

# Pre-Texts

## Pedagogy Workshop

Led by Vialla Hartfield-Méndez, Director of Engaged Learning, CFDE  
Professor of Pedagogy, Department of Spanish and Portuguese  
in collaboration with  
Bobbi Patterson, Professor of Pedagogy, Department of Religion

**January 14, 2016**

4:15 - 7:30 pm

Modern Languages Building, Room 201

[RSVP](#) required by January 11

Community-engaged learning pedagogy generally seeks to link institutions of higher education with local or distant communities in mutually beneficial arrangements. Moving away from the concept of “service-learning,” community-engaged learning emphasizes community assets and bi-directional communication and benefit. Nevertheless, it is still often the case that faculty and students think of community-engaged learning as emanating from the university toward the community. What if we were to seek out ways of learning in community settings and reverse that directionality, adopting within the university effective learning and teaching strategies that have been developed outside the university?

The Cultural Agents Initiative at Harvard University (<http://culturalagents.org/>) has developed an innovative pedagogical approach to teaching primary texts called “Pre-Texts” that can be used in many different settings. This approach is derived, in part, from community organizing strategies that have emerged in various Latin American contexts, especially the “cartoneras” movement begun in Argentina and now spread across Latin America (a movement to foster high levels of literacy and wide access to challenging texts), and including practices introduced by the Brazilian community theater practitioner Augusto Boal, whose work has been widely adopted in pedagogical practice. Pre-Texts workshops use these and other community organizing practices as a basis for activities that foster close readings of texts while also fostering creativity. Texts become “pretexts” for individual and group creativity while at the same time the creative activities are, by design, mechanisms for returning over and over to the original text, creating access to layered and nuanced readings/interpretations. As the learning experience (i.e., a course) progresses, each participant becomes a leader, designing and facilitating an activity. The text that serves as the starting point is generally a challenging but rich one – selected pages from a well-known novel, a “classical” text, perhaps a famous but dense historical text, etc.; in other words, usually “primary” texts. The workshop elicits very focused, analytic work with this text while also generating highly creative and reflective work from the participants. It accomplishes this through deceptively simple strategies.

Professor Vialla Hartfield-Méndez has collaborated with the Cultural Agents Initiative for the past year, using the Pre-Texts pedagogical approach extensively in a senior seminar in the spring 2015 semester, and then teaming with Professor Bobbi Patterson to offer a Pre-Texts workshop at Emory. A number of professors and graduate students have begun using this pedagogy in their classes. This approach allows students to engage with many different kinds of texts and student response has included three general themes: 1) this pedagogy helps them to understand others' points of view and to appreciate the importance of understanding different perspectives; 2) the approach allows the students to be “teachers” and to participate in their own learning and that of other students; and 3) it fosters better and more nuanced understanding of complex texts.

Professor Hartfield-Méndez and Professor Bobbi Patterson are collaborating to offer an abbreviated Pre-Texts workshop that will incorporate strategies gleaned from application of Pre-Texts strategies in university courses. Participants will gain facility in the Pre-Texts pedagogy as well as consider possible applications in their own courses. A light dinner will be provided. Participants are encouraged to attend the entire workshop.

**Please RSVP by GoogleDocs at this [Pre-Texts link](#).  
by 12:00 pm, January 11, 2016.**

Co-Sponsored by Emory College Language Center  
and the Center for Faculty Development and Excellence (Engaged Learning Program)