at the same time respecting the rights of individuals to the due process offered by administrative hearings and appeals. According to this policy, "Members of the academic community are required to conduct themselves in accordance with the highest standards of academic honesty, ethics and integrity at all times." In addition, "To support a commitment to the Honor System, all members of the VCU community are required to:

- Adhere to the Honor System policy and its procedures;
- Report any suspicion or knowledge of possible violations of the Honor System;
- Answer truthfully when called upon to do so regarding Honor System matters;

- Maintain appropriate confidentiality regarding related to Honor System matters.”

PLEASE SEE THE WEBSITE of The Office of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity for more information. <https://students.vcu.edu/studentconduct/> Do your own work and cite your sources!

STUDENTS with Disabilities: To receive accommodations, students must register with the Office of Student Accessibility and Educational Opportunity on the Monroe Park Campus (828-2253) or the Division for Academic Success on the MCV campus (828-9782). Please also visit the Student Accessibility and Educational Opportunity website and/or the Division for Academic Success website for additional information. <http://saeo.vcu.edu/> and/or <http://das.vcu.edu/>

OFFICE HOURS: My office and office hours are listed above. If you cannot make my listed office hours, please email me and we will schedule an appointment. I will try to answer all email communication within 24 hours, not counting weekends.

FURTHER INFORMATION and syllabus statements, PLEASE GO TO <http://go.vcu.edu/syllabus> Students should visit <http://go.vcu.edu/syllabus> and review **all** syllabus statement information. The full university syllabus statement includes information on safety, registration, the VCU Honor Code, student conduct, withdrawal and more.

#### ASSESSMENT:

10%	Participation and attendance
10%	Quizzes
20%	Response papers
20%	Midterm Exam
20%	Final Project
20%	Final Research Paper

LEARNING OUTCOMES: By the end of this course, students will be able to analyze performance and literature within historical contexts, critique scholarly arguments, demonstrate the ability to compare global performance techniques, and think critically about a wide variety of performance elements.

#### GRADES

Grade	Description
A (4.0)	Exceptional achievement. Substantial effort and achievement in the areas of critical thinking, technique, and presentation.
B (3.0)	Very good work that satisfies goals of course; clear and convincing structure that is complex and unique.
C (2.0)	Average. Original assignment approached but does not develop further.
D (1.0)	Below average. Does not fully understand assignments. Very little effort, is incomplete or late. Lacks of full understanding and commitment.
F (0)	Failure, no credit.

**Weekly Breakdown**

**Week One: Introduction**

8/23: **IN CLASS:** Introduction

**Week Two: Ancient Athenian Tragedy**

8/28: **READ:** Euripides *The Bacchae*

8/30: **READ:** Goldhill “The Audience of Athenian Tragedy”

**Week Three: Ancient Athenian Comedy**

9/4: **READ:** Aristophanes *Lysistrata*

9/6: **READ:** Hazell “The Power of the Mask” AND Aspden “Opera and National Identity”  
(selection “The rise of the chorus”)

**Week Four: Medieval Japanese Noh (Tragedy)**

9/11: **READ:** Anonymous *Tomoe*

9/13: **READ:** Zeami, *Teachings on Style and the Flower (Fūshikaden)* pp. 4-17 and 43-63  
**DUE: Response Paper 1: On Masks (2pp+mask)**

**Week Five: Pre-Columbian Americas**

9/18: **READ:** Mayan *Rabinal Achi*

9/20: **READ:** Tedlock *Rabinal Achi: A Mayan Drama of War and Sacrifice* (selections)

**Week Six: Post-Columbian Americas**

9/25: **READ:** Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz *Loa for the Divine Narcissus*

9/27: **READ:** Meyer “Reclaiming the Discourse of Camp”

**Week Seven: Early Modern China**

10/2: **READ:** Xu Wei *Mulan*

10/4: **REVIEW!!**

**DUE: Response Paper 2: On the Chorus (3pp)**

**Week Eight: Midterm and Puppets**

10/9: **MIDTERM!**

10/11: **READ: Bunraku Puppet Play:** Takeda Izumo, Miyoshi Shoraku, Namiki Senryu  
*Yoshitsune and the Thousand Cherry Trees* (selection from Act IV, scene 5: “The Fox”)

**Week Nine: Puppets**

10/16: **READ:** Schumann “What, At the End of This Century, Is the Situation of Puppets and Performing Objects?”

10/18: **NO CLASS! Reading Day**

**Week Ten: Medieval Japanese Kyogen (Comedy)**

10/23: **READ:** Anonymous *Thunderbolt AND Mushrooms AND The Delicious Poison*

10/25: **READ:** Bogost “Alien Phenomenology” from *Alien Phenomenology*

**SEE As You Like It this weekend at SALT!**

**Week Eleven: Medieval Comediennes**

10/30: **READ:** Hrotsvit *The Passion of the Holy Virgins Agape, Chionia, and Irena*

11/1: **READ:** Gordon “Lazzi”

**DUE: Response Paper 3: On Puppets (2pp+puppet)**

**Week Twelve: Commedia dell’Arte**

11/6: **READ:** Moliere *Tartuffe*

11/8: **READ:** Peacock “Slapstick and Comic Violence in Commedia dell’Arte”

**Week Thirteen: NSFW!!! XXX-Rated Shadow Puppets from Medieval Egypt**

11/13: **READ:** Ibn Dāniyāl *The Shadow Spirit* (pp. 4-43, scene six)

11/15: **READ:** Ibn Dāniyāl *The Shadow Spirit* (pp. 43-end)

**Week Fourteen: Shakespeare**

11/20: **READ:** Shakespeare *As You Like It* Acts I-III

11/22: **NO CLASS: Happy Thanksgiving!**

**Week Fifteen: Shakespeare**

11/27: **READ:** Shakespeare *As You Like It* Acts IV-V

11/29: **IN CLASS:** Rehearse Final Projects

**DUE: Response Paper 4: Critique of As You Like It (3pp)**

**Week Sixteen: Final Projects**

12/4: **IN CLASS:** Performance

**DUE: OUTLINE of final project for all groups performing**

12/6: **IN CLASS:** Performance

**DUE: OUTLINE of final project for all groups performing**

**FINAL PAPER DUE: THURSDAY DEC 13 at 8:00am (5-6pp)**

**HAPPY HOLIDAYS!!**

## Vita

Brandon Alexander LaReau was born in Alexandria, Virginia and raised in Lynchburg, Virginia. He is a proud American citizen. He graduated from Heritage High School in Lynchburg, Virginia in 2010. He received his Bachelor of Arts in Musical Theatre and Dance from Christopher Newport University in Newport News, Virginia in 2014. He received a Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Pedagogy with concentration in Dramaturgy and Dramatic Literature from Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia in 2019. During his time at Virginia Commonwealth University he was an Adjunct Professor, and the Executive Assistant to the Chair of the Department of Theatre.