
Introduction: Teaching Latin American and Latinx Theatre

Most of the plays and performance pieces detailed in the pages that follow won't be seen on the mainstage at a university theater. As Debra Castillo reminded me in a conversation about the student group she founded at Cornell University, Teatrotaller, the target demographic for principal theater spaces skews traditional and requires a strong dose of Shakespeare (or Shakespeare and Marlowe, as more and more theatre historiographers would have it, at least for the *Henry VI* plays) and other similar fare. Despite—or because of—this sidelining, however, unconventional plays and performances are brought to life in astonishing ways and in multiple venues. And they engage and impact participants (readers, student actors, university audiences, community spectators, and those of us who teach) in ways that grab the attention of even the most cynical among us. If the goal is to change the way people see the world, it is clear from the articles in this collection that the mainstage, or even the stage, can be a specious goal; the floodlights may be those of a formal theater, a primary school cafeteria, a college classroom, or “simply” in the imaginations of (also co-creating) readers. What matters, as the authors in the following pages affirm time and time again, is not the venue but the act, not *authority* but collectivity.

In this light, the audience for the articles Jackie and I present is comprised of teachers at all levels who want to use theatre and performance to bring their classrooms alive, and vice versa. From instructors of intermediate Spanish or Portuguese courses who incorporate dramatic texts into the curriculum, to those who design upper-level courses that treat Latin American and Latinx performance art in a variety of departments, teachers will find background information and creative activities that empower them to improve the quality of their own research and instruction. Many of the authors in this special issue write of the ways that students are transformed through the process of reading, staging, and/or creating plays. What becomes evident in reading the pieces that follow is something equally profound; in our (legitimate) desire

to show that theatre work changes the lives of our students, we forget that we are also continually transformed. The collaborative work that we *study* as scholars, which is almost always tightly tied to social-historical issues, has, more than any other pedagogical current, transformed the way we *teach*. We follow a Latin American theatre and performance tradition that begs a different genealogy for our US-based pedagogy; it's not mainstage, but its results are eminently more palpable.

Thus it follows that even our most time-honored literary analysis is infused with the idea that we are building—no, creating—something together, as part of an artistic-intellectual community. Sometimes the work is explicit, influenced by the tradition of *creación colectiva*, often called devise theatre in the U.S. Sometimes the concept of collaboration is less obvious, though it still underlies our work. Far from recoiling at what might appear to be an adulteration of literary tradition, students take in stride (and thrive from) the many ways a dramatic text can be used in the classroom, from a means for the discovery of literary motifs, grammatical structures, and vocabulary, to a basis for acting out important scenes or even full-scale productions. Or plays become the intellectual fodder for new creations—original work that engages the immediate and broader communities. As students begin to consider their own personas, their own roles in society, and as they begin to see social and political interactions as rehearsed performances, a crucial link between the classroom and the world around them becomes evident. The beauty of the articles that follow is that, since we are creative partners with our students, they can be read as primers for creative collaboration—by both students and professors. And while they are but fourteen examples among hundreds, they shed light on the versatility, utility, and beauty of artistic endeavors.

Stuart A. Day
University of Kansas