Shakespeare, rehearsal approaches, and dramatic inquiry: Literacy education for life

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Abstract
Drawing on data from a collaborative action research study of teaching Shakespeare’s King Lear conducted by a university professor and a classroom teacher in the teacher’s middle school classroom, this article analyses how rehearsal and inquiry approaches to drama pedagogy can be used to promote the type of authentic literacy learning long advocated by scholars. We argue for the use of two complementary dramatic dimensions of literacy teaching. An active, collaborative, ensemble-based rehearsal approach, rooted in both dramatic play and dramatic performance, promotes engagement in, and meaning-making about, the fictional world of a text. Equally, a dramatic inquiry-based approach extends rehearsal approaches and creates a classroom community that supports the development of literacy social practices.

Keywords
Drama, literacy learning, rehearsal approaches, ensemble, dramatic inquiry, mantle of the expert

Shakespeare can open up brave new worlds to young people and offer them fresh ways of dealing with familiar ones. His work can challenge our language skills and introduce us to new realms of poetic playfulness. He can extend our concepts of what fiction

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can do, and of what stories a drama can tell. Working with Shakespeare can be challenging but is eminently rewarding, rich, and fulfilling.

(Department for children, schools and families 2008: 6)

Inspired by assurances like the one outlined in the DCSF quotation above, education and theatre professionals from both Stratford-upon-Avon, UK and Ohio, USA, have provided classroom teachers in central Ohio with opportunities to learn and apply innovative drama approaches to engage students in reading Shakespeare and other complex texts. Over the first year of the Stand Up for Shakespeare America professional development leadership programme, supported by a partnership between the Royal Shakespeare Company and The Ohio State University, teachers in primary and secondary schools have used active ensemble-based rehearsal room approaches (Stredder 2009; RSC 2010) that some have extended using an applied theatre approach that we call ‘dramatic inquiry’ (Edmiston 2011).

This article analyses data gathered in one classroom to show how rehearsal approaches, as complemented by dramatic inquiry, can be used to promote literacy learning. Video and digital still photographic data along with email exchanges and reflective notes on teaching were gathered during January-February 2010 in a collaborative action research study (Gordon 2008) conducted in a middle school classroom in suburban central Ohio, USA. Amy McKibben was the classroom teacher of two groups of students identified as ‘gifted’ or ‘talented’ by the school district using the results of standardised reading and mathematics tests. One group was comprised of twenty-two, the other of twenty-three, low to middle income young people aged 10–13 (in the equivalent of Years 6–7); with the exception of five African-American students, all students self-identified as white. All were identified in the study by pseudonyms. The uses of rehearsal and dramatic inquiry approaches in the classroom were new for Amy. Amy’s focus in the study was applying new methods to improve her teaching of reading Shakespeare’s King Lear which she assessed qualitatively using the theoretical framework outlined in this paper. She kept a reflective journal throughout the study. Brian and Amy planned, co-taught, and analysed the first five two-hour videotaped sessions for each group spread over two weeks. Amy and Brian continued to communicate and reflect via email when Amy taught alone for the remainder of the study. In May 2010 Amy and Brian analysed her notes and selected illustrative extracts for this paper. In addition, she selected representative results from an open-ended survey that she had previously administered, in which she had asked pupils how they thought the work had affected their reading and understanding of the play.

Creating an ensemble
For the RSC, ensemble learning lies at the heart of the company’s approach to both theatre and education:
We operate as an ensemble; a group who learn from each other, and a group that gets stronger as we get to know and trust one another. You cannot perform a play without relying on each other. (RSC 2010: 8)

Operating as an ensemble is at the core of literacy learning when literacy is not viewed narrowly as skill acquisition, but rather conceptualised as accessing and providing young people and teachers with tools to transform both their reading practices with texts and their understanding of how literacy shapes social and cultural lives inside and outside of school. Intentionally building a collaborative ensemble in the classroom can begin to create a sociocultural ‘community of practice’ (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998). Core literacy practices (Street 1995) like dialogue, listening for meaning, inclusive group discussion, and socially building understanding may be learned in ways that more closely resemble the collaborative complex modes people in authentic contexts outside schools learn to use language and texts (Kalantzis and Cope 2008). Young people and adults may learn from one another when they bring their social and cultural understandings, histories, concerns, and questions to shared activities that centre on shared explorations of the meaning and significance of texts.

For an ensemble to build, people must collaborate, learn to trust one another, and have common goals and trajectories focusing the purpose of their work. Explorations of the complex human dilemmas that abound in the world of a Shakespearean play can build ensemble. For example, as they entered the world of King Lear, Amy’s class spent weeks wrestling with the question of what responsibility King Lear’s daughters had toward him, and he toward them, given how they had previously treated one another. Shakespeare’s plays are as relevant for young people in the 21st century as they were in the 17th. As the RSC artistic director Michael Boyd puts it, in his Foreword to the RSC Shakespeare Toolkit:

At the end of the [rehearsal] process we all share a common understanding of the play, its relevance to the world and to each other …. democracy, family loyalty, parental control, dictatorship. (Royal Shakespeare Company, 2010: 5)

After four weeks of approximately twenty hours focused on King Lear, Amy noted the following in her notes:

During our whole class discussion of the opening scene [that I had not shared with the class until this day] one observant child named Heidi raised her hand and said, ‘I think King Lear would rather hear flattery than the truth’. Several other students agreed, discussing the specific lines that led them to this belief, such as, ‘Nothing will come of nothing: speak again’, and ‘Beloved Regan,
thy sister’s naught …’ Then the group moved on to discuss other aspects of the text. Together, even at their tender ages, they continued to explore the very heart of a problem in this fictional world. They had got there without direct instruction, without essay prompts, without the read-discuss-write tradition. They had arrived at these conclusions together, after weeks working as an ensemble focused on a complex problem within a complex text – and they were not surprised by the depth of their own understanding.

Her words are an answer to a question posed by Boyd, and quoted by Jonothan Neelands:

*Given that theatre is ‘a quintessentially collaborative art form … can an ensemble … act in some sense as a … better version of the real world on an achievable scale which celebrates the virtues of collaboration?’*  
(Neelands 2009: 176)

In his response Neelands stresses the transformative educational potential of building and sustaining an ensemble in classrooms where significant themes may be explored as a group inhabits a literary world. He shows how this is possible by drawing parallels between the ensemble approach to theatre, the socially transformative power of the arts, and the possibility of creating and experiencing an ideal of participatory democracy in classrooms where drama is used. We take this vision as a given as we consider the significance of active dramatic approaches to literacy learning in Amy’s classroom that were both rehearsal and inquiry-based.

**Rehearsal approaches**

In the RSC Toolkit the company outline why they employ rehearsal approaches in the classroom.

*The process of rehearsing a play is collaborative. … actors and director make discoveries by working playfully together. As a group they make choices about the plot, characters, themes and language of the play. This process is similar to … a classroom where teacher and pupil explore a play text together. Our simple premise in this book is that the more active and collaborative … the more the teacher works as an enabler and fellow explorer, the better the teaching and learning will be.*  
(Royal Shakespeare Company, 2010: 8)

Teachers and pupils who use rehearsal approaches open up spaces for active, collaborative, and playful explorations in the world of a text. Learning resembles the process of rehearsing for a performance: young people speak carefully selected extracts, they use Shakespeare’s language as they move and
represent characters and scenes, and they interpret characters' motivations and relationships as well as themes from the play. Pupils gain access to key tools for making meaning about complex texts that normally may be ignored, minimised, or considered too difficult or opaque for pupils: movement, speaking in different voices, raising questions, and working with others.

As Amy’s students explored *King Lear* they acted at different times as if they were Lear and his daughters, his knights, and his Fool, as well as various nobles and servants. They encountered and hot-seated characters represented by peers as well as both Amy and Brian. The young people actively explored the play as they brought to life extracts, key words, and phrases. They met and questioned characters, spoke inner thoughts during dialogue, shared their own views, and gave characters advice. By the end of four weeks’ work they had related the mythical world of *King Lear* to their lives in contemporary America.

**Dramatic playing: acting as characters**

Acting as if we were other people is highly significant for literacy learning: this is what young children do in dramatic playing and what young people do when they act as characters. Over 40 years ago James Moffett foreshadowed this connection between dramatising and literacy learning when he theorised that readers of any text must imaginatively ‘project’ into the ‘drama’ of ‘what is happening’ in order to understand language (Moffett 1968: 50). In everyday face-to-face interactions to make sense of what is happening as language is used people mentally project into the everyday ‘drama’ of a social event in which they actively engage. In contrast, readers are normally required to individually imagine people and events described in words on a page: the ‘drama’ of the event is neither visible, nor tangible, nor socially accessible.

When young people use drama in the classroom they stand up, move around, interact, and use language as if they are the characters in a text. By participating in physical and social interactions they are able to project into situations that otherwise could remain inaccessible. As Vygotsky (1966, 1978) theorised, imaginative movement and social interactions are mental tools for making sense of language. Dramatising foregrounds the meaning of imagined events and objects and backgrounds the actual situation in the same way that children do when they play (Vygotsky 1966: 14).

As pupils participate in pedagogical activities adapted from the rehearsal room they have affective, embodied, cognitive experiences that are both imagined and real. When using the language and movement of imagined characters they do so in spaces that they experience as if in a complex social and cultural fictional context within the imagined world of whatever text is being explored. Participants are released from having to act only in ways that are appropriate for pupils in a classroom and instead like young children playing who follow the social rules in imagined situations, they are also able to act in ways that are socially appropriate for characters in the world of the play (Vygotsky 1966: 9).
For example, at different times the young people in Amy’s classroom acted as if they were a king, courtiers, servants, and Lear’s hundred ‘riotous’ knights and squires (Act 1 Scene 4).

Though their actual situation becomes secondary, relative to their primary experience of imagined events as if they are other people, participants also have social experiences that they feel as ‘themselves’. In effect, in all dramatic activities participants have imagined-and-real experiences (Beach et al. 2010: 74). Like players on a stage or on the playground they act both as themselves and as whatever character they portray. For example, one young boy, Adam, who could have been categorised as ‘the class clown’ loved to tell jokes and make his peers laugh, often at inappropriate moments. Yet, when he took on the role of Lear’s Fool, with the rest of the group in role as Lear and then Goneril, standing around him in a circle, he displayed leadership in a joyful and entirely appropriate activity in which the class experienced and reflected on not only why Lear must have loved being with his Fool, but also why his daughter Goneril might have found his behaviour annoying to the point that she ordered her servant, Oswald, to ‘chide’ the Fool (Act 1 Scene 4).

Moffett argues that in order to understand and explore the complexity of ideas, whether in life or in texts, people must ‘abstract from the ground up’ (Moffett 1965: 247). People make meaning from lived experiences. Any new understanding is rooted in lived experiences because ‘experience is behind the discourse, buried in the processing and combined with other experiences’ (ibid: 245). To create understanding about any text, young people may use both relevant prior experiences and their imagined experiences when they act as if they are characters.

Rehearsal approaches can provide pupils with rich and complex imagined-and-real experiences that make the abstract ideas in texts more accessible and more malleable: the language, situations, relationships, and themes of texts are made visible, more affective, and more mobile as they are shared through embodied social interactions representing events that ordinarily must be imagined individually and usually without using much movement or social exchange.

When the young people in Amy’s classroom encountered the line, ‘Did my father strike my gentleman for chiding of his fool?’ (Act 1 Scene 4) it was apparent that they were confused. What did the abstraction ‘chiding’ mean? Who struck whom? And why? The line from the play was used to focus the class’ attention on rehearsal activities that lasted nearly an hour, beginning with the activity noted above that so captivated Adam. Amy reflected in her notes:

> They acted out imaginary scenes from Lear’s childhood in which he played games with the Fool, playing like best friends do. Next,
they created statues showing how Lear felt about the Fool – his enjoyment of their long and lasting friendship. From this, the students began to grasp the relationship. Next, Adam-as-Fool returned to the centre of the circle and again made people laugh – but this time, people crossed the circle, ‘chided’ him, and in action clarified their sense of the word. As the meaning of the term chided became clearer, students began to appreciate the dramatic tension: chiding this man was no minor problem in Lear’s eyes. Why had Lear struck Goneril’s gentleman? Perhaps he was defending a lifelong friend, one student suggested. Other students’ realisations that there are deep bonds between friends, just as there are between family members, changed their understanding by making it more complex. Whereas previously they had empathised with Goneril, now they began to see things from Lear’s perspective as well.

Students’ reflections on the work reveal the significance for them of playing and interacting as characters. In a survey response one student wrote:

Moving and speaking as characters helped the most because it helps you paint a better picture in your mind, because they are right in front of you and you feel how the character feels. You don’t really get the feeling when you’re just reading, because you could think it was not a big deal if you get banished or get turned down by your daughter if you’re just reading, but it is a big deal. I think that getting physically involved in your learning helps it stick in your mind better than just reading about it and then testing on it. It was interesting because of how much more I was paying attention to the details, then if I was just given parts to read.

Dramatic performance: making meaning of texts

Stredder emphasises that rehearsal approaches are dramatic in the sense that ‘students are performing or using the idea of performative voices or roles or structures’ (Stredder 2009: xxii). Rather than preparing for a staged performance outside the classroom, the idea is to ‘make our classrooms and workshops themselves into stages, with our students as both actors and audience’ (ibid: xxii).

James Britton (1970) theorised in his seminal scholarship that people make meaning about the language in texts by shifting back-and-forth from the roles of ‘participants’ to those of ‘spectators’. Experiencing as participants, people can use language, movement, and other tools to accomplish goals in their interactions with others. However, it is only when people are able to slow down and step back to reflect as spectators on events, for example orally, in
writing, or through movement or drawing, that they make meaning about those experiences.

Amy’s pupils readily reflected in writing about their experiences and shifted between participant and spectator roles to orally interpret the meaning of events that they or others had performed. One student noted:

*I think that the activity we did where we met the characters and were able to ask them questions and receive answers rather than reading them helped me learn most.*

Moves between participant and spectator mode are apparent in the ‘chiding’ example: showing and talking about the statues; laughing with the Fool and agreeing on what makes people laugh and how that deepens a friendship; modifying their own and peers’ actions to show different ways of ‘chiding’ based on an ongoing analysis of how people felt when a person acted in a particular way; comparing feelings of laughter with those of feeling put down; and reflecting on feelings when pretending to be both Lear and then Goneril reacting to the behaviour of her servant.

Teacher-in-role is a drama strategy that teachers can use to position students as both participants and spectators. Amy’s notes below were written following the first day of work when she was in-role as Goneril meeting students-in-role as an interview panel. She shows how she can give information, press for deeper thinking, use language in context and in relation to others, and engage students.

*When the students interviewed me-as-Goneril, I was able to subtly guide the discussion without lecturing or being overtly directive, responding to their questions and carefully revealing truths about the relationships between characters from Goneril’s point of view. Sometimes, I quoted directly from the play, referred to immediate past events, and referenced my sister, Regan, as well as my father, the king. The students, even those who were not on the interview panel, listened carefully to the interview; they offered questions and took notes on answers. The whole exploration of the play became more authentic because children were genuinely looking for a solution to the relational problem the characters were having.*

**Enquiry and inquiry approaches**

In the RSC Toolkit the company outlines how enquiry is integral to rehearsal approaches.

*The process of rehearsing a play is … a focussed artistic enquiry … similar to an enquiry in the classroom where teacher and*
pupil explore a play text together … the more active and collaborative that enquiry is, the more effective it will be.

(Royal Shakespeare Company, 2010: 8)

Stredder shows how young people enquire when teachers use ‘investigative approaches’.

Any teaching approach which does not disclose the play’s ending, or uses gradual disclosure of the events of the play, or works with ‘what happens next?’, is able to nurture, and draw very powerfully on, students’ involvement and curiosity. [Investigative approaches] focus on exploration and enquiry … they lead with an intriguing mental challenge or enigma … [that] must remain alive and challenging’

(Stredder 2009: 185).

A teacher may present key lines as clues for pupils to construct a basic plot; young people may dramatise and reflect on an event implied in the text, for example, investigating characters’ actions by conducting a tribunal that advises the Prince at the end of Romeo and Juliet about who should be ‘punished’ and who should be ‘pardoned’ (Act 5 Scene 3).

A dramatic inquiry approach (Edmiston 2011) is complementary to, but also an extension of, rehearsal room approaches that include the sort of investigative enquiry approaches outlined above. The difference in spelling is significant beyond the fact that only the ‘inquiry’ spelling is used on both sides of the Atlantic. Whereas the British English term ‘enquiry’ tends to be used as a synonym for asking a question, or to connote a short-term response to being curious or a narrowly focused investigation, we use the term ‘inquiry’ to connote longer-term and more sustained inquiries focused by questions that are explored from competing viewpoints. Core, or ‘essential’, inquiry questions are used to focus a sequence of activities over days or weeks (Wiggins and McTighe 1995). The essential question in Amy’s classroom inquiry was: What is Goneril’s duty toward her father and what is his duty toward her? Sub-questions focused inquiry in particular activities.

Initially the pupils knew neither the opening scenes nor the plot when they began to explore and investigate Goneril’s dilemma: how should she deal with her elderly father, King Lear, and solve the problems caused when he comes to live in her castle, bringing with him his hundred knights who desire rollicking late night parties?

In contrast to individual projects and uncritical explorations, we use the term inquiry, as others do, to envision ensemble spaces where teachers and young people adopt a questioning, critical stance toward learning in general, and the investigation of particular texts, in order to promote and create more dialogic
understanding of literature, language, and life (Harste 2001; Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2009; Beach et al. 2010).

Because pupils imagine from, and are conscious of, the competing viewpoints of characters, they readily ask critical questions of the context. Inquiry becomes critical when people ‘question the everyday world and consider actions that can be taken to promote social justice’ (Lewison, Leland and Harste 2008: 8) especially as they ‘question and challenge the attitudes, values and beliefs that lie beneath the surface’ (Luke and Freebody 1997: 185). And such critical inquiry creates dialogic understanding when young people embrace and accommodate competing views and meanings (Bakhtin 1986).

From the first day pupils adopted a critical stance that explored the attitudes, values and beliefs of the characters. Their agreed objective was to find a just solution that would be fair for all parties. As the inquiry developed, they not only challenged the characters about their views on parenting; they also reconsidered some of their own views about how people ought to act in light of the responsibility they believed young people have toward older family members, and vice versa. As Amy illustrates, dialogic understandings developed as the young people shifted viewpoints and took account of competing perspectives and their underlying values:

Focusing on one line gave students the opportunity to explore four different perspectives that the students struggled to reconcile. Elaine wrote about it this way: ‘Everyone in this part wants respect. Goneril wants her gentleman to be respected, Lear wants respect for his friend, the Fool wants respect for himself, and the gentleman wants to gain respect by putting the Fool down. So we are needing to make sure everyone gets what they want and it be win-win. [sic]

For pupils of this age the revelation that people see things in different ways is often a radical idea. One astute ten-year old said,

When we interviewed the characters of the play, it was helpful because we were able to see the different points of view from the characters of the play. We learned things that we wouldn’t have been able to figure out from the surface of the text which made it easier to understand.

Still another reported,

Having interviews was great because it gave us the story from more than one character’s perspective. With that, the story is made more clear, because everyone has different stories, which give us the whole story.
**Dramatic frame**

Dramatic inquiry both promotes pupils’ creation of more complex dialogic understanding and extends and deepens the ensemble-building, the playful and the performative dimensions of rehearsal room approaches, through the negotiation and use of a collective dramatic frame that engages with core themes of the play.

Applying Goffman’s (1986) sociological theory of framing to drama, Heathcote (1984) proposed that when young people imagine a social role different from their roles in everyday life, they interpret events and make sense of the world differently because they ‘frame’ events from different viewpoints. When young people speak lines of dialogue and reflect on characters’ competing viewpoints and assumptions, the contrast will highlight the meaning of language used.

Dramatic inquiry takes this approach further by negotiating and using an organising shared dramatic frame for extended inquiry that is focused thematically to create both a conceptual space for analysing and synthesising multiple views and a more multi-faceted community of practice. The dramatic viewpoint is *outside* the world of the text, providing young people with a sense of *responsibility* for grappling with extended inquiry into dilemmas and other big problems inherent *in* the world of the text that contextualise core themes. Heathcote explains that

> participants have to be framed into a position to influence … placed in a quite specific relationship to the action because this brings with it inevitably the responsibility, and more particularly the viewpoint which gets them into an affective [and analytical] involvement.  

(Heathcote 1984: 168)

Elsewhere she stresses the aim:

> creating the circumstances where it is imperative to inquire, search out, and interrogate the information we locate.  

(Heathcote 2006: xii)

When the dramatic frame that teachers introduce is that of a group of people with expertise, the responsibility that young people experience and can begin to identify with resembles that which adults with professional roles develop (Wenger 1998). When teachers use Heathcote’s (Heathcote and Bolton 1995) ‘mantle of the expert approach’ to dramatic inquiry, as they engage in a sequence of activities, young people gradually take on a shared ‘mantle’ of the responsibility and analysis that accompanies a whole area of shared professional expertise and practice, as they collaboratively respond to a ‘commission’ from imagined clients as if they are members of a company or other shared ‘enterprise’. Using Shaffer’s term, players adopt a shared ‘epistemic frame’ that provides them with
ways of knowing, of deciding what is worth knowing, and of adding to the collective body of knowledge and understanding of a community of practice  
(Shaffer 2006: 161).

When adults share the dramatic frame with the students as if they also are members of the enterprise, they can press, for example, for textual analysis in their interactions with young people, not as ‘teachers’ but rather as ‘fellow professionals’.

For Amy’s classroom we invented a professional company, Transition Care, with expertise in caring for and dealing with people ‘in transition’ like Lear who had given up ruling the country and, accompanied by his knights, had moved in with his daughter. We introduced the idea of Transition Care via a letter we read aloud and displayed (see Appendix A) that performed several literacy functions:

- created a professional framework for exploring a core theme of the play (duty)
- made reference to a successful history of the company that connected intertextually to previous classwork on another Shakespearean play (The Tempest)
- revealed factual information (e.g. in relation to the terms on which Lear had given up the affairs of state)
- made references to the text (e.g. Act 1 Scene 4, ‘riotous inn’)
- raised initial inquiry questions (‘What should I do? What is my duty toward my father? What is his duty toward me?’)
- suggested Goneril’s motivation in her surface attitude (e.g. ‘I am at my wits’ end’) and deeper values (e.g. ‘outrageous’)
- withheld information that would be revealed later (e.g. there was no mention of Cordelia).

The class was unanimous in wanting both to meet Goneril and to turn the classroom into places in the Transition Care building. After using the Smartboard to look at online photographs of period houses, the young people worked in groups to create a ‘caring’ interior and exterior place appropriate for receiving nobility in Shakespeare’s time. The students advised how Amy-as-Goneril should wear a shawl and diadem, as well as where and how to talk with her. Amy commented about the effect of the letter and these initial framing activities on engagement, ensemble, and the impetus to inquire.

Once they understood what was being asked of them there was an engaging purpose for students: they needed to find out why this situation occurred and what the possible solutions could be. The students became quickly invested in the action of the play because they had a purpose and a role to play, both collectively and individually. They were highly motivated to understand what would bring a family to act this way toward one another, because
the onus was on them to help the characters solve their problems. Their natural curiosity was also aroused by the situation: what kind of father brings his drunken knights into his daughter’s home? In the creation of this shared world everyone was successful, where everyone had expertise, and all ideas were welcomed and included.

The primary goals that motivate students engaged by rehearsal approaches are intrinsic to any textual study: discover the plot, investigate the relationships among character in settings, and connect with themes. A dramatic frame extends these goals: the primary focus of the class is now on a professional problem to be solved that frames a shared viewpoint on the entire conflict-ridden world of the play. Engaging with a collective professional dramatic frame shifts pupils’ minds off assumptions of difficulty about the text to focus on using extracts from the text to find possible answers to a shared engaging adult problem. They can discover or may explicitly be shown, for example by the teacher, how setting affects the text or how to infer character motivations, but this occurs because the members of the enterprise with which they identify (in this case Transition Care) need to find these things out in order to help their clients.

Inquiry questions focus the selection, sequencing, and analysis of experiences, viewpoints, encounters, and dialogue. In the weeks following the above examples, the increasing complexity of their commission, and thus the theme of duty, became more apparent as Amy’s students encountered Regan, Albany, Kent, and Cordelia as well as Goneril, the Fool, and Lear. As they discovered and inferred the relationships between the family members, although they ‘cared’ about each person, they realised that there were no easy solutions. Connecting their lives with those of the characters, they considered possibilities beyond the characters’ beginning assumptions. In letters to characters to promote reconciliation, before learning of Shakespeare’s resolution, the young people suggested outcomes that ranged from redistributing the kingdom to the pragmatic idea of building Lear his own party castle.

As Amy noted, one student argued, ‘All of you should apologise to each other. You have all done something that has angered or hurt someone’. Another stressed, ‘Life is worth more than proving yourself worthy of love’.

Conclusion
The American students referred to in this paper, in the equivalent of Years 6–7, engaged with themes, characters, and the plot of King Lear in ways that went far beyond usual expectations for this age group. For example, they considered ‘the moral and philosophical significance of Shakespeare’s plays and their contemporary relevance’, a goal for British pupils in Year 11 (DCSF 2008: 9).

This article illustrates how teachers’ uses of rehearsal approaches may promote pupils’ deep engagement and extensive meaning-making about texts by acting
as characters and analysing as audiences. Dramatic inquiry approaches can extend the classroom ensemble and promote more complexity of meaning as young people ask and explore questions and engage in literacy practices that embrace the struggle to accommodate conflicting viewpoints. At the heart of these dramatic approaches lies social imagination harnessed by pupils and teachers to ask deep questions relevant to their lives that sustain challenging explorations of a text. As Maxine Greene (1992) puts it,

*Imagination will always come into play when becoming literate suggests an opening of spaces, an end to submergence, a consciousness of the right to ask why.*

(Greene 1995: 25)

References


**Appendix A: letter from Goneril to Transition Care**

The 9th day of the 1st moon after mid-winter day
Dear Transition Care,

I am writing to you on the recommendation of my cousin, Miranda of Naples. She has been so pleased with the way you have helped her father and brother in the challenging situation of adjusting to a new family dynamic on their return to the dukedom of Milan. I can only hope that you can give aid where much is needed – in my family.

I need your advice on what to do. My elderly father is the King. However, he has divided the territory between my sister, Regan, and me, given up ruling the country, and says he no longer wants the responsibilities of any state affairs.

When my father, the King, made this decision a few weeks ago,

- He decided to keep 100 knights and squires;
- He decided that my sister and I would pay for them;
- He decided to spend one month at a time at my castle, the next at my sister’s.

While he has been at my house, his behaviour has been stressful. One might characterise it as outrageous. My castle feels more like a riotous inn than a home. For example:

- There are drunken parties into the middle of the night;
- His knights and squires have been quarrelling, fighting, and acting inappropriately;
- He himself has been disrespectful to my servants, even striking one.

What should I do? What is my duty toward my father? What is his duty toward me?

I am at my wits’ end and desperately need your advice.

Sincerely,

Goneril of Albany