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## Shakespeare and the Cultural Capital Tension: Advancing Literacy in Rural Arkansas

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A multi-faceted Shakespeare festival in a small town in rural east central Arkansas, part of a larger Community Literacy Advocacy Project, represents a concerted effort to alter the discourse of decline in this economically troubled region, but it also raises some challenging issues about how such projects distribute social and cultural capital among their participants.

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As I do my job, trying to sponsor and support reading and writing practices that will ideally enrich lives and communities throughout Arkansas, I'm always tempted to rewrite the American Declaration of Independence so that its second paragraph begins this way: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among those rights are Life, Liberty, Literacy, and the pursuit of Happiness." As I reflect on this minor emendation, I always recognize the original sentence as one of the most evocative assumptions ever penned by humankind. It's the clearest example I know of an enthymeme with the major premise explicitly expressed, not suppressed, as would be the case in most arguments. Would that it were true. Jefferson and his fellow Deists certainly assumed that all people were *created* equal; I wonder if they believed, as we now must concede, that, even though people are created equal, the inequitable social structures that persist—the inequality of access to life, liberty, literacy, and the pursuit of happiness—begin to materialize about one second out of the womb. I see a major part of my job as working to equalize people's chances to live freely and pursue happiness, however they define it, by understanding the roles that literacy plays in those endeavors. In what follows, I describe the most recent project of an ongoing initiative in rural, east central Arkansas to foster literacy throughout a small community, and I unpack some thorny ideas about how the concept of *capital* figures in this specific project, as well as in the overall initiative.

Let me offer two specific scenes that set the stage for these ideas to come to life. Here's the first scene: It's a Saturday morning in early April 2011 in tiny Augusta, Arkansas, population 2400. While other tenth-, eleventh-, and twelfth-graders from Augusta High and two neighboring schools, McCrory High and Newport High are sleeping in, or getting up to help with family obligations, or going to work, or resting their sore muscles from Friday night athletic pursuits, a dozen kids from these three schools are spending the day improvising, drumming, chanting, reciting, writing, running, chasing--all activities toward the goal of learning William Shakespeare's enormous and challenging romance *The Tempest*. This troupe's goal, to be achieved

some six weeks later after several of these day-long sessions, is to perform a forty-five-minute remixed version of the play, combining Shakespeare's scenes with their own text, music, and choreography. The student performance, *The Tempest Tossed*, is the curtain raiser to a full-length production of the play, cast with professional actors from Northwest Arkansas and talented amateurs from rural Arkansas, performed on an outdoor stage on the banks of the White River in Augusta on May 28. The student performance, the full-length play, a brief concert of original art songs based on themes in *The Tempest*, and an early-spring statewide tour of lectures and discussions about the play all collectively comprise the first of what is hoped to be the annual ARCare Shakespeare Festival, an event that brings reading, writing, and the arts to life in rural Arkansas in ways that the region has never experienced before.

Here's the other scene: It's November 2006, and I'm sitting in a conference room at the Augusta headquarters of White River Rural Health, an organization that operates clinics and supports development in twenty-two small towns throughout east central Arkansas. I have been invited by Dr. Steven Collier, executive director of White River Rural Health, to meet with a group called the Augusta Recovery Initiative, convened in response to the closing of a plant in the town that took dozens of jobs out of the economy. Seated around the conference table is this group of everyday citizens, determined to keep their town from going under:

- Katina Biscoe, a nurse practitioner for White River who graduated from Augusta High School in 1991 and has children there now and who serves on both the Augusta School Board and the Woodruff County Literacy Council.
- Raymond Bowen, a teacher who retired from Augusta High School after thirty-five years but who still pinch-hits as a teacher of algebra II and advanced math.
- Regina Burkett, the Community Development Coordinator for White River and a licensed practical nurse.
- Evelyn Coles, a farm owner, mother, and grandmother whose husband serves on the Augusta School Board.
- Brenda Collins, longtime resident of Augusta whose children and grandchildren have gone to school there and who serves on both the town council and the Woodruff County Literacy Council.
- Craig Meredith, a graduate of Augusta High School who, having served in the U. S. Navy, has returned to the region to work as a computer technician for White River Rural Health.
- Jimmy Rhodes, a longtime resident of Augusta who runs the funeral home ("I'm burying too many young people," he says), serves on town council, and plans to run for mayor.
- Donny Shields, the postmaster in Augusta whose wife and son teach in the district's schools
- Janice Turner, an ordained minister who recently moved to her husband's hometown, Augusta, after he retired and who now runs a Christian bookstore called "The J Spot" and serves as president of the Woodruff County Literacy Council.

Of course, presiding at the meeting is Dr. Collier, who graduated from Augusta High School, took a degree in history from Baylor University, and after completing his

M.D. at the University of Arkansas Medical Center and his residency in Pine Bluff returned to Augusta as CEO of White River.

The committee had been meeting, I learned, for about eighteen months, having been convened initially to address the economic downturn in the town and the county, Woodruff, of which Augusta is the seat. As Dr. Collier told me then--and I've heard him repeat the point several times in other gatherings--the group decided about a year into its existence that the problem wasn't economic, it was "educational." As the Initiative's notes from its October 2006 session put it, "Last year we started an Augusta improvement plan with brainstorming sessions. The topic of education kept coming up. We are now putting it on the front burner." In other words, Dr. Collier and the others realized that, unless Augusta could responsibly convey the impression that its schools were top-notch and that its graduates went on to college, graduated, and got decent jobs, the town would stand a slim chance of not only finding a company to fill the deserted space from the shuttered plant but also of urging new businesses and industries to locate in Augusta and Woodruff County and thereby create jobs, a stronger tax base, and so on.

This was where the Initiative expected me, I think, to pitch in. As an educator who grew up in small-town America and had accrued thirty-five years in the trenches at the secondary and post-secondary level, I was a fresh face in Arkansas, where I had recently moved to become the initial occupant of an endowed chair in literacy studies at the state's flagship university.

A thought occurred to me. Seated around this table were representatives of all sorts of "constituencies" in this small town: education, health care, small business, government, religion, agriculture. Each was interested in helping to save Augusta. Each had come with the notion that improving "education" could play a central role in the recovery initiative. Each was completely open to my argument that improving literacy—improving all citizens' abilities to read and write to the extent that they can live a rich, fulfilling personal life and participate in a changing economy<sup>1</sup>—was *the* most vital aspect of the educational improvement plan.

To make this plan work, I proposed to the group, we couldn't simply focus solely on the schools and hope that they "fix" the literacy problem. Without wanting to endorse any political candidate, I argued that "it takes a village" to raise the profile of reading and writing and to improve education. Consider, I asked them, all the organizations and entities in Augusta that might say, if asked, that they were interested in helping folks read and write more fully and effectively: not only the schools, but also the churches, the library, the local literacy council, the local economic development council, the health clinics. Why not launch, I asked them, a project that would have a designated person at its helm who would actively seek out individuals and groups in Augusta who wanted to read and write in fuller, richer ways than they had in the past and who would forge "literacy liaisons" between and among all the constituencies who wanted to raise the profile of literacy in Augusta but who had not known about one another or worked together in the past.

Thus was born the idea for the Augusta Community Literacy Advocacy Project. After a quick marshaling of resources by White River Rural Health and the Office of the Brown Chair in English Literacy, Collier identified the miraculous Joy Lynn Bowen, a former teacher in Augusta Public Schools who knows and is trusted by

nearly every person in Augusta, and he placed her on the staff of White River as the Community Literacy Advocate.

What we have accomplished since the fall of 2006—in other words, between the second and the first scenarios above—is substantial. We have run two events, a single-day workshop and a multi-session class, for parents and childcare providers on how to make homes more literacy-conducive for pre-school children. For the elementary school, we have sponsored family reading of the principal's "book of the month." For the high school, we have involved the students in the Arkansas Delta Oral History Project (Jolliffe, "The Arkansas Delta Oral History Project"; Goering, Jolliffe, Riley, Swanton, and Gates), a semester-long endeavor that connects University of Arkansas undergraduates with students from small, rural high schools in eastern Arkansas as they collaboratively develop essays, stories, plays, poems, and websites that capture the unwritten history of the region. In addition, at the high school, we have run regular sessions to help students score better on the ACT examination, and we even recruited a young playwright whose work was performed as part of the Arkansas New Play Festival sponsored by TheatreSquared, a professional company based in Fayetteville. The general citizenry in the town has gotten involved in two ways. First, many of them wrote stories and essays about military service, their own and that of family members, for a commemorative volume that my office published to coincide with the unveiling of a new veterans' monument outside the courthouse on Memorial Day 2012. Second, many folks have been involved in an evolving effort to write about the "pillars" of the churches in Augusta: We've been trying to link up young people and senior citizens in the churches and get them to write, collaboratively, the stories that capture how long the older generation has been attending the church, what changes they've seen over the decades, how the church has served the community, and so on. Our goal is a volume of pieces published for each of five or six churches in the town.

Each time we've had a major accomplishment with the Augusta Community Literacy Advocacy Project, the folks at White River Rural Health (which has changed its name to ARCare to reflect a new statewide presence) have sponsored some kind of public celebration—a lunch, a reception, a dinner—to honor the participants. Elsewhere, I have appropriated a term from the work of communication theorist David Procter and described these celebrations as "civic communions" ("The Community Literacy Advocacy Project"). Indeed, just as the communion service in Christian churches celebrates the life of the church with bread and wine, so do civic communions epideictically commemorate the spirit of a the town's citizens, their accomplishments, their initiative.

Have we made a difference in Augusta? I think so. The year before we started the Community Literacy Advocacy Project, of the forty-eight students who graduated from Augusta High School, only twenty-two even took the ACT and only six went to college. Four years into the project, twenty-nine students graduated, twenty-three took the ACT, and twenty-two went to college, many with scholarships. The town is changing. Store fronts on the old main street are being renovated, and small businesses, many related to the health-care industry that ARCare anchors, are moving in. ARCare has also opened its new Community Health and Education Center, which

provides high-quality preventive programming and offers the first substantial pre-school day-care in the region.

Bowen, the community literacy advocate, and I continue to look for ways that reading and writing can enrich the quality of life in Augusta and Woodruff County, and the Team Shakespeare project emerged from our opportunistic searching. The project actually was sparked by a comment from Dr. Collier: "David, I remember a time when we used to do Shakespeare plays in Augusta." A little further digging revealed the existence, until the 1950s, of a Shakespeare club in the town. The game was on: We would create the ARCare Shakespeare Festival with four components. First, since I have a substantial background as an actor and a director, I knew right away that I wanted to direct a production involving both professional actors from the outstanding theatre community in Northwest Arkansas<sup>2</sup> and good amateur actors from near Augusta. I selected *The Tempest* because (a) I love it; (b) we would be performing it on an outdoor stage on the banks of the White River in Augusta<sup>3</sup>, a very tempest-conducive setting; and (c) I would be able to fill the roles of the "main" cast—Prospero, Ariel, Caliban, Ferdinand, Miranda, Stefano, and Trinculo—with Northwest Arkansas actors and the roles of the "usurper" cast—Antonio, Sebastian, Gonzolo, and Alonzo—with actors from Augusta and nearby Beebe. We rehearsed scenes from the play in two separate locations—Fayetteville and Beebe—for five weeks, only putting the two casts and the entire play together the night before we performed it in Augusta.<sup>4</sup>

We capitalized on an Augusta connection to forge the second part of the ARCare Shakespeare Festival. Beth Gregory, who grew up in Augusta in a family that has lived there for generations, is married to Professor Peter Smith, a prominent Shakespeare scholar, critic, and dramaturge based at the University of Nottingham. We prevailed upon Smith, during his and Beth's visit to Augusta in late winter, to give a series of wonderful public lectures about *The Tempest* at five locations throughout Arkansas, sort of "priming the pump" for audiences who we hoped would travel to Augusta in May to see the play.

The third component came from an old personal connection of mine. The composer in residence at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Dr. Bob Boury, is from Wheeling, West Virginia, near my hometown of New Martinsville. I had met Bob in 1976 when, as part of Wheeling's bicentennial celebration, he had written the score for a new musical called *Time Steals Softly* about, of all things, the love match between Henry Clay and his secret paramour who lived in Wheeling. I had reconnected with Bob in Little Rock shortly after I moved to Arkansas in 2005, and I knew he had written a series of art songs based on *The Tempest*. It took little to convince Bob to rehearse the songs with two outstanding singers, a baritone and a mezzo-soprano, who agreed to come to Augusta and sing the pieces as people were coming in for the curtain-raiser and the full production.

The fourth component was *The Tempest Tossed*. Before describing the process and production, let me focus solely on this aspect of the ARCare Shakespeare Festival as the most visible "hot spot" in this relatively thorny issue about literacy outreach and cultural capital. A snapshot preview: Sponsoring a project like Team Shakespeare's production of *The Tempest Tossed* forces one to walk a dialectical

tightrope over the chasm of capital, with Louise Rosenblatt's rosy terrain on one side and Pierre Bourdieu's briar patch on the other.

On the one hand, I know that as people read and write, they don't simply decode and encode, but instead, in Rosenblatt's terms, they transact with the text by tapping into their "linguistic-experiential reservoir," a phenomenal entity that she describes as "[t]he residue of the individual's past transactions," his or her "funded assumptions, attitudes, and expectations about language and about the world," an embodiment of "*inner capital* . . . that is all each of us has to draw on in speaking, listening, writing, or reading." As Rosenblatt puts it, "We 'make sense' of a new situation or transaction and make new meanings by applying, reorganizing, revising, or extending public and private elements selected from our personal linguistic-experiential reservoirs" ("Transactional" 5, italics added). Or, as she writes in her influential book, *The Reader, the Text, and the Poem*, "The reader's attention to the text activates certain elements in his [sic] past experience . . . that have become linked with the verbal symbols" (11). The reader doesn't "understand" the meaning but instead actively constructs it. The reader selectively attends to clues in the emerging text and to responses he or she evokes by connecting the emerging text to elements of the linguistic-experiential reservoir (10-11 and *passim*). In other words, according to Rosenblatt, people never actually learn anything completely *new* while reading; instead, they *construct* the new by connecting to what they have already learned and experienced. This Rosenblattian principle is evoked in reading comprehension instruction in its initial dictum: "Activate prior knowledge." The principle finds a home in common parlance as well: The more you know, the more you can learn.

Our goal with Team Shakespeare's *The Tempest Tossed*, and other similar projects that the Brown Chair has sponsored, is to deepen the participants' linguistic-experiential reservoir, to enrich this "inner capital." It's not that I believe the folks in rural Arkansas don't know anything and therefore have a difficult time learning more. But having grown up in a small town in a rural region, I understand that "the new" is often not a completely welcome visitor in these locales, and the linguistic-experiential reservoirs of folks in this type of location can be relatively shallow. Manifesting an admirable aspect of their culture, people in small town/rural America often recount stories from the past—achievements of high school sports teams, memories of times when famous personages visited the area, accounts of community pageants and parades that marked historical moments, such as centennials and the like. It's important in these locales for people to know their roots, their heritage. It's rare in small town/rural America that one encounters forms of art—*theatre*, the visual arts, dance, esoteric music—that transcend the boundaries of the expected, the traditional. In other words, it's difficult to encounter—*live*—art that offers the salutary, educational shock of the unfamiliar, the unknown.

But if one believes Rosenblatt's theory, one can only hope to become more literate—to become a more effective transactional reader—by encountering the unfamiliar and the unknown, making it the familiar and the known, and then connecting to it in later encounters with more, new "unfamiliar" and "unknowns." Nothing in Rosenblatt's work suggests that she had the slightest political or ethical qualms about educators' roles in enriching the "inner capital" of readers to support and fuel the transactional process.

Reading the French sociologist Bourdieu, on the other hand, brings political and ethical issues rapidly to the forefront. Developed by Bourdieu and his colleagues, the concept of cultural capital refers to the "cultural habits and . . . dispositions inherited from" the family that are fundamentally important to school success" (Bourdieu and Passeron 8). Bourdieu emphasizes that cultural capital comprises "competences" that conduce an appropriation of a society's "cultural heritage," but that are unequally distributed and lead to "exclusive advantages" for their bearers, especially in countries with highly differentiated social class structures, including educational systems that institutionalize the criteria of evaluation so that the competences held by children from a particular class are deemed elite and preferable (Bourdieu). In their tidy book, *The Elements of Literacy*, Julie Lindquist and David Seitz define the term simply: "Cultural capital refers to inherited cultural habits and competencies that can be transferred first into social capital (membership in social groups and networks with power and access) and then into economic access—real money" (104).

Given this dialectical tension—acknowledging that people's literacy can be enhanced by strengthening their inner capital, yet acknowledging that cultural capital is socio-politically loaded—I have tried to sponsor literacy-enrichment opportunities in rural Arkansas that manifest the trope, frequently invoked in educational practice, of mirrors and windows. On the one hand, I try to provide opportunities for people to read and write in ways that mirror their existence and in ways that open windows to new experiences. For example, the Brown Chair has sponsored two major "mirrors" experiences, the Arkansas Delta Oral History Project and the Augusta Veterans' Stories Project. On the other hand, I try to sponsor reading and writing activities that offer windows, operating under the assumption that these experiences will help, especially for young people, to deepen linguistic-experiential reservoirs and foster connections to new ideas, new perspectives, new language. The Team Shakespeare project was, I believe, the boldest of these windows experiences, and in initiating it, I gulped and admitted, at least to myself, that I was trying to provide the dozen young participants with a helping of cultural capital.

The Team Shakespeare Project in Augusta in May 2011 was actually the third such project my office has undertaken in collaboration with Trike Theatre, an innovative enterprise led by Kassie Misiewicz that produces professional theatre for children and provides professional development activities for teachers at all grade levels who would like to integrate the performing arts in their curriculums and pedagogies. The first two iterations of Team Shakespeare involved gifted and talented middle school students who spent all morning with us for three consecutive weeks studying, rewriting, remixing, writing about, and ultimately performing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 2008 and *Much Ado About Nothing* in 2009. The 2011 project in Augusta was a bit of a departure. Rather than working with us three hours on fifteen consecutive days, the Augusta group devoted all day for five Saturdays between the first of April and the end of May. In the earlier projects, we had worked primarily with eighth- and ninth-graders. In this project, we were working with sophomores, juniors, and seniors. While they all volunteered for the project, we had no idea—nor did we actually need to know—whether they were designated as "gifted" or "talented" in any way.

Here's how the Team Shakespeare process works. First of all, there are three instructors: a "Shakespeare" person who introduces the play to the students and helps them understand it; a "theatre" person who works via improvisation and tableaux, the latter a brilliant technique that gets participants to physicalize moments in scenes and kinesthetically understand them; and a creative writer, who periodically pulls the students away from the study and performance and leads them in exercises to write poems or short fiction about the themes and issues raised in the play. In the Augusta project, Erika Wilhite was the Shakespeare person, Kassie Misiewicz was the theatre person (although Erika's and Kassie's roles blended a good bit in practice), and Erika's husband, Rodney Wilhite, was the creative writing person.

Whether spread over three weeks of daily sessions or five weeks of Saturday sessions, the Team Shakespeare process is essentially the same. From the outset, the young participants learn how to do Short Shakes scenes, ten- to fifteen-minute chunks of the plays, with cue cards provided by the leaders. In Augusta, Erika and Kassie would provide lots of context about what's happening in the play prior to this scene and what comes after it, but the students begin simply by getting Shakespeare's words in their mouths.

Once they've had the Short Shakes experience with several of the scenes, the leaders and the students take the scenes one at a time, reading the script carefully and then paraphrasing the lines. Invariably, the students want to put Shakespeare into formal, academic language. That's not the goal. Team Shakespeare very soon wants to get them up on their feet, doing the scenes in their own language, thereby inviting scene analysis: Who are the characters? What kind of relationship do they have with one another? With others not on the stage? What do the characters want to do, to achieve? What's standing in their way?

After a substantial amount of scene analysis work, the participants move from acting to writing. As part of the process of paraphrasing, performing, and analyzing, the leaders and the students have been discovering literary techniques that Shakespeare employs: for example, metaphor, parallelism and antithesis, alliteration and assonance, and so on. Rodney, the creative writing specialist, sets the students to work by showing them models of poetry and short fiction and then helping them as they write in one of those modes about a theme or issue raised in the play, using a particular literary technique they've learned about.

By this time, the process is becoming recursive. In the midst of a scene, being done in either Shakespeare's language or the students' paraphrase, Erika will shout out, for example, "emphasize the antithesis." The students do so, and then immediately sit with Rodney and write something that embodies an antithesis.

As the sessions proceed, thus, each student is assembling a substantial packet: the play itself, their paraphrased scenes, their snippets of writing craft, their poems and stories. About three-quarters of the way through the total experience, the leaders and students begin to think about crafting a final performance. They discover a rhetorical situation, an exigence that will lead them to present their version of the play, in this case *The Tempest*, to an audience. They take everything they've done, divide it into moments, and then work to craft these moments for presentation.

In Augusta, *The Tempest Tossed* embodied this conceit: A random collective of students is trying to *explain The Tempest* to their friends who didn't participate in

Team Shakespeare, but the participants are getting the play all wrong and everyone is getting confused. So, one of them, a young woman, appears as Ariel and tells them (duh), "Let's not tell them about the play! Let's show them the play!" There follows, then, a forty-minute version of *The Tempest*, in the students' own words, with their poetry and prose interspersed, supplemented by their own singing, drumming, and dancing.<sup>5</sup> My words don't do just to *The Tempest Tossed*. It rocked.

Did the Team Shakespeare Project improve the participating students' literacy abilities? I employed no pretest/posttest assessment to see if students could score higher on some kind of test as a result of the Team Shakespeare experience. I can assert, however, that the students' experience deepened their connection with a significant literary work. The students connected with *The Tempest* emotionally, intellectually, and kinesthetically. As the five weeks of the Team Shakespeare project proceeded, Erika, Kassie, and Rodney were able to engage the high school students in challenging conversations about the issues and themes raised in the play because the students had experienced it fully as art.

The work of two educational theorists helps to support the proposition that the Team Shakespeare experience ultimately helped the students become stronger readers. Richard Marzano makes a strong case for the role of vocabulary enrichment in literacy development. The more extensive and deep a young person's vocabulary is, Marzano argues, the more he or she can develop comprehension and fluency skills. Marzano describes eight characteristics of effective vocabulary instruction:

1. Effective vocabulary instruction does not rely on memorizing definitions.
2. Students must represent their knowledge of words in both linguistic and non-linguistic ways.
3. Effective vocabulary instruction involves the gradual reshaping of word meanings through multiple exposures.
4. Teaching word parts enhances students' understanding of terms.
5. Different types of words require different types of instruction.
6. Students should discuss the terms they are learning.
7. Students should play with words.
8. Instruction should focus on terms that have a high probability of enhancing academic success. (62-90)

The Team Shakespeare project capitalized on all of Marzano's points except numbers 4 and 5. For the participants, definitions of complicated terms came experientially as they paraphrased, reorganized, and redefined Shakespeare's lexicon. They represented their knowledge of new terms kinesthetically, via improvisation and tableaux. They reshaped word meanings by making metaphors for difficult terms with their bodies. They discussed the terms they learned by collaboratively writing scenes. They played constantly, not only with the words of the play but also by inventing dances based on the punctuation in *The Tempest* and in their evolving scenes. They internalized definitions of "terms that have a high probability of enhancing academic success"--terms like metaphor, parallelism, antithesis, and climax--by experiencing them in their study, their improvisation, and their creative writing.

Donna Alverman extends her consideration of literacy achievement beyond the vocabulary-literacy connection, organizing her overview of "Effective Literacy Instruction for Adolescents" around five central principles:

1. Adolescents' perception of how competent they are as readers and writers, generally speaking, will affect how motivated they are to learn in their subject area classes (e.g., the sciences, social studies, mathematics, and literature). Thus, if academic literacy instruction is to be effective, it must address issues of self-efficacy and engagement (191).
2. Adolescents respond to the literacy demands of their subject area classes when they have appropriate background knowledge and strategies for reading a variety of texts. Effective instruction develops students' abilities to comprehend, discuss, study, and write about multiple forms of text (print, visual, and oral) by taking into account what they are capable of doing as everyday users of language and literacy (193).
3. Adolescents who struggle to read in subject area classrooms deserve instruction that is developmentally, culturally, and linguistically responsive to their needs. To be effective, such instruction must be embedded in the regular curriculum and address differences in their abilities to read, write, and communicate orally as strengths, not as deficits (195).
4. Adolescents' interests in the Internet, hypermedia, and various interactive communication technologies (e.g., chat rooms where people can take on various identities unbeknown to others) suggest the need to teach reading with a critical eye toward how writers, illustrators, and the like represent people and their ideas—in short, how individuals who create texts make those texts work. At the same time, it suggests teaching adolescents that all texts, including textbooks, routinely promote or silence particular views (198).
5. Adolescents' evolving expertise in navigating routine school literacy tasks suggests the need to involve them in higher-level thinking about what they read and write than is currently possible in the transmission model of teaching, with its emphasis on skill and drill, teacher-centered instruction, and passive learning. Effective alternatives to this model include participatory approaches that actively engage students in their own learning (individually and in small groups) and that treat texts as tools for learning rather than repositories of information to be memorized (and then all too quickly forgotten) (201).

Alvermann's ideas resonate soundly throughout the Team Shakespeare Project. The dozen students, early in the five weeks' work, quickly developed a keen sense of self-efficacy and engagement. The project capitalized on their "everyday uses" of language as it led them to create scenes they understand in terms that they use to comprehend Shakespeare's complex work. *The Tempest Tossed* captured beautifully the dialects of the multi-racial cast. With their bodies and their choreography, the participants created pictures and tableaux to depict the emotions, the tensions of the play kinesthetically and graphically. And, of course, the whole experience was, I'd argue, an exemplar of participatory education.

The ARCare Shakespeare Festival, especially the Team Shakespeare component, in short, was a highly satisfying mirrors and windows experience, enriching students with new inner, cultural capital, by infusing something radically new in their minds and words by connecting it to a mirror of their own lives.

## Endnotes

1. This is a rough paraphrase of the definition of literacy promulgated by the National Assessment of Adult Literacy: Literacy is the ability to use printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential.
2. The University of Arkansas' MFA program in acting provides an excellent training ground for local actors. Fayetteville's professional theatre company, TheatreSquared, recently received substantial award from the American Theatre Wing, sponsor of the Tony awards, as one ten outstanding, emerging regional theatres.
3. Coincidentally, central Arkansas was victimized by strong storms and flooding during the spring of 2011, when we were rehearsing *The Tempest*. Nature cooperated with our choice of plays.
4. We later moved the production and performed the play in Fayetteville.
5. Coincidentally, I was so impressed by one of the students' scenes in *The Tempest Tossed* that I stole some of their percussion and choreography for the opening scene of *The Tempest*.

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## What's Writing Got to Do with It?: Citizen Wisdom, Civil Rights Activism, and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Literacy

Michelle Hall Kells

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This article examines what a pedagogy of public rhetoric and community literacy might look like based on an understanding of twentieth century Mexican American civil rights rhetoric. The inductive process of examining archival materials and conducting oral histories informs this discussion on the processes and challenges of gaining civic inclusion. I argue that writing can be both a healing process and an occasion for exercising agency in a world of contingency and uncertainty. To illustrate, I describe several key events shaping the evolution of the post-World War II Mexican American civil rights movement in New Mexico. Taking a case study approach, I begin this chapter by examining the civic discourses of one prominent New Mexico leader in the post-World War II civil rights movement: Vicente Ximenes. As a leader, Ximenes confronted critical civil rights issues about culture and belonging for over fifty years beginning in Albuquerque, New Mexico. It is a historical moment worth revisiting. First, I set the stage for this examination about writing, citizenship, and civic literacy by analyzing two critical rhetorical moments in the life of this post World War II civil rights activist. Secondly, I connect the Ximenes legacy to a growing movement at the University of New Mexico and the ways that we are making critical responses to current issues facing our local communities in New Mexico. By triangulating social acts of literacy, currently and historically, this article offers organizing principles for Composition teachers and advocates of community literacy serving vulnerable communities in their various spheres of practice.

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Marking the ten year anniversary of 9/11, the Albuquerque Cultural Conference recently took as its theme: "Cultural Survival in Difficult Times" to signal the stark reality that our vulnerable communities (locally and nationally) are becoming increasingly fragile economically, culturally, and politically. This post 9/11 kairotic moment calls to mind the concept of *solastalgia* or what Glen Albrecht terms human ecosystem distress. Albrecht defines *solastalgia* as the embodied effects of isolation and the inability to exercise agency over place. *Solastalgia* can be mapped to such endemic social conditions as drug abuse, physical illness, mental illness, and suicide. I believe that we as a nation have been trying to resolve a kind of collective *solastalgia* or post-traumatic stress syndrome for the past decade. Moreover, the kind of border tensions that we are facing today, the current anti-immigration hysteria, and the omnipresent English Only movement are historically connected and politically relevant to the current work in public writing and community literacy education (Kells, Balester, and Villanueva; Kells "Mapping"). Writing can be both a