



# Adding Drama to the Classroom: Utilizing Dramaturgical Teaching to Engage Students

Jason Headrick &  
Kate McCain



UNIVERSITY OF  
Nebraska  
Lincoln



# Presentation Overview

## Introduction

- Background of Dramaturgical (Simulation) Teaching
- Best Practices for Implementation
- Course Examples
- Research Supporting the Pedagogy





## **Dramaturgical Teaching**

### Pedagogy Background

“Students engage in an activity that simulates complex problems or issues and requires decision making...” (Jenkins, 2012)

- Origins in theatre and performing arts (Orr, 2003)
- A tenet of role-play and simulation
- Effective learning instructional strategy to promote student engagement (R. Stevens, 2015)







## **Dramaturgical Teaching**

### Pedagogy Background

- Described as the most student-centered approach in leadership and management education (Leberman & Martin, 2005)
- Ability to connect theory and practice, meaning making, and the development of critical thinking (Schwarndt, 2005; Tchaicha & Davis, 2005)
- Has been utilized in sociology, political science, economics, management, and STEM (through games)
- Value-added instructional strategies to case studies, games, team-based







## **Dramaturgical Teaching** Pedagogy Background

- Dramaturgical teaching has been described as the most student-centered approach in leadership and management education (Leberman & Martin, 2005).
- Features of dramaturgical teaching support its potential ability to connect theory and practice, meaning making, and the development of critical thinking (Schwarndt, 2005; Tchaicha & Davis, 2005).
- Jenkins (2012) reported only 10.2% of instructors use simulation teaching in 34-65% of class session, and 13.2% used simulation in 66-100% of class sessions.





## **Best Practices** Implementing Simulations

1. Provide justification: your “why” for using this teaching method.
2. Selecting simulations that fit your content and course objectives.
3. Spend time setting up the simulations with your students.
4. Research your role.
5. Be prepared for emotional responses.





## Example

### ALEC 302 Course Objectives

- Teach students to successfully navigating complex organizations using power dynamics
- Create a learning environment in which students learn about specific “styles” or “situations” while experiencing them in a simulation role play by the professor.
- Students will learn through personal experience how to adapt, and be successful in environments
- Enhance critical thinking skills (i.e., interpret, analyze, evaluate, make proper inference, explaining, and self-regulating)







## Example Course Outline

<b>Unit 1: Authoritarian Simulation</b>	Students learn about the dynamics of power and influence
<b>Unit 2: Participatory Simulation</b>	Students learn about servant leadership and learn to place the needs of others before their own individual needs
<b>Unit 3: Team Based Simulation</b>	Students learn about transformational (full range model) and work in teams to motivate each other towards a shared vision





## Example

### Student Quotes

- "I have learned that I am starting to become slightly familiar with his teaching style and am beginning to figure out how to handle the intensity of Mr. Headrick and the TAs while also paying attention and comprehending what he is saying while taking notes. This is pushing me to become a better listener and focus on multiple things at one time."
- "No matter who the relationship is with it is always important to identify the type of power that one party may have over the other. This is the first step in being able to work on political skill and be able to adapt and work with all kinds of people, or by knowing which influencing tactics to use or that are being used on you like mentioned before. "
- "He's just playing the part, and he's playing it well— he's just an authoritative leader. If people can't handle that, they're sinking, not swimming. I'm glad I'm swimming, and I'm so happy I'm benefiting from a class I nearly dropped."





## Research Supporting Pedagogy

**The overall rating of the course was within the highest percentile range, which indicates that students are satisfied with the course**

Table 1

<i>CIEQ Assessment Data</i>			
Category	Mean	Standard Deviation	Percentile
General course attitude	3.73	.56	79.90
Method of Instruction	3.35	.79	64.38
Course Content	3.40	.67	70.75
Interest and Attention	3.39	.80	81.63
Instructor	3.85	.45	87.50
Total	3.56	.69	78.63

*Note.* Mean and standard deviation scores are based on eight semesters of data, percentile is based on seven semesters of data.







## Conclusion

### Takeaways

- Dramaturgical teaching is an innovative teaching pedagogy courses in higher education.
- Forces students outside of their comfort zones and challenges them to reach deeper levels of critical thinking.
- Research suggests dramaturgical teaching can have a powerful impact on student experiences and learning.
- The goal of this presentation is to inform faculty members about dramaturgical (simulation) approach in higher education.





Thank you!  
Questions.

[jheadrick2@unl.edu](mailto:jheadrick2@unl.edu)  
[kate.mccain@huskers.unl.edu](mailto:kate.mccain@huskers.unl.edu)

