Drama as Inquiry: Students and Teachers as Coresearchers

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Doing research with drama helped us to really understand things and to make sure we understand. [When] we didn’t know what to do in the drama, we knew we didn’t know enough. Somehow it was pretty hard to fake because you have to do something . . . . if you do something and you don’t feel it or it doesn’t seem right, you go back and learn more and do it again. You know, like you always say about “research”—go back and “resee” it.

—Ned, grade 7

[The drama] kind of brought doubt. My original opinion kind of fell down, then up again with some doubt. I had different reasons for my opinions, like the effect on the Vietnamese people which I’d never thought about — how they got killed and their houses destroyed and stuff . . . . so in a way, my opinion is stronger, but it’s less sure. I’m kind of more open to that there are other opinions that are strong and stuff even though you might disagree [with those other opinions].

—Ron, grade 7

“How could someone end up shooting a machine gun at rival gang members in the St. Valentine’s Day Massacre planned by Al Capone’s gang?” “What did Hank Aaron have to do off the ballfield to become great?”
“How did the Great Depression affect ordinary people’s lives?” “What would be the effects of suffering through the Holocaust?” These were some of the research questions that Jeff and I explored with his students in May 1995 when Jeff once again invited me into the school to help students with their projects.

The students had spent three weeks working on final inquiry projects from the integrated unit on the theme of Civil Rights and Social Issues discussed in Chapter 3. Consistent with the idea of a problem- and project-centered curriculum, small groups of students had chosen to pursue some personally meaningful inquiries related to the theme. Many had voluntarily begun to use drama strategies, which Jeff and I had previously introduced to them.

In previous chapters, we have shown the power of drama: to introduce and extend students’ involvement in units of inquiry, to integrate the curriculum, and to engage students in reading and other essential learning processes.

This chapter illuminates how, in conjunction with other methodologies, drama can become a significant mode for conducting research in small groups where students (and for a time, teachers) are co-researchers (2). Drama can be used both as a method when students work alone or with a teacher in the exploration of research questions and also by students in the presentation of the results of inquiry.

As teachers, Jeff and I used drama strategically with small groups for short periods (one or two forty-minute sessions) to help students pursue their research purposes and to create spaces in which students could move beyond their current understandings through zones of proximal development. Drama, as we have seen, emphasizes meaning making through interaction, imagined experiences in multiple contexts, reflection, exploration, discovery, making connections, seeing implications, and the implementation and use of new understandings beyond the drama worlds. But deeper learning will occur and more complex understandings will develop if students interact in contexts in which, in dialogue, there is a sharing of expertise, a respectful challenge to superficial ideas, and an intermingling of different perspectives. This happens in peer groups that work together productively—it also occurs most effectively when teachers work with small groups of students to focus on their particular questions, understandings, misconceptions, and viewpoints.

**Drama and Research**

Each group of two to four students in Jeff’s five classes had chosen a topic and conducted extensive library research. They had gathered factual information and read applicable books; many had read relevant literature, in-
tviewed informants, or watched videos about their topic. In addition, many groups had begun to incorporate drama strategies into their work. The unit's outcome, which had been agreed on with the students, was for each group to create a video documentary to inform their classmates and inspire some kind of social action or transformed thinking about the issue they were researching.

As many of the students wrote first drafts of their video scripts, they indicated dissatisfaction with their questions, understandings, findings, or how they were approaching their topics. When Jeff told his classes that I was interested in working through drama with groups to help them explore their topics in more depth, many students wanted to work with me and/or with Jeff. Over the course of the following week, thirty students in nine different groups used drama as a research tool. I conducted most of the initial sessions, and Jeff conducted follow-up sessions and student interviews.

What is Research?

Inquiry is another name for research which, according to Webster's 9th New Collegiate Dictionary, means "careful or diligent search, inquiry or investigation." From the first five minutes I spent with two of Jeff's students who were researching the Mafia during the 1920s, as I heard them talk about books they had consulted and saw their notebooks, it was clear that they had been carefully conducting inquiries.

For professionals, the "search" of research revolves around a key question or a series of questions that researchers clarify, and attempt to answer, as they pursue their inquiries into a particular topic. Jeff's students were similarly engaged in serious searches. These boys who were researching the Mafia wanted to know: "Who was Al Capone?" They had become clearer about factual details, historical events, and social aspects of the Mafia. Like all researchers they had collected and investigated "data." The students had consulted nearly all the relevant books in the school library that mentioned the Mafia, had collected photographs, and had read biographical accounts of mobsters. They had asked their parents about the topic but had had no success in finding "informants" (people who are considered important sources of information) to interview. Because they had not been alive in the 1930s, they could not make direct observations as many researchers do and although they would have liked to visit Chicago, such a trip was considered impractical. All Jeff's students had used the "methodology" of library research to gather data. These two boys were determining "results" of their study as they ana-
alyzed and interpreted the data they had gathered. They had some provisional answers to the question that had initiated their research; they knew about details like the St. Valentine’s Day massacre and how the Mafia used extortion and ran “speakeasies.” Like many researchers, they had found that in looking for answers they had come up with more questions. For example, in conversation with me they asked the question noted above: “How could someone end up shooting a machine gun at rival gang members in the St. Valentine’s Day Massacre planned by Al Capone’s gang?” Professional researchers ideally conduct their studies carefully and systematically: they “re-search” in the sense that they revisit questions and are cautious at every step to ensure that whatever results are presented are interpretations which can reasonably be drawn from an analysis of the data (4). These boys were more ready to rush to conclusions: they had concluded that anyone who really wanted to could have avoided getting caught up in the Mafia.

Elements of Research

Clearly, Jeff’s students were following professional research models. Their inquiries had the core components of all research:

- questions
- researchers
- information/informants
- methodologies
- data
- results/interpretations

The students were coresearchers in their small groups as they pursued questions collaboratively, shared information, and critiqued each others’ interpretations.

There are a host of ways—or methodologies—for conducting research in the classroom: reading; interviewing people; studying artifacts, documents, photographs; and watching documentaries. Drama is one research methodology, which can be used in conjunction with others, to gather and interpret data. When drama is used for inquiry, students gather data that are shared from memory, selected from books, presented as words and images, shaped with others, interpreted, and critiqued together. In drama, students can “re-search” when they revisit questions and reposition themselves to reconsider ideas and understandings as they re-look in different ways at the world they are studying together.
RESEARCHERS AND INFORMANTS

Professional researchers who ask questions about people’s lives usually talk with informants in order to find out their relevant experiences, reflections, and understandings (5). Informants contextualize and amplify the information researchers find in books; they may also question positions, provide alternative views, and affect researchers’ assumptions and inquiries (6). Drama used as an inquiry tool can have a similar effect on student researchers.

Student researchers who are interested in the same questions as professionals may have the opportunity to interview others, but most students will only read and talk about people, especially when they are separated from them in time and/or space. In drama, students can imagine the perspectives of informants (7).

The use of independent reading as the major method of gathering data may be problematic for many students, given Jeff’s findings as outlined in Chapter 2. Gathering mountains of data will not necessarily bring the social worlds of other people alive for students. Looking at photographs and videos will help “resistant” readers construct images of another time and place, as will accompanying short factual or fictional first-person narratives of events. Reference books, which present abstract generalizations from a detached acultural point of view largely devoid of social contexts, may be barriers rather than windows into other times and places. Even “proficient” readers may experience texts as largely unconnected or disjointed threads of information, dialogue, and image (8).

Inquiry in Social Worlds

Student researchers must imagine social worlds if they want to go beyond the decontextualized facts and information of texts. To inquire into a topic in depth, they must be able to imaginatively amplify, extend, and reinterpret words and images and weave them into a cultural fabric to reveal patterns of human interactions, details of experiences, and create understandings of moments of significant action.

They must be able to go beyond dry facts and threadbare narratives; they need to be able to identify with more points of view than those from which stories are told. They must also learn how to read sources to make connections, and imagine details, events, times, places, people, and relationships from a variety of perspectives that are often inferred but not directly described in the accounts or stories they discover in the library. For example, to understand Al Capone, students needed to imagine from viewpoints of Al Capone’s “family” as well as his victims; to recreate the Vietnam-era culture of protest, students had to discover why people protested for as well as
against the war in Vietnam; and to avoid depersonalizing unemployed people during the Depression, students had to know something of the personal histories of people standing in never-ending breadlines.

Ideally, students' research questions send them to talk to informants who will assist them to see the world from their various points of view. Informants can raise new questions, reinterpret findings, and problematize simplistic approaches.

Because drama enables students to collaboratively create, enter into, and wonder about other social worlds, drama can be used as a tool for inquiry into the meanings of people's experiences in other times or places. In drama, students can imagine how a variety of informants might see the world and critique other views. In drama, students can adopt the stances of both researcher and informant (9).

**Stances of Researcher and Informant**

In drama, students may take up the perspectives of multiple "informants" as they imagine the experiences of people in the worlds of, for example, Chicago in the 1920s, protests against the Vietnam War in the 1960s, or the Great Depression of the 1930s. Yet, students may always critique and amplify their "findings" when they dialogue with those positions as "researchers."

Students can shift between the stances of researcher and informant. When drama is intentionally used as a tool for inquiry, students (assisted by the teacher) can become more purposeful about their shift from one posture to the other. The students already see themselves as researchers and thus have a clear reason to evaluate their experiences in drama.

The students shift between the stances of researchers and informants as the drama progresses. They will often do so without teacher intervention when they slip in and out of role, interact as if they were other people, or talk as themselves. However, if we are aware of the significance of switching between these postures, we can intervene at one moment in order to structure their interactions as various informants and at another moment to ask for their interpretations as researchers.

Jeff and I, as teachers, were coresearchers with the students. We also pursued the questions of their inquiries (10). As needed, we raised questions, provided information, and supported the students' plans. We also remained open to new ways of looking at each topic and in role adopted perspectives of informants in order to provide information, perspectives, and raise questions from inside the social worlds of the students' inquiries.

My work in forty minutes with the "Mafia group" illustrates how I
adopted different informant perspectives and enabled the students to shift among the stances of researcher and various informants. The two boys wanted to find out how a person could have pulled the machine gun trigger but could not imagine how so “ordinary” a person could get so caught up in the Mafia that they could not have avoided involvement in the St. Valentine’s Day massacre.

I structured the drama so that they would be both informants and researchers by placing them in situations in which they adopted perspectives from which they imaginatively experienced the power of the Mafia to manipulate people into actions they would ordinarily have avoided—and then repeatedly asked the students-as-researchers how difficult it would have been to say “No” in such situations. I moved the students through a sequence of encounters from boys selling fruits and vegetables on a street corner from a handcart, through running a corner store that was operated as a front for storing alcohol, to Mafia members who had to prove their loyalty. I adopted the perspectives of fellow street vendor, F.B.I. agent, Mafia members at various levels of involvement, and family members. As the boys became more and more entangled in Mafia activities, first unwittingly, then to avoid being hurt, and finally to protect their families, as coresearcher I repeatedly returned to their research question. They became more critical of their initial position that people could have just said “No.” The students wanted me to push them to the point at which the logic of picking up a machine gun made sense and was no longer seen as an impossibility. They experienced ways in which unscrupulous people can blackmail others into actions by promises and threats to themselves and their families.

Several times they tried to do the “right thing” and cooperate with or contact the police. However, as researchers, they began to problematize these actions; they recognized inherent dilemmas when I shifted to a Mafia position to imply and warn against fatal consequences for them or their families.

By the end of the session, as informants, the boys had created and interpreted a world of the Mafia and, as researchers, they had used drama to pursue a question as well as to reach and critique some conclusions. They said that now they could understand how a person might indeed fire a machine gun at others—they had ginned me down despite my cries for mercy. Pat remarked at the end of the session that previously as a researcher, “I just didn’t get it.” Imagining the experiences of Mafia informants was very important for him. Pat had finally been able to see from a position “inside” a Mafia “family”—as he said, they had become members of “the family of hate.”
Multiple Informant Stances

Taking up the perspectives of other positions during inquiry is critical for the development of multifaceted views and meanings. Students can then construct understandings as they dialogue with each other, with the teacher in and out of role, and with themselves about various informants' positions.

Buddy and Ron were researching the Vietnam War and noted how drama expanded their awareness. Buddy explained that "we got to see that there were other ways of looking at it [the war]... It helps you see other points of view that you can work from." Ron noted that "We were so many people. We were everywhere... I was inside so many different characters... protesters, army, politicians, parents [of soldiers], Vietnamese people." He reported that he had never really thought about what the Vietnamese people went through, until doing the drama. "That really changed me."

Students seem to adopt most easily points of view with which they have already identified. These may be the points of view that are already privileged in texts, for example, a narrator's point of view. The Underground Railroad group of four girls had read some slave narratives and readily adopted the perspectives of enslaved people eager for news of Harriet Tubman. However, in drama we can shift point of view at will and imagine from multiple positions including those of people not mentioned directly in texts students have read. For example, these girls had only read about references to abolitionists, yet readily adopted their position in order to plan a response to the Fugitive Slave Act that made people subject to imprisonment if caught assisting runaway slaves.

Resisting Informants' Stances

Everyone, including researchers, resists identifying with some points of view; in doing so, we limit our potential for understanding. Researchers who interview others can try to hear from the different positions as they later reflect on transcripts; drama can similarly give voice to those whose views have been silenced.

In drama, students can begin to imagine the world from points of view which initially may seem peripheral to them or difficult to adopt. The Great Depression group began to understand more about being unemployed people in the 1930s. Maria recalled how significant the drama perspectives were for her. "After reading, finding the photographs, and even interviewing people I didn't get why people couldn't get jobs or money. [After the drama] I knew how it could happen, because I had a chance to..."
be like people back then. I know now how people felt without jobs and how they helped each other cope."

Some potential perspectives may be difficult to adopt because they are painful for the students. Janie, one of the girls in the Underground Railroad group, noted the following soon after their drama session. "[The hardest part of the dramas] was when we had to pretend we had to leave older and weaker people behind, because we knew we would have to run . . . we didn't want the dogs to get them or for them to drown . . . so we didn't even tell them we were going and we knew we would never see them again . . . That was so hard . . . After we felt the dangers, what it would be like to run away, the risks, the excitement, being so afraid, being almost caught . . . we knew we made the right decision [not to bring the others] but our being happy at being free wasn't the same because they were still slaves and we wondered what had happened to them."

The perspectives of other informants may be resisted because a student initially disagrees with that way of seeing the world. In his Vietnam War research, Ron had adopted such a firm antwar stance that he found it difficult to imagine why anyone would have wanted to join the military. However, Ron shows how significant it can be to have even a very brief perspective shift in drama. For no more than two minutes, he adopted the position of an army recruiter and was able to see from his point of view. After the drama, Ron reported that it "was hard [to imagine I was an army recruiter] because I was so much for the protesters." When he reflected on the perspective of the military recruiter he noted: "I felt like no one respected me . . . I saw how people hated hippies and how they had a point how the hippies were against what they really believed in and wouldn't listen and you could see them as lazy." Buddy also reconsidered protests for their effectiveness. He wrote that big protest demonstrations didn't "work" because, "there were beatings and fighting when we wanted peace . . . and when the antiwar people were beat by the police it wasn't always the policeman's fault because the people were not listening and were cursing at the cop." Thus, he concluded "everyone had made an excuse not to listen to each other. It was hard to argue against what I believed in—but I could see how both sides had good points—and how both sides only knew their side."

Nate noted another reason why some perspectives are resisted—seeing the world from some people's point of view can be "scary." Yet we argue that it may be critically important to assist students in their attempts to see the world from initially disturbing points of view—especially when they are trying to understand a topic like the Holocaust, which Nate and Carl were researching. Nate volunteered at one point to imagine he was a concentration-camp guard. It was a troubling realization for him that as a
guard in a concentration camp he might have begun to enjoy hurting others. Nate recognized the potential corruption of power: “I could do whatever I wanted and [the inmate] couldn’t do anything. Even in the drama I knew his arms were hurting and . . . there was a kind of enjoyment . . . like I was an animal or something waiting to pounce.”

When students use drama as inquiry they imagine the world they are researching. They can experience how the world might look from the points of view of different key informants and dialogue from those positions. They can think and feel what it might have been like to have lived a different life in another historical or social context and, through shared imaginative encounters, students can understand more about times and places that seem initially remote. Students will often discover more than they had expected—this can also happen to us as teachers. When I imagined that I was a camp guard alongside Nate, I also caught a glimpse of evil and wondered how I would have fared if I had been born in Nazi Germany. If we use drama in our inquiries with students we need to expect such insights because, as Maxine Greene (1995) reminds us, “experience always holds more than can be predicted and . . . imagination creates openings to the unpredictable” (p. 45).

Community of Researchers

Professional researchers build a sense of community if they gather and interpret data together; they have common experiences to bind them together. As co-researchers, Jeff and I have discovered the strengths of sharing alternative views and forming common understandings, despite instances of initial confusion or disagreement.

Students must learn to cooperate and tolerate alternative views if they are to be co-researchers (11). Drama can be very helpful in creating community when teachers assist students in pursuing their research questions, and create opportunities for students to have significant shared experiences and periods of reflection. Rather than have abstract arguments, students can talk, disagree, and find common ground as they interpret shared drama experiences in the light of what they have read or been told by other people.

Collaboration  Drama and inquiry only occur when students collaborate. In both, students must learn to share ideas, listen to each other, and build on each others’ suggestions. Teachers support community-building when they help students listen to each other and focus on tasks, purposes,
and deadlines. Jeff had helped his students learn to cooperate over the year; the process of making drama together in whole class sessions and in self-selected research groups (both with and without a teacher) helped to create a community of collaboration and caring about the work.

Many groups realized the cooperative nature and community building power of drama. As Mike said, “By doing the drama, we had to become a team and put everything we knew into our play book—for everybody.” In subsequent research, each member of the group read different material and then shared information with the whole team. They cooperated in scripting scenes for their documentary but also critiqued each other’s work. Mike explained the supportive tone of their critiques that were meant “to help the team. If one person knows more and plays better, the whole project is better for all of us.”

Engagement Drama also helps students build a sense of community at a more basic level: shared engagement with the inquiry process itself.

If students agree to create drama together, they will begin with at least marginal engagement. Drama creates a space in which students are safe to ask questions and raise objections in role without feeling that their ideas are “wrong.” Drama occurs in a fictional world where new ideas, attitudes, and perspectives can be explored without the social consequences of everyday life; students are not pressured to talk or move in public and should not feel judged or “put on the spot.” As Heathcote stresses, though drama “demands . . . some change in understanding . . . it does this in a no-penalty zone of agreed depiction” (1984, 197).

If teachers build the sort of caring community discussed in Chapter 3, it will be difficult to “fail” at drama because passive participation is sufficient initially and students can be mentally engaged even when they say and do very little.

Further, drama encourages all students’ participation because it is so inclusive, drawing on multiple modalities of learning and communication. Students who find reading and writing barriers to comprehension and communication are not excluded. Drama can include reading and writing but, as Jeff and I have shown, these activities always take place within shared contexts that students imagine and that thus support their joint examination of texts. As Pat, one of the boys working on the Mafia, reported, drama is not like “reading word for word. It’s acting out what it means step by step . . . and trying things out to see what happens.” Students, like Ned, who may be labeled “disabled,” yet are skilled in talk or movement, can be community builders in drama; they can find that their
abilities are valued by peers when they are the ones who can sustain or extend the possibilities of the world of inquiry.

In drama, students can come to know the world in multiple ways that go beyond the decontextualized interactions that so frequently dominate traditional classroom discussion. In drama, students can create the sorts of “multimodal” texts which Leland and Harste (1994) argue are essential in education. They can communicate with themselves and with each other using more of what Gallas (1994) calls the “languages of learning” than are used in abstract talk. There are many modes of communication and learning—many sign systems—that are usually marginalized or ignored in schools. Drama is a mode in its own right but also creates contexts that encourage participants to draw on other modes when, for example, they move, shape images, make sounds, tell stories, or use poetic language. The Mafia group, for example, at different times moved as if they were pushing handcarts, shaped a visual image of the results of the St. Valentine’s Day massacre using my body, made the sounds of machine-gun fire, and began to retell the story of how they had paid protection money. At another time they might have moved to show the Mafia members’ dreams and nightmares, or have written their tombstone epitaphs.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Researchers always have at least one question to motivate and guide their inquiries. Even though researchers change or modify their questions, if they did not have a motivating question that puzzles or worries them they would never begin to wonder, or talk, and then read, or write about a topic. As research continues, questions and focus become more specific. In schools where they learn to “follow directions” unthinkingly, students may actually have little internal motivation for their inquiries. By adopting different points of view, drama can help students look at a topic in new ways and uncover questions that interest them. Further, the process of using drama opens up perspectives and assists students to ask more complex or demanding questions which stretch them beyond their initial thoughts.

Finding Questions

Jeff’s students were all working from broad research questions, which they had chosen in consultation with Jeff, and which had guided their extensive library research and information gathering. However, not all groups had a focused question to guide the creation of the video documentary which
was to be the final synthesizing group project for the unit. Finding more specific questions was a major objective of the small group drama work which Jeff and I conducted.

I met with groups of students three weeks after they had begun their research. Initially, I talked with them in order to agree on specific questions that could be used to guide subsequent drama work. As they told me about what they had found out about their topics, some students were easily able to identify a more specific question that puzzled them, like the one noted at the beginning of this chapter within the broad topic of "Who was Al Capone?"

Other students who were unable to articulate more specific questions immediately did so after some initial work. In such cases, I used the materials they had collected to come to an agreement with them on a beginning point and waited for questions to arise. For example, the students interested in the Vietnam War suggested that they begin with a protest. I asked them where the protest would be held and they suggested a military recruitment center. I marched with the boys up and down the room and encouraged them to shout the slogans and sing lines from the songs we had just talked about. Then I switched to become a soldier trying to enter the center who belittled their efforts and questioned their position; they articulated many of the reasons for protesting the war, which they had previously formulated, along with hurtful comments about the recruiter. When I suggested that we all become military people inside the recruitment center, they agreed and from this point of view I asked them what we should do about the protests. The boys were quick to suggest that so long as they did not cause physical damage, they made little difference. As the boys later reflected on these and other interactions they realized that they were interested in the question, "What kind of protests were most effective?" This question then guided subsequent work and led to episodes that explored what happened when different people had to deal with protesters: a family with two sons (one a protestor, the other in Vietnam); and a Pentagon policy committee over the years advising different Presidents on military buildup, bombing campaigns, the police, and giving advice about dealing with protesters at the Woodstock concert.

With other groups, a question became clear after the drama work began and I checked with the students that this was indeed what they were interested in exploring. For example, the group working on the Great Depression blamed me, in role as an out-of-work squatter, for not having a job. "There must have been jobs!" exclaimed one girl and the others tacitly agreed. The girls then acknowledged that they were all interested in
exploring the question, “Why did some people not have jobs?” and later, “How were average people affected by the Depression?”

Changing Questions

All students who used drama wanted to change their research questions. In drama, they stepped into worlds of imagination, dialogued there, uncovered complexities, and realized the inadequacy of their previous positions and questions in light of the explorations they now needed to make. Anne (who had researched the Great Depression) noted on her end-of-year survey: “Drama helps you to answer unanswered questions. But it helps you ask new questions and add stuff that we didn’t even know to ask about before.”

The group researching the life of Hank Aaron realized in the middle of the drama work that rather than what Aaron had achieved in terms of sporting achievements they were much more interested in what he had to do to deal with racist attitudes. They recognized that the scripts they had developed for their video were basically reports listing facts (e.g., he and his brother would hit bottle caps with broom handles, toss burning rags back and forth, cut school to play baseball, and watch Negro League games) and three of the four boys found these scripts “boring.” Over two sessions, the drama work concentrated on his experiences: in the locker room, receiving hate mail, with the owners, and with other baseball players in the Major League as well as in the Negro League.

During and after the drama the boys negotiated a series of new research questions. They had begun with the question: “Who is Hank Aaron?” but eventually settled on this question: “What did Hank Aaron have to do off of the ballfield to become great?”

Anthony said that “we realized that the most important things he had to put up with and get over were things like fighting through prejudice. If he couldn’t do that then he could never be a great ballplayer. He did both and that’s why he’s great.” Mike stressed that “The dramas made me realize that the research question about what he had to do was . . . well, we kind of thought we knew. I kind of thought it just had to do with practice, but now I see it had to do with being black and being great at baseball. It was overcoming prejudice and discrimination. [The library work and reading] was easy, the dramas and like . . . understanding [the inner experience of Hank] well, . . . that’s what was really hard.”

Ron and his partner, Buddy, asked themselves new questions both after their drama sessions but again as they used drama on their own in the preparation for their videotaping. They started their project with the pre-
liminary research question: “What was the most important protest music against the Vietnam war?” After two drama sessions, the boys reviewed and changed their question to: “What kind of protests were most effective?” Ron explained to Jeff that, “we got to see that there were other ways of looking at it [the war] and so protests were not going to . . . like . . . automatically work.” Buddy wrote in his journal, “So I will put both sides in my story, not just the anti-war side.”

As they continued their independent research of the Vietnam War from “both sides,” they added a question that acknowledged the way they had extended their attention: “How were people in the military affected by the anti-war protests?” As they prepared to videotape, they finally extended their attention to the broader question: “How can you change opinions to help peace?”

They scripted dramatic encounters, which extended their work with me; these involved a protest demonstration, musical and artistic statements, conversations, a family scene, a debate, and a letter-writing campaign. In their final video, key encounters dramatized arguments that both supported and protested the war in Vietnam; these included a family with one son in college and one in Vietnam, and a debate between two politicians.

**METHODOLOGIES**

Researchers have a host of research methodologies—or modes—available for the exploration of different questions. Different questions envision different outcomes or what John Dewey (1992) calls “ends-in-view” and thus suggest different major modes of gathering data.

Researchers interested in a question which necessitates facts and information are likely to employ quantitative methodologies. Their researcher stance will be more detached. Their research focuses much more on the “objective” details of situations rather than the “subjective” experiences of the people in those contexts. They will especially be interested in numbers and those details that can be “quantified.”

As detached observers, the Hank Aaron group began their work with an interest in factual details and a quantitative stance. They interpreted their question “Who is Hank Aaron?” to mean: what records did he set as a baseball player? They read books for factual and statistical information, which they recorded in lists and notes. They were interested in the names of people with whom he had played, the number of home runs he had hit, and the different clubs for which he had played. The moves which Jeff initially made enabled the students to achieve their end-in-view: he helped them find books, locate information, and record details.
When researchers ask different questions, their mode of research often changes. If they are interested in people’s experiences, they are more likely to conduct qualitative research during which they talk to informants (12). Because drama is always concerned with how people experience and interpret the world, drama can best assist in qualitative research.

Drama acknowledges and is respectful of students’ experiences and their feelings of connection to others; it assumes that in concentrating on students’ feelings as well as their thoughts, they will discover much that goes beyond what is described as “known” in the books they read. Alicia wrote about how drama assisted her as she became interested in meanings that went beyond the facts: “I learned how to ask more questions. I would ask questions like, ‘How would I feel if I were in her place?’ or ‘How can I fit these clues together?’ I would look back at things and try to figure things out.”

Drama can also help with the motivation for quantitative research and assist students by creating contexts which help make sense of the factual details and numbers they discover. Mike noted that: “School is about facts—mostly boring facts; drama is about making facts exciting because you add the feelings . . . Drama takes facts and asks how they might have been different or how the facts might do something to you or someone else and how all that would feel. That’s why I like drama.”

In this chapter, I outline and discuss three broad modes of qualitative research: phenomenology, ethnography, and action research (13). These are listed below and contrasted with a quantitative research mode (14).

Categorizing students’ questions using this table is useful for the teacher because different types of questions suggest different research methodologies and thus different ways of beginning and initially structuring drama.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>End-in-view</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative research</td>
<td>What are the objective facts?</td>
<td>Decontextualized information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenology</td>
<td>What are the lived experiences of particular people?</td>
<td>Contextualized personal individual meanings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnography</td>
<td>What are the patterns of experience for people in general?</td>
<td>Contextualized shared social/cultural meanings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>What action can I take to achieve a particular goal?</td>
<td>How action changes contexts and people</td>
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</table>
work, Jeff's students neither categorized their questions in this way nor overtly excluded any modes of research.

Although all modes of research are valuable, because each leads to different ways of gathering and interpreting data, using one mode exclusively privileges only one way of interpreting the world. All groups of Jeff's students had taken a mostly quantitative approach to the gathering of data. I initially wanted to help the students pursue one of the qualitative facets of their questions and began using either a phenomenological, an ethnographic, or an action-research approach (15).

These students' questions tended to be very general and could have led to the initial use of several research modes. As already discussed, I worked with them to uncover more specific questions that would suggest a way of structuring the drama work. With some groups, as the work continued, I switched modes when students wanted to follow a different direction or when I decided to raise different questions.

**Phenomenology**

The Hank Aaron group's research question concentrated on the life of an individual: "Who is Hank Aaron? How did Hank Aaron get to be so great at baseball?" Significantly, however, they had not considered how Hank Aaron had experienced his world. After a few minutes of talking about their topic it became apparent to me that the students were interested in the particular experiences of Hank Aaron—their research question could best be pursued using a phenomenological approach (16).

Phenomenologists describe and interpret the phenomena of personal lived experiences. "Phenomenology is the study of lived or existential meanings... it attempts to explicate the meanings as we live them in our everyday lives." (Van Manen 1990, 11). They may research their own or other people's experiences. Phenomenologists study themselves or other people in social settings, but they are ultimately interested in people's unique, specific, personal experiences, and realities and are thus interested in personal stories and interpretations for their own sake. They ask a general interpretive question like "What are the lived experiences for particular people in particular contexts?" Their end-in-view is to understand and record the meanings that people make from their individual experiences in specific contexts.

A phenomenological approach to drama encourages students to focus on their experiences in drama worlds and to relate these imagined realities to how specific people might have felt. Drama experiences are imaginary, but they can nevertheless be deeply felt, personal, lived experiences—phenomenological experiences for the students. Part of the compelling nature of
drama is the potential for students’ “lived through experience.” Reflection is important but without experience, students have nothing to reflect upon. As Dorothy Heathcote (1984, 97) notes, “Drama is about filling the spaces between people with meaningful [emotional] experiences . . . Out of these we can build reflective processes.” Other boys in the Hank Aaron group later stressed the importance for them of trying to appreciate people’s feelings and life experiences. One said that drama was “a good way to really get into it about what life was like and how it would feel.” Another added, “you have to feel it before you can help someone else feel it.”

All moves in the first Hank Aaron drama session were guided by the end-in-view of enabling the students to find meaning in the imagined experiences of one individual—Hank Aaron—and how he might have experienced contexts about which they had only read. I structured the work so that the students were able to experience the world of Hank Aaron from various perspectives but always reflected as researchers on the meanings of those experiences for him. Aaron became the primary informant in his interactions with others: playing baseball as a child, reading hate mail, in the major league locker room overhearing racist remarks, out in the ballpark hitting a home run, talking to the manager of the major league club, returning to his Negro League club, talking with his family, and reacting to white players. All four students represented Hank Aaron—two chose to do so for interactions with me or their peers. I took on roles with the four students as they created these contexts: a player, a relative, a manager, the voice of conscience, a narrator. Knowing that the students were asking a phenomenological question gave me an approach to our work; later I made reference to broader issues like institutionalized racism but initially I concentrated on Aaron’s individual experiences.

After the drama work, the students reviewed their drama experiences and realizations. In preparing their presentations, the students scripted their own scenes, which drew on and extended the drama work. In addition to their role as Hank Aaron, they imagined they were people who wrote hate mail, sportswriters, Negro League teammates, white minor and major league teammates, baseball fans, and Aaron’s family. They revised their research questions and continued their research as they reread material and altered their scripts. Interestingly, they began to ask themselves additional phenomenological questions: “How would Hank’s experience have been different if he were white?” “What was his experience as a black ballplayer in a profession dominated by whites?” “How did the hate mail affect Hank and his family?”

Anthony explained how his group changed their priorities and realized the importance of considering Aaron’s inner experiences in order to find out “what it was like for him.” He noted that, “We realized that the most
important things he had to put up with and get over were things like fighting through prejudice. If he couldn’t do that then he could never be a great ballplayer. He did both and that’s why he’s great.”

Other students asked phenomenological questions including:

What would be the effects of suffering through the Holocaust?
How were people in the military affected by the antiwar protests?
How were average people affected by the Depression?

Upon completion of his group’s video, Mark said “It’s kind of like history is really nothing but what happened to people.” Phenomenologists agree. Abstract talk about experiences and problems cannot substitute for the complex situated experiences of people who are living through those problems. Rather than privileging any detached “objective” factual view as desirable, phenomenologists argue that the viewpoints of “subjective” experiences are essential if we want to record or find out how we, and others, actually experience the world. We interpret the world and adopt more detached perspectives as we reflect, but we cannot deny the importance of the intensity of experience or we will deny life itself and its importance as the object and tool of reflection.

**Ethnography**

If the students in the Hank Aaron drama had asked a question like “How did African-Americans in the 1950s cope with institutionalized racism in baseball?” then, I would have made quite different moves. If they had started from such a question, I would have structured the work so that the students would have examined the interplay of racist structures with fans, players, school children, and the game as a whole. I would not have concentrated on the experiences of one player. I would have made these moves because the students would have had an ethnographic, rather than a phenomenological, end-in-view.

Ethnographers are not only participants in everyday events, they are also observers of their social worlds. Ethnographers interpret social realities as they “participate, overtly or covertly, in people’s lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions.” (Hamersley and Atkinson 1983, 2). As participant-observers over a time, they participate in social events, but also observe what happens. They record what many informants do and say, interpret what seems to be going on from multiple perspectives, check their views against informants’ interpretations, and thereby over time construct their own understandings about social and cultural realities (17).
Ethnographers can research in "foreign" cultural settings such as Bali or in familiar cultural contexts such as classrooms (18). They ask a general interpretive question such as, "What are the patterns of experience for these people in general?" Ethnography is complementary to phenomenology. The ethnographer looks for commonalities, whereas the phenomenologist looks for individual differences. Although the phenomenologist is interested in understanding a person's particular experiences, ethnographers end-in-view is understanding general and shared social and cultural realities. Ethnographers rely on the personal stories and interpretations of cultural insiders, but they are ultimately interested in these people's shared realities and social experiences. They are interested in understanding what holds people together culturally, their shared world views, and their general paradigms for action (19). They are also interested in the reverse—what views are not shared and what tears people apart. Ethnographers are always asking the general interpretive question "What is going on here among these people?"

Students are often just as confused about what is going on in the events described in books as any ethnographer might be in Bosnia. A thirteen-year-old trying to understand the behaviors of people in the world of major league baseball as the racial barrier was broken has tasks similar to those of an ethnographer trying to make sense of behaviors, relationships, and attitudes in an unfamiliar culture.

Students cannot actually do ethnographic research in societies from which they are separated by time and/or space, but it is useful to use ethnography as a metaphor to explore how students in drama can use drama to imaginatively research questions about other cultures or worlds that would otherwise be difficult or impossible for students to access. Like ethnographers, students in drama can explore and interpret imagined social contexts.

If the students want to explore an ethnographic question, then the teacher's moves will be guided by an end-in-view that concentrates on making sense across many interactions and from many social positions. A single perspective is insufficient—the students need to experience from multiple points of view as they play in an ethnographic key and try to make sense of a social context. In successive drama contexts, the students can depict the actions of various informants and like ethnographers they can interview them, observe them, overhear them, and other activities. When they reflect as researchers, they can try to generalize and look for commonalities of meaning and patterns of experience for the people in general.

For example, the Holocaust group had ethnographic questions. Within a broad interest in the culture of Nazism, they asked the question, "What was life like in the Nazi concentration camps?" The students clearly
wanted to comprehend general patterns of experience in the camps—the end consequences of Nazi culture. They drew on and extended their understandings of the camps as they created the drama world. I was guided by an end-in-view of shared social meanings formed from multiple interactions that took into account different points of view. I wanted the students to experience the camps from multiple perspectives and find meaning in their reflections on this most horrific reality. They imagined the experiences of inmates as they were examined on arrival, as they sorted through clothing and shoes, as they tried to convince a guard to let them escape. I took on the roles of interrogator, organizer, and fellow guard. The students also looked at the camps and the inmates from other perspectives: the Germans who lived near the camps, survivors of the Holocaust, and Nazi guards. Those outside the camp were interviewed as potential witnesses at the Nuremberg trials—they were asked what they had seen and what they had known by me in role as an incredulous Allied officer. The guards contemplated the risks and pointlessness of trying to hide someone and the survivors remembered what sustained them.

Later, with minimal teacher participation, the students used drama as an integral part of their on-going research project into the culture of Nazism and its effects on those who were persecuted. They used the carousel strategy to observe and cross-examine each other from the perspectives of several real-life characters from Peter Weiss’s *The Investigation*. They interviewed the dead about their past lives as Nazi kapos or as Eastern European Jews. Finally, they time-traveled into the camp at Auschwitz. Their project eventually led them to consider the culture of other historical and contemporary hate groups in America.

Like ethnographers, the students in reflection looked and listened for patterns across different people’s experiences and views of their world. For example, though at first Carl in the Holocaust group had wondered why people did not escape from the camps, through the drama work he said he began to see a pattern of helplessness in the face of the scope of the Holocaust. He began to realize that the Holocaust “was so big. I knew it was bad, but not that bad. There were so many people. It was just so big and there was no escape.” Though he had created drama with only three others, in his imagination he had begun to see, “How many were killed in one day because they were weak, old, tired of . . . for just no reason . . . just how many there were and how Nazis were so in control they could make up fake little things and contests and jobs so that they could make them suffer and kill them.” He concluded that, “It was hard how it was like a game to kill and a game to stay alive.” In attempting to make sense of the ongoing genocide and find a pattern, he used the metaphor of a game—one which
was deadly and dehumanizing in very different ways for both perpetrators and victims. Carl was making social meaning about the Holocaust that was deeply felt with a breadth he had not previously demonstrated. However, his views were not treated as definitive—they were ideas that opened up discussion and led to additional research about resistance to the Nazis. In this sense, like ethnographers, the students were encouraged to return to their sources and review their tentative findings.

Other students were interested in the social and cultural realities of other groups of people from the beginning. Their questions suggested an ethnographic approach to the use of drama:

What was the Underground Railroad all about?
What was so bad about the Depression?
What were women's rights in the 1960s?

For other students, questions about the social and cultural aspects of their topics arose as a result of their research. Ron was particularly articulate about how drama helped him see the complex culture surrounding the Vietnam War. “[In the drama] I was inside so many different characters . . . the protesters, army, politicians, parents, Vietnamese people . . . We were so many people, we were everywhere. I didn’t know there was so much involved, at first I couldn’t understand how anyone would be for the war. It [the drama] kind of brought a doubt. My original opinion kind of went down, then up again with some doubt. I had different reasons for my opinions, like the effect on the Vietnamese people which I’d never thought about—how they got killed and their houses destroyed and stuff . . . so in a way my opinion is stronger but it’s less sure. I’m kind of more open to that there are other opinions that are strong and stuff even though you might disagree [with those other opinions].”

**Action Research**

The first session with the Hank Aaron group was structured phenomenologically to focus on Hank’s individual experiences but by the second session the group’s research question had taken an action-research turn. During the first session, the students had invented whispered racist remarks, hate mail, and veiled threats in the locker room. By the end of the session, Aaron (represented by Mike) had decided to quit and return to the Negro League, yet when I spoke as Aaron’s conscience and asked if he wanted to be remembered as a quitter, Mike had paused, unable to walk out as he had planned. At the beginning of the second session, the boys wondered what else Aaron
could have done in response to the racist attitudes he had experienced in the
major leagues. They decided that he could not have just walked out because
what he did would make a difference for other African Americans. The
group’s research question in effect had become: “What could Hank Aaron
have done in response to racist remarks at that time and place in U.S.
history?” Their end-in-view was now less concerned with the personal experi-
ences of Hank Aaron and more with the choices he had made in response
to racism. They were now thinking like action researchers.

Action researchers are, in a sense, hybrids between ethnographers and
phenomenologists because they are interested, not only in the social real-
ities of the culture of which they are a part, but also in their own experi-
ences as they take action in particular contexts. However, in addition, they
want to learn from their experiences in order to act more effectively in
context to achieve whatever their aims may be.

When students reflect and wonder about what choices people had (or
did not have) in particular contexts, they are entering an action-research
mode (20). They have become interested in the differences people can
make in a situation. A phenomenological approach concentrates on their
experiences in situations, and an ethnographic approach stresses patterns
that emerge across episodes experienced from multiple perspectives. An
action-research mode focuses on both individual experiences and on socio-
cultural realities but additionally considers the interplay among individual
or group actions, personal experiences, and social norms.

Action researchers’ end-in-view is to consider how their actions change
the context and effect the relationships among themselves and other
people. As they reflect, they ask a general interpretive question such as,
“What could I have done differently to achieve my goal?” Their actions are
strategic. Their actions also change over time as they reflect and share their
findings with others in their social situations. As Kemmis and McTaggart
(1988) describe action research, it is “the way groups of people can organ-
ize the conditions under which they can learn from their own experience,
and make this experience accessible to others.”

Action research is recursive and reflexive with researchers examining
and re-examining how situations affect actions and how changes in action
change situations. Over time, they proceed in an “action-research cycle”—
an ongoing spiral of steps: planning, taking action, observing, and reflect-
ing. They make time for all four steps. They plan what their actions will be,
act, observe how these actions seem to change the context and relation-
ships between people, and reflect in order to make sense of what is hap-
pening and how they might alter their actions. The cycle then continues
as further action is taken, which is itself reflected on.
If students have ends-in-view that resemble those of action researchers, then as teachers we can structure drama for cycles of action, observation, reflection, and planning. By manipulating time, the continuing spirals of action-observation-reflection-planning-action, can be speeded up or slowed down in drama. In the second Hank Aaron session, there were action-research cycles that spanned decades of his life in minutes. The students tried out several cycles of planning-action-observation-reflection-planning: explaining to his family that he could not quit, ignoring racist remarks, refusing to fight back, returning to talk to his former teammates in the Negro League. They repeatedly talked in and out of role to plan and reflect on action. They voiced his inner thoughts as he wondered about the effects of his actions on his family, Negro League players, major league players, and African Americans in general.

Action is inherent in drama. Indeed, the Greek word (dram) from which drama comes means action. However, participants will not be researching why people acted the way they did or how they might have acted differently, unless they reflect on the meanings of those actions (21). It is also important to note that “actions” need not involve overt movement but are reactions to an event which cause or permit other events to occur (Ball 1983, 11). Thus, silence, stillness, nonverbals, singing, and words are all actions; all can be reflected on (22). The boys showed Hank Aaron’s feelings by how they imagined he hit a ball; at other times they were silent or inactive, as well as verbal, in response to racist remarks.

Mike’s later comments highlighted how working as action researchers affected his understandings of Hank Aaron’s choices and actions. “The dramas made me realize that the research question about what he had to do was . . . well, we kind of thought we knew. I kind of thought it just had to do with practice, but now I see it had to do with being black and being great at baseball. It was overcoming prejudice and discrimination. [The library work and reading] was easy, the dramas and like . . . understanding [the experience of Hank] well . . . that was really hard.” Steven, conversely wondered about the actions of those who were prejudiced: “You just wonder why people act that way [prejudiced]; it’s so mean.”

Of course, few informants, whose perspectives students imagine, will have been professional action researchers. Some may have reflected very little on their choices and the consequences of their actions, but many have been acting like informal action researchers. The carefully orchestrated bus boycott in Birmingham, Alabama is a case in point. Rosa Parks may have been “tired” on the day she refused to move from a “whites only” seat at the front of the bus she boarded in 1955, but her act was not reactive
and had been planned as a result of extensive reflections by the Women’s Political Council in Montgomery (Kohl 1994).

When students evaluate their actions in drama they are not trying to recreate whatever happened in other contexts. They are imagining how they might have acted if they had been the people in those situations.

The teacher's role in using an action-research approach is to ensure that students have opportunities to focus on each aspect of the cycle; they need time both to take action as different people and to reflect on the consequences of those actions.

Ron and Buddy’s initial research question (“What was the most important protest music against the Vietnam War?”) had an action-research edge because the boys were interested in the role musicians and their music played in changing social attitudes. Over the course of their research, they changed their question several times but they retained their action-research approach—their final question became “How can you change opinions to help peace?”

Ron and Buddy continued to use drama after I worked with them as they explored “protest” actions in a variety of contexts: family disagreements, demonstrations, musical and artistic statements, conversations, debates, and a letter-writing campaign. In their final video, they dramatized arguments along a continuum between support for and protest against the war in their scenes of a family with one son in college and another in Vietnam, as well as in conversations and a debate between two politicians who disagreed about the war.

At the end of the project, both boys indicated an understanding of the complexity of the issue, and the sociocultural difficulties protesters faced in trying to change opinions. “It was hard to know what to do, but you had to do something, because you had to keep people thinking about it somehow,” said Buddy. Ron told Jeff that, “It was important to me to see why people hated the hippies to see why some people didn’t listen to them.” Reflecting on his drama experiences, Buddy wrote that big protest demonstrations didn’t work for his purposes because, “There was beatings and fighting when we wanted peace . . . . and when the anti-war people were beat by the police it wasn’t always the policeman’s fault because the people were not listening and were cursing at the cop.”

Some groups began with an ethnographic or phenomenological question but later wanted to explore action-research facets of their topic of inquiry. For example, the Holocaust group began wondering what life was like in the Nazi concentration camps but soon asked if prisoners in the camp could have escaped. The others imagined that they were sympa-
thetic guards who discovered a person trying to escape and interacted for several minutes. They soon realized that they could neither easily hide him nor smuggle him out of the camp—there were thousands of other prisoners, hostile guards, and their own lives would be in danger. They reconsidered what action they might take and were at a loss to know what they could have done. Their initial assumption that escapes "ought" to have happened had been problematized.

Moving Among Different Research Modes

Finally, it is important to stress that all questions can be interpreted from quantitative, phenomenological, ethnographic, action research, and other research perspectives, and that each mode produces fruitful results. Students will initially be more interested in certain facets of their questions and, if we can discover these, we can use drama to assist them in their explorations. We begin with the approach that seems best-suited to the questions the students are asking.

However, we also need to consider when switching to an alternative approach seems appropriate. The students' interests may shift and as teachers we may want them to consider one of the other ways of making sense of the events they are researching. Students immersed in personal experiences will gain from considering cultural perspectives; students who are aware of how people are products of their cultures will gain from considering how individual actions can change situations (23).

OUTCOMES OF INQUIRY

Jeff's students had agreed to create videotape documentaries as synthesizing outcomes of their inquiries, which would be shown to all of their peers in the sixth grade. The documentaries had to both inform and inspire, provide information and questions about the topic and inspire some social action or transformed thinking about the issues. In their presentations, the students used drama as theatrical performances; the process uses of drama had been transformed into videotapes—products which were shared with their peers. When the students spoke with Jeff at the end of the unit about using "drama" in the classroom, they referred to both process and product without distinguishing between the two.

The students who used drama as inquiry created complex and engaging videos, which reshaped and extended the explorations with me or Jeff into scenes they scripted, revised several times, and taped. All students made multiple revisions to their presentations. One group completely re-
filmed their documentary four times. Troy noted that each time, “we added a lot more drama, because it lets the viewer get a way better grasp on your topic and keeps it interesting.”

Clearly, the students had constructed complex understandings of the lives and worlds of the people they had researched, of the sociocultural contexts in which they lived, and of their possibilities for action in those contexts. Their understandings had been transformed and the students created products which were designed to inspire their peers.

Nicole was one of many students who recognized the generative power of collaboration in drama. Working on a video regarding women’s rights, she explained that “you use the information you found out to make the drama. You have to know what the facts meant. If you didn’t know, you could find out by making the drama . . . the point is that drama makes you know.” Steven agreed, “We came up with almost all of our good ideas for the video by doing the dramas.”

Using drama in the preparation of their presentation gave many students a keener awareness of audience. Sean noted that “drama is better at showing what life was like and helping people—other people like the audience—to experience it, too.” Steven said that drama “could help people see better.” Troy stressed that drama helped his group not only see “what would be interesting to put in the video” but also “what kind of things the audience would want to know and how to make it exciting for them.”

**Transformed Connections among People**

A highly significant way in which students’ understandings had been transformed was in their realization of human connections between their own lives and the lives of others. These connections seemed to inspire their thoughts about the possibility of social action and the need to communicate their new ideas with their peers (24).

Clearly, students connected with the lives of people who had lived at the times they were researching. In addition, many felt new connections between their research and their own lives in 1995 in a small Midwestern town in the United States.

Nicole wondered how the present would have been different if the historical figures they had researched had never lived. “It makes me think what my life would be like right now if there had been no Susan B. Anthony or Elizabeth Stanton.”

Troy noted in his final portfolio letter regarding drama and his group’s inquiry: “[Brian] not only helped us understand how Hank [Aaron] reacted, but also helped us understand how we may have reacted . . . So we
understood Hank, but we understood because we looked at ourselves.” Thus, the drama helped Troy to connect their research to his life, and also to perform the reverse operation, to connect his life to their research.

Drama helped many students apply their discoveries to their own lives, to make judgments and critical evaluations of the past, and to begin thinking about how individuals and groups might intervene and change situations.

The subsequent actions of Kristi’s group illustrate what might happen when research makes issues come alive for students. They have the desire to do something significant with their knowledge, and will often act to do so. Kristi’s group was so concerned about what they had learned about the treatment of women that they created a survey and posters that they used to create heightened awareness about the treatment of girls in the school setting.

The Hank Aaron group also began to realize that there were connections between the past and the present—similarities between America in the 1950s and in the 1990s. Significantly, their group had largely resisted the notion that racism still exists in America when they had begun the unit of study on Social Change and Civil Rights. After the drama work in which they imagined and talked about some of Hank Aaron’s experiences with racism, these experiences became the focus of their video documentary. After completing their video, the group sought Jeff out to talk about how they might try to understand and address racism in the present. As Troy said, “What we’re really wondering now is, what can we do about racism now?” Kristi made a similar point in summarizing the results of her group’s research into women’s rights: “Now we all kind of appreciate what the women before us did to get rights, and we all kind of want to know what we can do, too.”

Other students recognized the ways in which we are also connected to people that stress our differences. For example, Kathy had originally assumed that anyone could find a job and had resisted the notion that people could not find work during the Depression. Eventually, she came to accept that living through the Depression was tremendously difficult, stressful, and very different from her own assumptions and experiences about finding employment. Christine admitted that “I didn’t believe what I’d read . . . or what I’d been told.” Her views had changed as a result of the drama work. “It was just totally different [from now]. It seems that maybe when things are tough, people get tougher . . . both tougher and kinder . . . people have to find the hard way to get by.”

As Kathy reflected on her group’s completed video she resolved to connect more with her grandparents. “Now I want to know how it [living through the Depression] changed the rest of their lives.” She resolved to interview her grandparents during the summer to pursue that line of inquiry.
Tony also recognized connections with his family. During the creation of his video documentary with Robby, he said that “it [the drama work] gave me something to talk with my parents and uncles about. They had a lot of the same [conflicting] feelings about the war as I did. They talked a lot about being really frustrated. It made me think of how can you really change things.”

**Research Transformed**

Robby was one of many students who had radically altered their views on research by the end of the unit. He said that during previous school experiences research was about “a topic—not really a question. We did a report kind of like a word find or scavenger hunt and the teacher is watching to see if we’ll find it so you just go get answers as quick as you can. [With the drama, Brian] was watching to see what we’d find out... now we wanted to find out stuff so we kept redoing it.”

Mike and Steven enthusiastically articulated their support of drama itself as a powerful research methodology. Mike said that “when we started doing drama, my attitude towards [the project] changed. All of a sudden it would be fun. We could do stuff. I thought about how to show it, what it meant and all...” Steven exulted that “Doing drama was Awesome Baby with a capital A!”

Like many students, Maria came to regard drama as integral to the inquiry process. “[Research] is about getting something to think about... I think that you should be trying to do drama anyway when you research—imagining what it would be like—but it’s hard sometimes... Drama helped me because it gave me something to think about.”

Tony was one of many who recognized the highly significant shift in the teacher–student relationship which occurred in Jeff’s classroom over the year. Tony said that working together in drama was “working with a teacher instead of for a teacher... cuz he’s helping you understand and do what we want to do.” Tony had come to see his teachers as resources, and as co-researchers.

**Inquiry Continues**

Drama work helped students realize that inquiry is continuous. After working together to create fictional contexts, students often realized that they needed more information and additional perspectives. They then returned to the library or sought out other people with whom to talk. As students problematized their previous inquiry findings, they asked and then wanted
to pursue further research questions. Further research was also prompted by questions that arose during or after drama sessions as students realized there were gaps in their knowledge.

The Great Depression group returned to their sources after imagining they were in poverty on the streets of a “Hooverville” slum in the 1930s. Their experiences in the drama were less concerned with not knowing what to do and more with realizing that their discoveries and reactions in the drama were in conflict with the expectations they had formed in their previous research.

Christine explained:

When we started I didn’t understand how all the people were so poor. I just thought they were lazy or something and that they should have tried harder to get a job, or should have moved where the jobs were. So then we tried it out in the drama and I couldn’t get a job. Then I got one and somebody accepted less pay, and then only meals, but I had a family so I couldn’t do that. And I moved, but I couldn’t find work there either and in the end I lived in a cardboard box and I was really frustrated and angry . . . asking myself, “what could I do?” Then the health inspectors came and kicked us out . . . It really made me understand . . . I just didn’t get it when I read about it.

Her group realized that they needed and wanted to know more about life in a Hooverville than they thought they did. They began the drama work with a very superficial attitude, saying that they knew about the slums and the difficulty of getting work. However, when they began to imagine living in a slum and tried to find and keep work, they became much more engaged with the topic and were eager to know more. I answered some of the group’s questions, and shared what I knew about the difficulties of finding work in the 1930s. After working with me for two sessions, the girls returned to the library to do more research: they poured over WPA photos and at Jeff’s suggestion read scenes from John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*. In addition, two of the girls re-interviewed their grandparents. Previously they had conducted sketchy interviews whereas now they returned with a list of questions they wanted answered—questions that had arisen from the drama work. For example, they wanted to know what sorts of jobs people would be prepared to do in the Depression, how much work there really was, what choices people really had, and who might have ended up living in a Hooverville slum.

It is important to stress again that we are not suggesting that the students reached some final realization through the drama work. The students explored and raised questions in the drama, but these questions also
focused further classroom investigations, which provoked further questions and more complexity. Students were re-searching. A few weeks later, after further research, Kathy’s comments reveal some of the complexities of her thinking. “It was bad, but I don’t think it was as bad as I felt it was in the drama—I’m sure there were things I could do but I couldn’t see it then [in the drama]. At first I thought there had to be jobs somewhere, then I understood that it was worse than I thought at first, and I thought that it was really hard, but now I think that there had to be some laziness and there had to be some ways to find work . . . so I wonder what the government or people could do more of to help.”

CONCLUSION

When I retell my experiences co-researching with the students from Jeff’s classroom, people are amazed that students could have achieved so much in such a short time. I remind them of two essential aspects of the work. First, I was able to work so successfully with the students because over the year, an inquiry community had been established in the classroom. Drama can only work when groups want to “play” together in drama worlds and are not playing games like “get-the-teacher” or “impress-my-friends.” These students had all come to see themselves as researchers, just as Libby had proclaimed herself a reader. They were serious about their topics and committed to their joint inquiries. Drama had become an important tool for them and they were eager to have me help them explore their ideas and questions using a method they had previously experienced as powerful, engaging, and thought-provoking. Second, they knew that their work would continue for weeks after I had left as they created their documentary videotapes and shared them with their peers. They had ends-in-view in addition to those which developed in the drama—they had assignments to complete and audiences they cared about with whom to share their results. Further, they had begun to care about how their work connected to the world beyond the classroom.

Organizing the curriculum around student inquiry has begun to be recognized as a powerful way to move students beneath the facts and beyond a skill-and-kill approach to learning. Inquiry that centers on students’ questions and real-world issues is intrinsically motivating, engages students in high-level critical and creative thinking, and connects the classroom to the world—past, present, and future. Teachers are freed from being the authority to being an authority who can guide, assist, and wonder with students—but most of all we are freed to ask questions with students and join together in joint explorations.
Drama creates the conditions in which all of these facets of learning by inquiry can come together. However, drama does more because students and teachers together imagine alternative views, live through moments of these possibilities, and in dialogue each participant forges new understandings as they reflect on how the world—and they—might be different now that they have thought about drama realities in the light of the actual world. This happens if repeatedly we ask students, “From where you are now, how does this problem seem to you? And when it’s been dealt with, let’s look at where you now are” (Heathcote 1984, 121).

Drama harnesses imagination to open up new vistas: to see unexpected connections with people across time and space, change perspectives on those who seem close and those who seem distant, and always—to discover new visions of the future. As Maxine Greene stresses, when the imagination is released “no accounting, disciplinary or otherwise, can ever be complete. There is always more. There is always possibility” (Greene 1988, 128).

NOTES


2. For a discussion of students and teachers as collaborative co-researchers and references to relevant research, see Clark and Moss 1996. For other examples of collaborative co-research with students of this age see, for example, Heath and McLaughlin (1993) and Oldfather (1993).

   For an illuminating discussion of drama as inquiry, see Gavin Bolton’s afterword in Taylor (1996). Bolton acknowledges that drama can be used to conduct research provided students “already see themselves as researchers” in contrast to when the frame of researcher “is seen as something that can be hung around the students’ necks as a temporary measure” (p. 193). He draws an important parallel between drama as research and Heathcote’s mantle of the expert methodology (see Chapter 1). In both, the students’ work is long term and they do not “pretend” to be researchers or experts, but actually regard themselves as such.

3. At the end of the project, the students viewed and evaluated their final projects, completed surveys, and discussed their drama work with Jeff. Most of the quotations from the students come from these data.

4. Professional researchers often “triangulate” their findings. Qualitative researchers frequently compare one person’s interpretations (including their own) against another’s; they repeatedly revisit their questions and assumptions in the light of these views. They may also gather data from multiple informants, multiple sources, and use multiple methods. Drama can similarly triangulate interpretations if students dialogue with each other and with themselves about their questions, findings, interpretations, and assumptions.
5. A broad distinction can be drawn between "qualitative" and "quantitative" research methodologies. Qualitative research is broadly synonymous with such terms as naturalistic, interpretive, and constructivist research methodologies. Ely and colleagues (1991) provide a useful overview of qualitative research methodologies. They note that rather than attempt to define what makes research qualitative, it is more useful to look at the methods that qualitative researchers use, which include holistic views of experiences of situations, immersion in settings, attempting to avoid predetermined views and seeking out informants' perspectives with a readiness to switch methodologies as needed. Qualitative research, then, has the aim of understanding experience as nearly as possible as its participants felt it or lived it' (p. 5). They quote Sherman and Webb's summary

"... qualitative research implies a direct concern with experience as it is 'lived' or 'felt' or 'undergone'..." When students are interested in "understanding [human] experience as nearly as possible as its participants feel or live it," then, they are engaged in qualitative research (Sherman and Webb 1988, 7).

In contrast, however, quantitative research frequently operates within a "positivist" paradigm. Positivistic research was originally grounded in the natural sciences in which the aim was to be "positive" and "objective" about results. Observations are reduced to numerical order and other "objective" data—the facts; "subjective" perspectives and interpretations of researchers or "subjects" are assumed to be at best unimportant, or at worst, biases that must be discounted. By contrast, qualitative researchers argue that when we ask questions about how human beings interact or understand—the quality of their experiences—it is essential to discover the perspectives and experiences of actual people. Thus, they insist that researchers must discover the subjective experiences of informants.

Jeff's students were interested in "facts" but were much more concerned with the "quality" of the lives of the people they were researching. In talking about research, unless otherwise stated, from now on in this chapter I will be talking about qualitative research.

6. I should stress that many researchers attempt to maintain an "objective" stance in "studying" their "subjects"—they try to minimize any effects on their inquiries.

7. Drama enables this because of its liminal nature; it exists on the boundary between the individual imagination and the external world. Again, I should stress that the use of drama is not a technique which professional researchers use.

8. I am using the term text to mean written information, including books, newspapers, documents. Clearly, some texts are more accessible to proficient readers.

9. As discussed in Chapter 1, participants experience a kind of "double consciousness" in drama—an experience, at the same time, of being in both the actual world of the classroom and the fictional world of the drama—which makes it possible for students to reflect in internal dialogue on their experiences.

When drama is used for inquiry students' double consciousness can also be experienced as a double stance of researchers and informants. If, like Jeff's students, the participants are committed to conducting inquiry then they will regard themselves as researchers. If they become engaged in a drama world which is
10. The students were aware that we were also conducting research in the classroom and were eager to help in giving their responses to drama work. However, we did not formally share our research questions with them.

11. Wells and Chang-Wells (1992) describe at length classrooms where students are learning collaboratively by inquiry. At the core of each of those classrooms is a "community of collaborative inquirers" with "the values of caring, collaboration and curiosity."

12. I am not suggesting a clear split between qualitative and quantitative research since the same professional researchers often use both methodologies. I am noting that the questions which researchers ask are best answered by different methodologies.

13. Other qualitative research methodologies include: biography, history, life history, philosophy, curriculum, criticism, and critical theory. The three chosen seem to most closely parallel drama work.

14. We do not intend these descriptions to be more than a cursory introduction to these methods of conducting research. The description of each mode deliberately avoids the complexities of those approaches since we only intend to propose a template rather than a detailed analysis of different research modes. Nor do we wish to suggest that these research modes are hermetically sealed off from each other since, in practice, researchers in one primary mode will often draw on many other methodologies.

15. I should stress my own role as an action researcher and reflective practitioner. When I was teaching I had my attention on the students' needs as a teacher and wanted to help them in pursuit of their questions. Though I had begun to sketch out the idea of a framework of different research modes, my realizations about the usefulness of this categorization occurred later. In teaching I intuitively drew on my experience as a teacher (and as a researcher) as I helped shape the students' work. My detailed awareness of the precise framework explored in this chapter came later.

16. Again, I should make clear that I did not share this terminology with the students. I focused their attention on their questions.

17. We use the term "culture" in a very broad sense to mean any social context which has shared social meanings not apparent to the researcher. The purpose of interviewing others, watching them, and engaging with them is to discover aspects of these shared meanings—why people do what they do.

18. It is worth noting that ethnographers who work in apparently "familiar" settings like classrooms must make the familiar "strange" so that they can begin to see
patterns where these may have previously been invisible. Heathcote (1978) compares how Brechtian theatre and her uses of drama in the classroom both work in similar ways to make the familiar strange.

19. An ethnographic "thick description" (Geertz 1973) foregrounds the researcher's outsider perspective as she interprets, analyzes and identifies structures of meaning which may not be apparent to insiders.

20. The potential for students as action researchers has been recognized (Coe 1993) by a teacher who advises her students to "think for yourself" and who wants them to become "more thoughtful and reflective in their work." Stevenson (1986) has also noted how teachers can collaborate with students in the teachers' action research projects.

21. Note reflection and action can occur at the same time. For a detailed description see my 1991 thesis and the work of Schon, especially Schon 1983.

22. For a discussion of dramatic action see, for example, Ball (1983) who defines dramatic action as "When one event [which could be words] causes or permits another event, the two events comprise an action"(11).

23. In addition, students' research will be intensified if the work is structured as a spiral so that the students are re-searching for answers and re-considering the implications of their questions. As described, this was something that happened for groups studying the Vietnam War, the Concentration camps, and the Depression.

24. Their peers, in fact, gave them the highest possible rating for "audience consideration" as well as for "interesting and informative content"—two of the five criteria agreed upon by the class and Jeff.