
Preface

At a time when our nation's public schools are narrowly defined by reading and math scores, scripted curriculum, and high-stakes tests, and students are becoming more and more disconnected to the school environment, there is an urgent need to show how curriculum can be engaging, rigorous, and relevant to the lives of the children and the families it serves.

Curriculum drama provides an innovative way for teachers and students to become invested in the world within a curricular area, to develop complex understandings within a content area, and to engage in purposeful collaboration with each other. With its participatory structure, curriculum drama helps to develop students' sense of agency, creating an environment where they can appraise the world around them, and in their constructed classroom positions, they can take deliberative action. Now more than ever, we need our students to develop experience as informed leaders and as critically minded, socially conscious citizens.

Purpose

Civic Literacy Through Curriculum Drama describes an innovative approach for engaging students in the lived world of social studies. Field tested in various classrooms—public and private, at various academic levels—from middle schools to a university setting, “curriculum drama” (Franklin, 2003) creates a pedagogical bridge that connects student interests with curricular content.

Without scripted roles or predetermined outcomes, the teacher *and* the students construct the curriculum drama. Through this process, students develop a new frame of reference within the classroom. They interact with each other, not in their conventional classroom roles as students, but rather from constructed positions within a defined community of practice. For example, they study the legislative process by working *as senators* in their classroom senate (Chapters 3–8); they closely analyze the “crimes” of a literary character in a novel (or historical figure) by transforming the class to a courtroom and working *as members of the criminal judicial system* (Chapter 8).

Who Should Read This Book?

Middle and secondary school educators who teach social studies or those who want to situate social studies as a core topic within the extended literacy program will find this book helpful, relevant, and thought provoking. Teachers of adolescents know that students yearn to be engaged with the world, and they need the opportunity to talk back to society. Curriculum drama provides them with an appropriate structure within which to develop leadership skills, take initiative, and engage in peer collaboration. In addition, curriculum coordinators, parent groups, and directors of afterschool programs will be well served by the many classroom ideas presented in this book.

Furthermore, this text has relevance at the college and university levels. Whether the topic is history, political science, literature, or speech, faculty can use curriculum drama as a way to teach. In this way, students will be motivated to develop complex understandings in a content area through their inside positions within this constructed experience. In teacher preparation programs, particularly those in social studies education, English education, curriculum design, or educational drama, this book provides a window into constructivist practice.

Step-by-Step Approach

Many teachers recognize the power of experiential learning, but they do not know how to successfully prepare their classrooms for this transformation. This text provides a hands-on guide. One of the curriculum dramas explored in this text is the classroom senate. Chapters 3–8 suggest steps for transforming the classroom to a legislative setting. For easy access, I list the key topics, the format of the experience (e.g., full class session, small groups) and the approximate number of class sessions. As this is a constructed experience, not a scripted one, this “plan of action” is merely a guide; included in this section are shortcuts and extensions to custom-design the experience for any time frame. A resource section at the end of this book includes activity sheets, project guidelines, and samples of student work.

Making Classroom Dilemmas Transparent

This text, however, goes far beyond being a “how to” guide. I wrote it from the vantage point of a classroom teacher who has taught a diverse range of students in both public and private school settings around the world and who is now a teacher educator at an urban public university working with the next generation of new educators.

I have spiced this book with dilemmas that students and I encountered when we used this approach in our classroom. For example, in Chapter 4, I describe an encounter with collective student resistance. In Chapter 5, I recount an episode when students as senators decided to take a spontaneous recess. Chapters 6–8 describe other classroom glitches. Making these challenges transparent underscores the inherent nature of curriculum drama. It can be unpredictable, and at times it can feel like a ride on the wild side!

These dilemmas, however, stretched my own practice (and patience). I grew from these experiences, and I believe my teaching became better. Along with describing these unexpected moments in the classroom, this text also explores how as a class the students and I worked together to address these credibility issues and how we devised strategies to bring collective belief back into the classroom situation.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1, “Curriculum Drama: An Engaging Approach to Social Studies,” describes the constructive nature of this classroom approach, its relevance to standards in social studies and language arts, and its emergence within the field of educational drama. Chapter 2, “Constructing Curriculum Drama: Exploring Its Structure,” describes how teachers can construct their own curriculum dramas by using three processes: adapting content from a blueprint (e.g., using a primary document), setting the stage (e.g., stimulating visual curiosity), and devising multiple entry points (i.e., creating situations).

Chapters 3–8 examine an extended curriculum drama focused on the legislative branch of government. Each chapter builds upon the one before it. Chapter 3, “Becoming a Senator: Setting the Stage,” explores the preliminary tasks involved in helping students construct their frame of reference as senators. Chapter 4, “Political Parties: Building Belief,” and Chapter 5, “Holding an Election: Engaging in Multiple Entry Points,” describe how to construct a political world within the legislative experience. Chapter 6, “Current Events: Doing Legislative Work,” builds upon current events as a way for students to construct legislation based on issues that are meaningful to them. Chapter 7, “Constructing a Hearing: Appraising Witness Testimony,” shows the classroom transformation to a legislative hearing. Chapter 8, “Constructing a Debate: Taking Legislative Action,” examines how students as senators take a public stance on prioritized legislation.

Chapter 9, “Constructing Curriculum Drama in Other Contexts,” describes ways to use this approach in current events, history, and

law. The first example outlines ways to transform the classroom to a world summit on peace; students interact *as leaders of peace* to devise plans for civic action and community building. The second examines the women's suffrage movement in the nineteenth century; students *as concerned citizens* engage in a town hall meeting to debate whether women should have the right to vote. The final example details the construction of a criminal trial as a way to build deep understanding about our judicial system; students *as members of a jury* determine the fate of a literary character (or historical figure).

Ideas for Reading This Text

There are many ways to read this book. Some may prefer to go cover to cover and read the chapters in sequential order. For these readers, the first two chapters describe curriculum drama and its conceptual framework, how it reflects attention to national standards in social studies and English language arts, and how internal structures work to develop the experience. The middle chapters bring to life an extended curriculum drama in a particular field of civics (i.e., legislative practice). The final chapter explores the use of curriculum drama in such content areas as current events, history, and the criminal justice system.

For those who are social studies teachers seeking to engage students in a study of the legislative branch of government, Chapters 3–8 will be particularly useful. These chapters provide a detailed approach for constructing a classroom senate. Chapters 4 and 5 take a detour from lawmaking to add a political layer to the context. These two chapters include *suggested* experiences; if you are under scheduling constraints, you may decide to read these chapters for background purposes only and concentrate on Chapters 3, 6, 7, and 8.

Others may be interested in exploring curriculum drama as a concept and how it can be designed in different areas of social studies or language arts; in this instance, Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 9 will be particularly relevant.

Civic Literacy Through Curriculum Drama provides an innovative way to make social studies accessible, relevant, and fun. This book challenges teachers and administrators alike to explore the power of imagination and the use of active inquiry within the classroom setting. By examining the processes that help to shape curriculum drama (Chapters 1 and 2), by learning how to build an ongoing situation within the classroom (Chapters 3–8), and by exploring other contexts for curriculum drama (Chapter 9), teachers will be well positioned to begin the process of constructing engaging curricular experiences within their own classrooms.