Ethical Imagination: Choosing an Ethical Self in Drama

Brian Edmiston

The really amazing thing is that we all saw it the same way. I mean, it never even occurred to me to look at it from the Indians' point of view. And it was hard to do; I kept saying 'No' to it and when I finally did [see from the Taino Indian point of view] it just blew my mind.

—Luz, 7th grade girl, during the Columbus Drama

What should we do with the prisoners? They should go off in the spaceship with the aliens. It doesn't matter if they die, they're worthless anyway.

—Ron, 7th grader, as a Senator on day one of the Space Trader Drama

I've changed my mind. You can't decide for people. Even if we need the money we can't make them go—they're people too... and [even though they are criminals] we have to consider their families and their feelings and what's really fair.

—Ron, 7th grader, as a Senator on day four of the Space Trader Drama

Jeff and I share an ethical vision of education that affirms students' relationships with others as integral to their individuality. We agree with Noddings (1984) who argues that "caring" is our "basic reality." She be-
lieves that teachers ought to promote the formation of each student’s “ethical self,” which “is born of the fundamental recognition of relatedness; that which connects me naturally to the other, reconnects me through the other to myself” (1984, 24, 51). Carol Gilligan, in a similar vein, advises us to nurture webs of relationships “that revolve around a central insight that self and other are interdependent” (1982, 74). We both work hard in our classrooms—often failing, but never quitting—to build and maintain relationships among students and teacher in an atmosphere of care toward others and the world, which is engaging yet safe, demanding yet fair, challenging yet respectful.

We accept the ethical responsibility of this position—as we work and play with students we may either extend and strengthen or shrink and weaken the circles of care and connection that form with and among students. As Mimi Chenfeld has put it, every teaching moment is “either life or death, either opening up or closing down, either connecting or disconnecting” (1). We have both experienced the opening up to life which can happen in drama—the powerful caring circles that may be forged when students’ imaginations are harnessed together.

Though conflict is at the heart of drama, in classroom drama the conflict must be between ideas and views—not between students (2). Paradoxically, though students can imagine all sorts of relationships, even hateful ones, drama work should create an atmosphere of care. Students may imagine that they assassinate another (as in the “Castle drama”—see Chapter 1) or they may make hurtful racist remarks (as in the “Roll of Thunder drama”—see Chapter 2) but these should be unifying not divisive experiences. Ideally, in drama students come to understandings together about why human beings kill or are racist—and about how we are all capable of killing or being racist (3). Some students may make profound discoveries about their prejudices or presumptions. However, the process of social and self-discovery that drama can enable is not a cloak for meanness, for exposure, or for humiliation. As Dorothy Heathcote has continually stressed, drama “protects students into experiences” so that they are safe to imagine, explore, and confront possible ways of being in the world. At the same time, drama is a site for celebration of our humanity in the face of human—and inhuman—adversity.

When I first visited Jeff’s classroom in the winter of 1994–95 (to work with Jeff and his students in the “Space Traders Drama” which is discussed later in the book) I was immediately struck by the friendly, respectful atmosphere. Having talked with Jeff over the two years since he had first used drama, I was expecting a classroom in which students cared
about each other, their teacher, and their work. I was not disappointed. Within a few minutes I had seen Jeff joke with students, listen carefully, gently but firmly cajole them about incomplete assignments, and smoothly help them make the transition from a chaotic mass of adolescence into an attentive audience to his sharing of the day's plans. Within the next forty-five minutes, the students had laughed, listened to each other, cooperated, read, written, shared honest opinions, and left to do research in the library. I realized that students felt safe in his classroom and I understood why he had previously been able to explore ethical issues so productively with his students (in the "Columbus Drama" which is outlined later in this book).

When I work with students, I want us all to be open to difference and tolerant of diverse views whatever their source. I want us to listen for the silenced, to talk with the powerless, to see beneath the stereotype, and to hear above the rhetoric. I want us to listen for new voices, to continue to question, to argue, to rage, to laugh, and literally to make up our own minds. Drama is integral to my process of working towards these goals.

Jeff has similar hopes. When I asked him to summarize his ethical stance as a teacher, he wrote: "I hope to help students become responsible stewards for our fragile planet, help them to respect and celebrate diversity—and to know that diversity always leads to strength and vitality. I hope to assist them to become responsible democratic workers and citizens, provide tools for recognizing and correcting our human errors, and help them to become visionaries who use symbols to explore, express, and even create new, more humane ways of living together." (4).

As teachers, our ethical principles shape both what we value or encourage as well as what we question or disallow in daily classroom interactions. For example, my principle of caring means that I will not allow students to be disrespectful or hurtful toward each other in class. My knowledge of play leads me to encourage the use of drama to explore issues.

Students must be respectful, yet within a drama world, students can interact as if they are otherwise; they can imagine disrespectful or hurtful actions—they can also imagine caring and kind ones. The difference between imagined actions and actual ones is the subtle but profound difference between play and actuality. Players of any age, whether in the theatre or in a preschool, know when they are pretending and they want to play—they know they are not actually a king, actually restoring a castle, or actually being mean. The need for a trusting and safe classroom community is hopefully now quite clear; it is a prerequisite for a playful space in which students can imagine the worst—and the best—of humanity. Drama creates spaces in which students can explore the moral dimensions of the situ-
ations they read about and encounter on a daily basis in the classroom. Within a caring community in drama it is safe to explore less caring ethical attitudes toward others outside the classroom: for example, people who are or have been demonized, silenced, or treated as scapegoats.

**ETHICS AND EDUCATION**

We argue that teachers should promote the formation of students’ “ethical selves” because no matter what or how we are teaching, a moral dimension and an ethical subtext are always present in our work (5). Peter Singer makes it clear: “We cannot avoid involvement in ethics, for what we do—and what we do not do—is always a possible subject of ethical evaluation. Anyone who thinks about what he or she ought to do is, consciously or unconsciously, involved in ethics” (Singer 1991, v). We agree. We want students to think about what they, and others, ought to do as they read literature, study science, or explore history. Rather than avoid moral issues, we believe that when they are relevant to curriculum issues and students’ lives, ethical dimensions should be faced and confronted in the classroom, especially through drama (6).

In advocating the development of an ethical self, let me be clear that we are proposing neither moral indoctrination nor a moral vacuum in schools. The public school classroom is not a place for “politically correct” or rigid moral positions, which may never be formally stated but which students cannot seriously question. Nor is the classroom a site for the uncritical airing of any intolerant attitudes.

**Bakhtin’s Views of Ethics**

Bakhtin proposes a radical middle path between the extremes of moral relativism and moral absolutism—a “prosaic” view of ethics based on dialogue, imagination, and answerability (7).

In genuine “dialogue,” we imagine how the world looks from another’s perspective at the same time as we see from our own point of view. Now we see the world with “double consciousness” (see Chapter 1) and as we act, or contemplate action, we do so in dialogue by keeping both this other’s viewpoint in mind as well as our own.

Unfortunately, dialogue is less prevalent than you might expect. Much conversation and thinking are what Bakhtin calls “monologic” rather than “dialogic.” Classrooms are no different when students’ “opinions” are sought and expressed but not critiqued. Thoughtful dialogue—in which views are reconsidered and reformed—stands in contrast to what Deborah
Tannen (1994) calls the “triumph of the yell,” which is unfortunately too often touted in popular media as a desirable outcome of an encounter between viewpoints.

Being “answerable” for our actions means that we acknowledge our agency within a specific context and particular circumstances—we are prepared to answer to other people who are affected by our deeds. In other words, we don't blame others and shift ultimate responsibility. Nor do we say that because we did not intend the consequences of actions, we are therefore not responsible for them. We are ethical when we recognize that as we act we are responsible for the consequences of our actions—from the other’s point of view.

What Bakhtin calls a “prosaic” view of ethics grounds morality in the choice of actions by individuals who are in relationship with others at specific moments in time and space. In other words, ethics should never be wholly abstract—actions are always local and affect people in specific contexts. Considering how we ought to act means that we must always consider how the people who are going to be affected by our actions may view our deeds. We discover the other’s views in face-to-face dialogue and in imagination as we try to see the context from their point of view. Though moral codes or policies will be influential, we are not ethical if we have an unquestioning reliance on either in order to determine how to act because any generalized or abstract principles cannot take into account considerations of a specific context.

If we are ethical in the ways Bakhtin outlines, not only will we have thought about how we ought to act but in doing so our initial opinions, points of view, and ethical understandings of issues will have been changed—the circles of connection with others will have been extended and strengthened and we will have chosen facets of an ethical self. In the classroom, this means that our understandings as teachers will change along with those of the students.

**Drama and Ethics**

Drama is a powerful tool for thinking about what we “ought to do” and uncovering some of the moral complexities of situations. Not only can students engage in talk about action—moral reasoning about what they might do if they were people in particular circumstances—in drama students take action and in imagination do that which in discussion they might only sketchily contemplate. As Jeff has shown in the previous chapter, students’ talk about a book is very different from their acting as if they are the characters.
Dialogue Drama inherently involves talk as people interact. Yet the talk may not be genuine dialogue (or be dialogic) unless students imagine the world from another’s point of view at the same time as they see from their own.

Some students imagine and dialogue with alternative viewpoints as they interact in daily life or in drama worlds. Even so, as Jeff discussed in the previous chapter, many students do not imagine situations from the positions of characters as they read. As will become clear in this chapter, even students who are “proficient” readers may not imagine alternative perspectives and positions to the ones they currently hold—whether they interact in drama or not.

Students do not just act in drama—they also reflect on the meanings of actions as they consider the consequences for different people. Reflection is dialogic when the students evaluate actions from the point of view of a person affected. Students can evaluate not only others’ actions, but critically—for the development of an ethical self—in drama they can evaluate their own actions. Although we want students to judge peoples’ actions and reactions to situations—and wonder what they would have done in similar situations—unless this leads students to reconsider their own positions and understandings, drama work, like so many classroom discussions, will merely reinforce whatever ethical assumptions the students bring into the classroom and express in their opinions (7).

Because interactions can be sequenced in drama—with students acting, reacting, and reacting again—students’ dialogues in drama can be about the possible consequences of actions, which extend beyond those initially imagined and which complicate the students’ ethical understandings of situations and issues. Planning and structuring so that this may occur in drama comprise what I call “dialogic sequencing” (8) (Edmiston 1994). The drama becomes dialogic when it is sequenced so that students’ views—and as is discussed later, their discourses—in one episode are destabilized by their views and discourses in another episode; this can happen when they are brought into conflict in moments of drama encounter.

Answerability In drama, students take action as if they have become other people. They will be faced with being answerable for those actions if they view the consequences of the actions from the points of view of those affected. Participants in drama imagine from points of view that are different from their usual ones. Not only do students adopt roles that frame their relationships to situations, students view the world from different positions. Most significantly, in drama those who were regarded as objects of actions in one drama episode can become the subjects of action in another.
Prosaic Drama is most meaningful when participants contemplate specific urgent action rather than talk about generalities or abstractions. Students may formulate policy or acknowledge a moral code, but it is only when they apply principles in prosaic—or everyday—moments as they interact that they are being ethical.

Drama can create powerful dialogic spaces in which students’ “ethical imagination” changes their moral understandings in making their views more multifaceted, interwoven, and complex. In the remainder of this chapter I describe and analyze two drama sessions in Jeff’s classroom in order to explore in detail how this may happen.

THE COLUMBUS DRAMA

Jeff and his teaching partner Paul Friedemann centered their teaching each spring on an integrated unit: “Social Issues and Civil Rights.” During one week prior to this unit, Jeff used drama to introduce the unit as he applied and extended a lengthy drama session that I had devised and in which he had participated that semester in a university class. The drama revolved around the quincentenary of Columbus’ arrival in the New World.

In Chapter 2, Jeff describes how a drama world brought the literary world of particular books to life. In this unit, drama worlds brought to life historical events that were described in the students’ textbook and in works of literature, which Jeff also shared (9). The missing scene approach was extended so that students imagined many other perspectives on events beyond those presented in the texts. Jeff used drama for about thirty minutes on five consecutive days. His students became captivated by the drama work, even though Jeff wisely paused in his use of drama both when he felt a need to plan his next teaching moves but also to give the students time to research questions that arose during the drama.

Jeff kept detailed notes of his teaching and retained mountains of students’ writing and artwork. This unit was taught with five different classes—here I describe one. In this case, as at many other times, we talked a great deal about our teaching. I use Jeff’s words to describe the moves he made in the classroom (Wilhelm and Edmiston 1998). The analysis of the teaching is both the result of an ongoing dialogue about the significance of our classroom work and a record of understandings I have articulated (Edmiston 1994, 1995).

Jeff wanted to challenge and problematize his students’ related positions both on Christopher Columbus and on contemporary Native Americans. His students were mainly of European-American heritage. He had noticed
that during the 1992 Quincentenary of Columbus, students seemed to be caught up in the popular conceptions celebrating Columbus as a cultural hero as they took part in school activities marking the event. He knew that mainstream academic knowledge echoed a view of Columbus “discovering” America and that students had encountered few, if any, challenges to this view in the popular media or in the school.

The students maintained that they were neither racist nor prejudiced, often insisting that they got along well with the small groups of minorities present in the school (Hmong immigrants, East Asians, and a few Native Americans, African Americans and Eastern European immigrants). Yet, at the same time, many students expressed very strong opinions regarding a “treaty rights” controversy involving local groups of Chippewa Indians and their rights to hunt and fish. They voiced mainstream ahistorical and acultural positions that treaty privileges were “unfair” to “sportsmen.”

Swimming in Discourses

The notion that we live—and act—by “discourses” is critically important to a consideration of ethics (10). Everyone gradually acquires and accepts core positions that have a largely unseen effect as they shape and guide our actions and our attitudes about how we and others ought to act. Discourses shape our deep-seated initial points of view—and too often, our only views—on any issue. From the political arena to family life, our discourses are as integral to our opinions and interactions as the water is to the fish—we “swim” in discourses. We cannot avoid discourses; we encounter them and promote them every time we talk or read or watch television.

The students’ historical views of Columbus and of contemporary treaty rights were discourses: from the comments Jeff noted and the opinions students expressed, it was clear to him that the students were swimming in the uncritical “mainstream” and were largely unaware of how little their understandings and attitudes had been unthinkingly constructed out of these discourses.

Unquestioned discourses work against the ethical need to be dialogic, answerable, and prosaic—to think and act and be responsible from more than one position in a context. We may critique our own discourses or embrace others’ questioning approaches—and thus make them more dialogic. However, we tend to resist both our own and others’ critical views because being unsettled about the ways in which we think may feel too much like undermining who we “are.” One reason why drama is so powerful at disturbing our discourses is because when students express and critique discourses in imagination they feel safe because they are “just pretending.”
Discourses are formed over time. For example, my commitment to “caring” is one of my discourses of “education,” which have been formed over years as a teacher as I have experienced, created, read about, and reflected on classroom communities. My views on caring communities are not just theoretical positions but are discourses that get played out in every classroom interaction. Watching my silent and orderly classroom as a young teacher, you would have seen a very different type of community because I initially—and unsuccessfully—operated according to the authoritarian discourse that I had experienced as a child and that was the norm in the school where I first taught. Whereas now I act to connect with others, then I acted to distance myself from students; whereas now I seek out differences of opinions, then I was easily threatened by them. However, I was largely unaware of how my actions and attitudes were shaped by the “norms” that I had internalized and in which I swam. Although I began to challenge these norms as I experimented with innovation in my classroom, I did not radically begin to alter my practice until I encountered a brilliant teacher (Dorothy Heathcote) and a powerful teaching methodology (drama), which challenged my discourses.

I believe that it is part of a teacher’s responsibility to challenge discourses respectfully—to make them more dialogic. We do so when we debate topics or discuss books—we raise questions, draw attention to inconsistencies, and highlight implications. James Banks (1993) argues that it is the teacher’s responsibility to question discourses that promote inequitable views—to rework mainstream knowledge so that it becomes “transformativ[e].” Discourses like “Columbus as hero,” “manifest destiny,” “Indians lose, superior culture wins” can then be problematized. Yet, in questioning positions we need to remain respectful and not tell students that their initial views are wrong. We also need to remain open to having our own discourses unsettled by students’ views.

Drama that is dialogic is a powerful tool in pursuit of an objective of challenging discourses. Our purpose is not to “discover” the right way to look at an issue, but to “uncover” fresh perspectives, explore new points of view, and, in dialogue, forge new ethical understandings.

For me, good teaching must problematize and complicate initial views of a topic. If learning is a life-long journey, then classrooms are campgrounds and teaching opens new vistas for students and helps them consider new meanings of the journey’s purposes. As students—and teachers—we are always in particular positions on different paths but these continually change as we walk, skyrocket, float, grope, dive, and swim our way through life. If we dialogue with other travelers, we will see the world in fresh ways. As we climb academic mountains, we have more panoramic
views; as we lose ourselves in the forests of books, we emerge with fresh perspectives.

One way in which drama is “magical” is that we can not only imagine additional paths, destinations, and travelers, but also alternative worlds and worldviews to explore in dialogue. In drama, we are released from a single “opinion” and can explore alternative possibilities. In drama not only could we fly in the sea or swim in the air—in drama, students can become aware that they actually are flying or swimming. Dialogic drama draws attention to discourses and place participants in active—rather than reactive—positions relative to them.

**Columbus Drama—Day One**

Jeff used drama for about thirty minutes on the first day of the unit. Jeff’s descriptions are in italics; analysis is in roman type.

*I opened the drama by convening a Museum Board Meeting. In role as curator, I asked the board to consider renaming the Museum of American Culture as the Museum of American Cultures. A brief discussion followed, during which small groups of students considered and reported on their thoughts about the appropriateness of this proposed change. My purpose was to see how they defined culture and how they felt about the notion of multiple American cultures. Liz, reporting from her group, said they had discussed the idea of America as “a melting pot,” and felt that there was one American culture, not many cultures. Her group proposed “keeping the old name.”*

Note how students articulated mainstream discourses of “American culture.” Even though the drama gave the students the opportunity to explore an alternative, they did not do so.

*I attempted to problematize their decision by revealing that the museum had been given a generous grant to set up an exhibit on the topic of “Columbus and His Legacy” but that the donor wished us to consider changing the name of the museum in recognition of her gift.*

The students, in role as museum trustees, wanted to know who the donor was. I insisted the donor was anonymous but asked who they thought might give such a gift. Liz, for one, thought the donor must be “a minority person” who “wants to use the museum,” presumably to present a particular political agenda. The students asked if we had to change the name of the museum to accept the money. When I said no, they quickly agreed to take the money but not to change the name of the museum. “Our job is to present history the way it was, not do any old exhibit the way someone wants us to do.
it. "Tim said. I framed a brief discussion about political donations and whether donors had a right to expect favors. Luz differentiated between political donations and those given to a "museum like ours that is supposed to be neutral." The trustees agreed to staging a Columbus exhibit, but insisted that they be allowed to do it their own way. One girl said, "we’re not supposed to rewrite history or anything."

Jeff, as curator, pressed the students, as trustees, to reconsider their position. They opposed him and questioned the motives of the donor. The direct conflict between the trustees’ views and the curator’s views did not lead to a change in the students’ positions but revealed these more starkly within a discourse of history which seemed to be shared—that history is "neutral," that there is a single authoritative viewpoint which can be "told," and that revisionism, or "rewriting history," is wrong. There was talk but no dialogue.

I suggested, as curator, that I could use the trustees’ help in brainstorming some ideas for our new Columbus exhibit.

Small groups began to brainstorm, and they mostly considered items they wanted in the exhibit: films, paintings, pictures of Columbus, statues, a replica of his ships, a computer game, maps, products Columbus “discovered” like gold and corn. Luz wanted a tabletop map placed next to a globe to show how Columbus’ voyage had changed human conceptions of the world. Tim wanted contemporary letters and journals. When Joe suggested including Indian artifacts, I jumped on this and asked the trustees what they thought of including Indians in the exhibit. There was some disagreement. One boy thought we should have a scene of the Indians welcoming Columbus. Luz indicated that we should be concerned with the story of Columbus, and that anyway, we probably couldn’t find real Indian artifacts. The group quickly dismissed the Indian issue and continued to talk about Queen Isabella, Columbus’ childhood, cities in America named Columbus, and other issues.

I thanked the trustees for their ideas and asked them to step back and consider the theme and title of the exhibit. Luz called out “The Beginning of America.” Tim thought “The Courage of Columbus” had a nice ring. Others were interested in the notion of “Discovery.” The students decided on the theme of “The Discovery of America.” I thanked them and ended the first day’s drama at that point.

Jeff was keen that the students consider the point of view of the indigenous Taíno people who were affected by the arrival of Columbus in ways the students had not considered [11]. He amplified one boy’s apparent interest in an indigenous view but wisely allowed the students to dismiss this concern. Instead, they continued to clarify their initial points of view: a European view on the first voyage of Columbus and a historical view of “real” Indians.
As Jeff noted, in Lisa Delpit’s (1993) words, at the end of the first session the students had not demonstrated a willingness “to learn to be vulnerable enough to allow our world to turn upside down in order to allow the realities of others to edge themselves into our consciousness.”

**Columbus Drama—Day Two**

On day two of the drama, I asked the students, in the role of filmmakers, to help create short films for one of the exhibits. I asked small groups to each use the tableau strategy to stage a scene they felt was important to put in the exhibit. Each group presented its tableau to the group using the related strategy of forum theatre. Each group acted out its scene. In some, the characters spoke; in others, the scene was accompanied by a narrator. The rest of the class, as audience to these tableaux, offered advice about how to reposition the figures, recast action, and make suggestions for rewriting dialogue or narrative. All of the scenes had to do with Columbus planning his journey (meeting with Queen Isabella), undertaking the voyage (standing at the prow of the Santa Maria gazing confidently at the horizon), or arriving on the soil of the New World. Luz’s group showed Columbus planting a cross and Spanish flag on the beach while an Indian knelt on the ground at his feet. Their narrative included the words, “I, Columbus, have sailed the ocean and discovered this country. I claim it now for Isabella, Queen of Spain. I bring civilization and religion to all people here!” The Indian echoed, “Oh, thank you, most powerful white man!”

In a new role as historical consultant, I praised the artists for their work, but said, “You have told only part of the story. Your job is to tell the whole story! Whose voices are missing?”

Students called out: the sailors, the sailors’ families, King Ferdinand, the family of Columbus, the Indians. I asked the students to respond as one of those who we had not heard from yet. Since they could not, I told them we would leave the drama and asked them what we needed to find out to continue the drama. In response to their queries, I made copies of primary source materials from diaries and historical accounts from Columbus, his sailors, and various people such as priests who accompanied him on his voyages. I also copied a chapter from Morning Girl and made some copies of the book available.

The students’ shift in role to filmmakers framed them with a reason to show historical moments with motion and dialogue. As actors in the films, the students were not merely talking about what they would have done if they had lived at the time of Columbus, here they were actually doing what they imagined.

Further, as an audience to the performance of scenes, other students were in a position to respectfully critique them as fellow professionals. Even though there was plenty of talk, there was little apparent dialogue. The
students continued to demonstrate the pervasiveness of their initial Eurocentric perspective.

Jeff honored their work but used the authority of his role to raise a key question—what voices did they think were missing from their views? He wisely ended the second session when the students found it difficult to switch perspectives.

Columbus Drama—Day Three

I began the next day using the analogy strategy. I had prearranged with one of the girls in class that I would pick up her journal and purse off her desk (12). As arranged, she protested. I said, “No, no. This is my purse and notebook now.”

When several students protested, I continued to insist and said “I found it. Not only that, I found it in my classroom. It’s mine.”

The students quieted. I opened the purse and pulled out a note which I began to unfold. Several more students protested, including Luz. “You can’t read her notes! That’s personal!”

“Yes, I can,” I persisted. “It’s my notebook now.”

“What makes you think it’s yours,” Luz argued, voice rising.

“It’s mine,” I said, springing the trap, “because I discovered it!”

Some of the students sputtered. “You didn’t discover it,” Luz almost yelled, “you stole it off of her desk!”

I acted incredulous. “Who thinks this is stealing?” I asked the class. All of them raised their hands.

“How can this be stealing?” I asked them, “when you say that Columbus discovered America?”

By this time, most of the students had read about Columbus’s purposes in discovering the New World—to find gold for himself and to secure himself and his heirs as rulers of this New World. They had also read about many of the atrocities committed as the Taíno Indians were forced into slavery, and mutilated and killed for their resistance or failure to find gold. The reading had described the ravages of smallpox on the Indians and their initial friendliness to the Spaniards, which was answered with nothing short of genocide.

These things were described in primary documents by Spanish witnesses.

A very lively discussion ensued during which many students indicated confusion about why these things were not more widely known or studied. Luz lamented that her father even belonged to “the Knights of Columbus. I used to think it was cool—note I think it’s disgusting! You think of knights in shining armor . . . but his knights killed all those people . . . .” Some students doubted that the readings were true. Others shouted that the readings were “by the Spanish! Why would they lie?”

This episode displays the power of students being propelled into an experience of sudden dissonance. Note that the student whose journal and
purse Jeff removed had previously consented to the move so that only other students would be momentarily incensed and she would not feel personally violated. The word “discover” was recontextualized in an event in which the preposterousness of Jeff’s position was juxtaposed with the previously uncontested Eurocentric view of discovery and then connected to the viewpoints presented in the students’ readings. The students’ discourse on discovery was suddenly brought into relief by a point of view which they instantly adopted—don’t touch other people’s “stuff.” Those who said they were “confused” probably experienced an unsettling in the discourse of discovery and were beginning to dialogue with themselves.

Note the danger of “flip-flopping” superficial views in the way Luz suggested she might have been about to do—from all “good” to all “bad.” When students do not have a great deal of information about a topic and have only considered one or two viewpoints, a tendency exists to totally reject a previous assumption as new perspectives are considered. There is a danger of becoming as rigid about the “new” way of looking as they were about the “old.” Instead, what we want to promote are “dialogic” views, in which students recognize that there are always new ways of looking at events.

In this context, it is important to stress that during the week students conducted extensive research on Columbus and viewed a videotape examining different perspectives on Columbus and his legacy. Students had the opportunity to read and view materials that ranged along a continuum of multiple viewpoints from those broadly “pro-Columbus” like I, Columbus to those “pro-Indian” like Encounter. Jeff was aware of the danger of emphasizing particular viewpoints and was explicit in making it clear that any historical information and all views were appropriate in drama and in discussion.

I asked the students to re-enter the drama world. As curator I observed that I knew they had been studying the history of Columbus and, referring back to the end of the previous session, I wondered if there were voices they wanted to add to the museum. The artists agreed that they wanted to tell the story of the voyage from the sailors’ viewpoint and of the Spaniards’ arrival and its aftermath from the perspective of the Indians.

To capitalize on this opportunity, I asked the students to pose as sailors or Taíno Indians and create an interactive exhibit. When a visitor walked by, they would speak about their experience. The students worked in pairs to prepare and then formed a circle. As I walked round, in the way a visitor would, they shared their prepared lines. Tim was a sailor: “I ate hardtack, filled with bugs. I thought we would fall off the edge of the world. And be promised us gold, and there is no gold!” Luz was an Indian. “We welcomed them. We were willing to share but they destroyed us. They brought greed and disease. My family is dead.” Other sailors said, “I want to go home. Let us take what we can...
and go home. This is no place for us,” and were answered by Tainos who said, “Go home and leave us in peace. This place was given to us by the Great Spirit. It is not for you to rule or own!”

By speaking as the “missing voices,” the students saw from inside perspectives they had previously either not considered or only fleetingly adopted. As sailors and Tainos they could review everything they had read but from new positions. New experiences were imagined that both contextualized images of fears, promises, and death as well as problematized the discourses of discovery and Columbus. Those who had seemed to be marginal bystanders—sailors and Indians—now came to the center of the world of Columbus. Those who had been the objects of the actions of Columbus and his men now became the subjects of new actions. Students could “fall off the edge of the world” and see it afresh from where they landed.

As the students reflected on events from new positions they dialogued with previous positions, created new meanings about historical events, and evaluated the previous actions of Columbus and his men from the point of view of disgruntled sailors and peaceful Tainos.

There are always additional “missing voices” that could be explored through drama. For example, the views and evaluations of historical women or Jews, impoverished Spanish peasants, or those who had opposed the genocide would have been interesting to adopt; each would have raised further questions and offered new perspectives and positions for dialogue.

We then all became Tainos, meeting in a circle as a tribe to share stories of what was happening, and suggestions of what to do. Many of the boys wanted to fight, but were reminded of the Spaniards’ superior weaponry and strength. Others wanted to send emissaries to explain our point of view, but we agreed the Spanish were “gold crazy.” Some decided to build canoes and escape to nearby islands, but recognized that this was only a short-term solution. “There is really nothing we can do!” one girl agonized. That night, I asked the students to write three diary entries as a Taino—one before Columbus’ arrival, one during his arrival, and one a year after his arrival.

Now everyone in the class adopted the same Taino point of view. From this position they shared multiple interpretations and evaluations of how the native people might have reacted—from escape to violence to inertia. As the students dialogued, they critiqued their new views. In contrast to the encounter between Jeff and the students on the first day—here the students’ energies were opposed not to what his role might intend but to a known common threat—the historical events after the arrival of Colum-
bus and his men. Their discussion—and subsequent writing at home—focused not on rewriting history, but on an exploration of and dialogue about possible diverse reactions by the native people.

The work led the students to consider in depth the ethical dimension of how the Taino “ought” to have responded. Luz provided an illuminating response that clarified that, at least for her, for the first time she had imagined how a Taino had viewed the events. Her view was transformed from an external judgment of others’ actions to holding two simultaneous insider points of view.

After this class, Luz responded that “The really amazing thing is that we all saw it the same way. I mean, it never even occurred to me to look at it from the Indians’ point of view. And it was hard to do, I kept saying no to it and when I finally did [see from the Taino Indian point of view] it just blew my mind.” Luz admitted that she was very “upset and confused” by what she had learned and experienced. “It’s just so different from what I thought,” she said, “it’s hard to put together.” When I asked her what had turned the tide, she said, “reading the descriptions helped. Morning Girl (the book she read from a Taino point of view) made me think of what life was like before Columbus came—how much that changed everything for the worse. And then being in the drama upset me because I felt so much like something had been taken from me! . . . and then when I heard all the other voices [in the drama, of sailors and Indians] it was like it was just drowning out all of the cool things I still believed yesterday about Columbus.”

Luz’s response illustrates the dialogic power of adopting and interacting in drama from a novel point of view. Although she had read about Tainos and had even read a text written from a Taino point of view, it was not until she personalized the position by standing in the shoes of a native, speaking from her viewpoint, and hearing the situated voices of others, that she actually adopted the Taino perspective—it ceased to be “their” view and became another one of “her” views. The effect was clearly explosive, upsetting, and confusing as her discourses surrounding Columbus were “drowned” in a dialogue of new voices.

Columbus Drama—Day Four

At the beginning of the next class, the students exchanged diaries in the role of curators. I asked them, in their roles to consider the importance and effect of including such viewpoints in the exhibit.

Jeff reestablished the museum context, thus framing the students with a professional historian’s responsibility as they read and evaluated their own
writing. The move that followed built on the writing they had done the previous night so that in the drama the students further contextualized and explored broader cultural discourses about life and beliefs.

We took on the perspective of Tainos who had found a small child floating in a canoe. As a shaman, I asked the students, as tribespeople, to offer what the child must learn to become one of us. Based on their recent research, the students said, "learn our language and customs." When I pressed them, Luz answered, "love of nature and respect for animals—for life."

"All life?"
"We are a peaceful people."
"What else?"
"Know about our beliefs?"
"Such as?"
"The Great Spirit, who provides all things. Being thankful for fire, water, food and other gifts."

We then proceeded to engage in a naming ceremony for the boy, during which each Taino would give the boy a secret name and a gift to signify what he must know and become to be a Taino. Luz gave the boy the secret name "Sunshine" and an eagle's claw to remind him "to enjoy the gifts of the Great Spirit and to never be greedy for more."

Here the students were developing discourses related to a "Taino" view of life. By enacting a naming ritual together they had a powerful shared experience and built a broadly common viewpoint. In doing so, some students used the opportunity to dialogue with previous positions and evaluate them. This is suggested in the ensuing ironies: the Tainos adopt a stranger as one of their own, whereas the Spaniards soon kill and enslave strangers; the desire not to be greedy is a gift that contrasts with the known effects of greed on the Spaniards and the Tainos.

We shifted the drama world to Spain in 1494 when Columbus was trying to fund a second voyage of 17 ships and thousands of people. This was difficult because the first voyage had lost money. The students became Columbus' emissaries to the King and Queen, attempting to justify the support of the King. Based on their reading, they spoke of trade routes, competition with Portugal, Indian slaves, Christianizing the world, gold and riches, settling new colonies, and more. In my role as King's courtier, I resisted all arguments, pressing them to explain themselves further. I eventually struck an agreement to Christianize all Indians and to bring a guaranteed amount of gold back to the King. (Both are historical facts.)

In this role, I asked the entourage of Columbus to develop a policy that I must approve for what to do when encountering new Indians. First, it was agreed that Indians must ac-
cept Christianity and that they must be enslaved to serve their new King. Historical woodcuts were passed around that showed the Indians being hunted with dogs, having limbs chopped off for not bringing enough gold, being burned if refusing to accept the King and Christianity. "Do we have other options for dealing with these savages?" I asked.

As they clarified their policy, some students insisted that the Taínos must be made servants of Spain: "We must protect ourselves first." "Kill them if we must." "If we take everything from them then they must serve us."

The students used all the information they had gathered in their readings as they adopted the point of view of emissaries from Columbus. As Jeff, in role as a courtier, opposed them he pressed the students to think more deeply about some of the implications of the discourses of "trade," "religion," and "wealth," which underscored the Spanish expeditions.

Note how the possibilities for internal dialogue were opened up because the students already knew much of what was going to happen in the New World and had begun to explore Taíno perspectives. Students may have dialogued with themselves very little and may have been more interested in imagining contexts of violence implied by discourses of colonization.

As the drama continued, other students resisted policies that condoned violence. Luiz said, "I will not help you with this."

"You are not longer one of us—you are not a Spaniard, I told her, and she was made to turn outward from the circle. "They have rights too—they are human beings," said another student, who was also turned outward from the circle. "No, they are not," I replied, "they are savages in a land we have discovered." We proceeded to discuss the differences between being civilized and being savages.

Jeff now used the authority of his role both to "ventriloquate" (in Bakhtin’s word) positions which were historically held, and to impose consequences on actions. In doing so he illuminated the discourses of colonization that were in operation. By silencing public opposition, he pushed some students to fume—and dialogue internally—as others talked about discourses of "civilization."

In the next scene, which proved to be the climax of our drama, we divided into Spaniards and Taínos re-enacting the first landing of Columbus. The class was divided into halves that planned the re-enactment and then performed it for the other half of the class. That audience played the role of historians checking for historical accuracy against the documents we had read.

The drama has come full circle. The students have returned to the moment at which they began a week earlier. However, they are in a very different space
because of all that they now know about this moment, which they discovered
in their research, discussions, and through the drama. Again, note the exten-
sive possibilities for genuine dialogue in this encounter. Now students can re-
visit their previously Eurocentric positions but in dialogue with problematized
discourses of colonization as previously critiqued from Spanish and Taino
perspectives. Knowing some of the consequences of the encounter—what will
happen to the native people and the Spanish explorers—now puts students in
a position of being faced with being answerable for whatever they say in the
scene. This is especially so for those who represent the Spaniards.

In Luce’s group, the sailors rowed up to the shore, jumped out of their boat and kissed
the land, but immediately put up their weapons upon seeing the Tainos. The Tainos
brought fresh fruit and yams and Columbus presented them with trinkets.

Columbus: (plants flag) I claim this land for Spain. The soldiers then surrounded
the Indians. “We have them, sir!”

To this, Columbus ironically replies, “Tell them not to fear. We come in peace.” To
which Luce, as a Taino elder, replied, “Then why are we being guarded?”

The Tainos were asked to pledge allegiance to the King of Spain. When they came
to understand this demand, some did so and some resisted. The resisters were shot.

Columbus Drama—Day Five

On the final day of the drama, we became the mountains on the island of Hispaniola.
I asked the students to “stand and look at history. What stories do you want to tell?”

After five minutes to prepare, we stood in a circle. Each student had his say and then
tapped the next mountain. Luce started the poem by asking: “They dug out what little
gold we had, and ignored the trees and birds. I wonder if it made them happy?” She
was followed by students saying, “The Spaniards dug mines and filled them with bod-
ies.” “Peace was followed by war.” “I was angry but could watch and do nothing.”

Adopting the inanimate perspective of the mountains framed the stu-
dents with a distance that made them historians with a different responsi-
bility. As nature’s storytellers, they could look in from the outside on both
Spanish and contemporary points of view to raise more philosophical cri-
tiques such as wondering if the Spaniards were happy.

To end the drama, we returned to our roles as curators creating the central exhibit. They
decided to create a sculpture. As students entered the sculpture, each added onto what
had previously been composed. First we had Columbus, proudly planting the flag.
Then we layered in the mountains shaking their heads at the great change to the peaceful
island and covering their ears in distress. Sailors entered who tied up Tainos who cried to
be released. Queen Isabella was placed at the far left with a cross in her hand, and the Tamo chief at the far right praying to the Great Spirit. The caption read, “Columbus, who discovered a land for one civilization and destroyed the one that was already there.”

Making the sculpture was a synthesizing aesthetic medium through which the students could reflect and transform into images some of the new feelings and thoughts that had arisen in their previous dialogues. Doing this together created a moment of unity in diversity—now multiple views coexisted not in narrative but in overlapping patterns.

Individual writing provided another medium for synthesis and reflection. Now students could step back from their experiences of and from different viewpoints into “their” position and consider how their views had changed. One student made a connection to contemporary Indian issues; others commented on the experience of the process.

In their reflective journal entries, one student wrote that “now I understand why the Indians [in Wisconsin] are so angry about the treaty rights thing.” Another wrote: “It’s interesting to think about things from different directions. I felt kind of like we held Columbus in our hand like a ball and turned him around to see all sides.” Luz simply wrote: “Wow! That was intense!”

Dialogue is essential. Bakhtin says “To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth.” (Bakhtin 1984, 293). Drama can create the opportunities for ethical dialogue to occur—dialogue that can radically alter how students think about issues and their relationship to them and the people whose lives are or were affected by people’s actions. In imagination, students can experience new viewpoints. In dialogic drama, students views can become both more troubled and clearer as alternative positions are adopted and explored in dialogue with each other. In drama, students can take steps on the path to creating more complex positions as they become more aware of how discourses both shape their lives but also how they can change those discourses and thus their views of their relationships with others. In drama, students can choose facets of an ethical self.

THE SPACE TRADERS DRAMA
When Jeff began the “Social Issues and Civil Rights” unit two years later, he invited me to come to his classroom. He was interested to see how through drama we could explore such ethical concerns as prejudice, racism, justice, and fairness. Like the students two years previously, his Euro-
ean American students maintained that they were neither racist nor prejudiced because of good relations in the school between them and the few “minority” students or those who were the children of recent immigrants. They did not recognize how discourses of, for example, prejudice operated in their lives despite individual cordial relationships.

I used drama for forty-five minutes with three of his classes back-to-back over three mornings; Jeff participated throughout and took on roles. In the afternoons, he worked alone with the two other classes. Broadly the same teaching moves were used with each class—I describe and analyze the teaching moves from one of the classes but record students’ responses from several. As with the “Columbus drama,” descriptions of each day are in italics with analysis in roman type.

I had been reading a short story, “The Space Traders” and thought that the central conflict might be a useful starting point for the class. The story comes from Derek Bell’s collection *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*, which examines racism and prejudice in America. It is set in a future when the United States is approaching economic and environmental collapse. The government is near bankruptcy and desperately needs money in order to rebuild and restore the country. “Alien” people from another planet land on Earth and offer the government all the gold they need for economic recovery in exchange for all the African American people in the country. The short story ends with the offer being accepted.

**Space Traders Drama—Day One**

The first day began by asking students if they would take on the roles of people framed with responsibility for major national policy decisions. The students were interested and chose the roles of Senators. I took on the role of majority leader. (Other groups made different choices, for example, one group chose members of the Cabinet—I became the President’s Chief of Staff).

I announced that an emergency session had been called because the country was facing economic disaster. The budget simply had to be slashed. The students brainstormed how this emergency was affecting the country and imagined, for example (in some classes they also showed these in tableaux), collapsing infrastructure, inadequate health care, and social unrest.

Small groups worked together to list everything on which the government spent money. When reports were made, we listed and categorized expenditures into budgetary items like the military, highways, parks, welfare, prisons, education, police and fire services, and many others. I then told the Senate that one whole budget item had to be eliminated, and that this would shortly be debated. They again resumed small group work to discuss what item should be eliminated.
The students were invited to enter and create a context similar to that of the short story. The students drew on and extended their knowledge of government expenditure to outline categories for initial thoughts about government social—and ethical—responsibility. The conflict of the drama (impending economic collapse) created a tension that demanded drastic action—budget cuts. In considering this action, the students had to prioritize and were forced to decide what was not “essential.” Drawing on discourses about what is essential in society they were in a position to marginalize programs and thus the people affected.

When we reconvened, spokespersons from each group were invited to introduce themselves and their group’s proposal for cutting a budget item. They enjoyed being, for example, “Senator Jones from the Great State of Idaho.” When each group had made its presentation, a debate ensued. Several votes were taken before a decision was made. In three classes, it was decided to completely cut welfare; in another two classes, all prison services were cut.

I had originally intended to establish a drama context similar to that in the story and as an “alien space trader” ask for African Americans in exchange for gold. However, what became clear was that each class was operating by mainstream discourses that marginalized other groups more strongly—those on welfare and those in prison. At this time, the U.S. House of Representatives was voting on massive public spending cuts and the students were surrounded by rhetoric in support of these positions.

In the next episode, the Senate was reconvened. I told them that a truly unbelievable event had occurred. We had been contacted by “aliens,” who had offered to repair our ecosystem, fix our infrastructure, and provide us with billions of dollars worth of gold to support our economy. I represented in role as the Space Trader and made my offer. In every class, the students almost immediately wanted to know the catch.

“I want your least valued group of people to take me back to my world.”
“Why?”
“That is none of your concern.”
“What will you do with them?”
“That is none of your concern.”
“Who do you think are our least valued citizens?”
“You have already identified them.” I internalized, “they are the welfare recipients (or the prisoners).” I then echoed many of the arguments students had previously made for eliminating welfare (or prisons).
After an intense interrogation, the Space Trader left, giving the senators "twenty-four hours before I take this offer to another nation."

There was an intense debate but few dissenting voices when the Senate voted overwhelmingly to accept the Space Traders offer.

We then used continuum and radio show strategies. The senators were asked to write a press release for their home state outlining why they had opposed or supported this measure. They then lined themselves up in a continuum stretching from those who agreed most strongly with the decision to those who disagreed most strongly. To do this, students had to consult and share their views with each other. Jeff came down the line as a radio talk show host interviewing senators on the reasons for their decisions.

These strategies gave each student opportunities to express a personal ethical stance. Although they had agreed to go along with the majority, in their writing, placing themselves bodily on a continuum, and in response to a question, each student had several opportunities to think through and state an individual position.

In his radio show comments, Ron said, "What should we do with the prisoners? They should go off in the spaceship with the aliens. It doesn't matter if they die, they're worthless anyway."

Nancy's press release read that "I believe we should cut welfare and send these people with the aliens. Is it our fault if people don't choose to work? Because they are too lazy! Why is it our fault if they drop out of school? I believe people who are disabled should have it [welfare], because they had a reason, but it's not fair for the people who have to work their butts off for their own families to pay for people like this. Now they will be made to do some good for society (by going with the Aliens).

In her emotional and rare dissenting voice, Bethany said, "I disagree with this! It is just like the slaves! We take people who are free and we're trading them again for money! Can't we see? When will it stop?" The girl next to her in the continuum said, "What? When will it stop?"

"Bethany continued, "Misusing people! It's just like the slaves! We have no right to do this!" The students paid close attention to Bethany, but at the end of the radio show, when she asked if people wanted to change their opinion and position on the continuum, no one changed by moving that they had done so.

Students like Ron and Nancy may have been experimenting with holding extremist positions in drama protests students into doing so because all serious contributions are legitimate. However, drama does more than allow students to voice racist or intolerant attitudes. In the drama, Bethany could challenge these positions. But there would be no ethical dialogue
between them—and thus no significant change in position—unless students allowed different views to (in Bakhtin's word) "interilluminate" each other. Later episodes in the drama enabled this.

In the next episode of the drama, we asked students to take on the position of a welfare recipient through a step-by-step strategy. We began by asking students to kneel on the floor and close their eyes. Through guided imagery, we asked them to imagine themselves as adults with a dream home and a dream job. When they had done so, they were to commit to this vision by taking a step and once again kneeling. Next they were asked to imagine some kind of problem that caused them to lose their job, to take a step and kneel in that new position. In this way we took them through several trials and tribulations to the point that they registered for welfare. We then asked them to pair up and tell their story to a partner. (A similar process was used for those who committed crimes).

For homework, we asked students to write two journal entries: one from the perspective of someone who had come to be on welfare, and another as "themselves" to reflect on the various reasons others might come to be on welfare, and what could be done to help people on welfare to improve their situations.

The students' imagination was activated in the step-by-step strategy, the guided imagery, and the journal entries so that they could take up the perspective of people receiving government assistance and, in reflection, rethink their previous position. Those who had been objects now became subjects; it was much harder for the students to dehumanize "people on Welfare," to treat them as a homogenous group, or see them as "them."

Nancy, in contrast to her diatribe the day before, had this to say: "I just had a run of bad luck, and people were cruel to me, my boss wouldn't understand or help me... Is it a person's fault if they commit a crime—yes. Is it a person's fault if they don't have a job—not necessarily. Yesterday, I would have said that they chose [not to work] and that therefore see [as Senators] could take their power to decide for them. But now that I have been on welfare, I can see that it might not be a person's choice, in fact, it probably isn't and maybe no one is helping them to get a job and get on their feet again."

Ron wrote: "I was a victim that got beaten up. And my family. And the police wouldn't help. When I took things in my own hands for revenge, the police caught me and put me in prison. Is this fair? And now I am going with the Space aliens."

Students have made some significant shifts in their positions. Yet note how, as in the Columbus Drama, there is a danger of students "flip-flopping" their positions—from being completely individually responsible for
what happens to not having responsibility. This would seem to be a product of dichotomous either/or thinking—something drama can alleviate if multiple views are explored.

**Space Traders Drama—Day Two**

On the next day the students were again role playing welfare recipients (or prisoners) who had been put into a holding prison to await being handed over to the aliens. The class observed certain prisoners through “one-way mirrors” as they discussed their fate on their last night on earth. We also did television coverage, interviewing family members, political pundits, and people on the street about their views of the impending “space trade.”

These strategies continued to humanize those who had previously been marginalized. Talking to relatives added perspectives that highlighted the financial, emotional, and social consequences if the people were allowed to go. These views were questioned by Jeff and me (as political pundits) and by students (as people on the street)—dialogue was occurring in the classroom for many students.

We then used tableaux in which small groups imagined the best possible scenario for the welfare recipients when they landed on the alien’s planet. Ron’s group imagined a kind of endless vacation land, sitting in the sun and being served by alien women. They provided the caption: “Like Winning the Lottery.” Then they were asked to imagine and create an image of the worst possible scenario. Ron was laid out on an operating table, while alien surgeons harvested organs from his body for their research. Their caption read: “We are lunch meat to the Aliens.” Nancy’s group imagined a best-case scenario of being able to start a new human colony in space, and a worst-case scenario of being enslaved.

This strategy was used by the students to create images of possible consequences for the people who would be traded. In the first episodes of the second day, students had looked into the future to imagine what might happen.

When the groups were asked whether they would, of their own free will, be willing to risk the worst possible scenario to gain the best possible one, every single student voted no. They discussed at length the costs even of the best scenario—being permanently removed from family members, human company, and even missing more mundane human ceremonies and events, such as Ron’s uselessness at “not being able to catch the World Series or Super Bowl.”
When the students reconsidered the present in the light of the future they radically altered their positions. A “present filled with its own future” is the unique dramatic experience (S. Langer 1953, 307). Because participants have to think of what might happen, they see their situation quite differently; although they are in the present, they are also in dialogue with their own images of the future. Those students who regularly create images of possible futures have learned to imagine likely consequences and to consider them as they consider possible actions. Those who do not can learn to do so through drama when they create and reflect on specific images, for example, through the tableaux strategy. Further, as they interact with peers and teachers, they can be assisted to imagine and consider more sophisticated and complex consequences as well as critique discourses that have previously been largely unexamined.

They once again became prisoners during their last night on earth. They were allowed to write one last letter. Most wrote to their families.

Ron instead elected to write to the Governor for leniency:

Dear Governor,

I really don’t think you have the right to send us to another planet. My family thinks I am a good person even though I committed a crime. I think you should not send us if we are willing to work or if our family is willing to pay to take care of us. If a member of your family was in prison would you want them to leave this planet and never see you again? Would you trade people you should love and respect for money? Would you? Probably not because you’d never see them again. You don’t have to do this, you know. You can still do the right thing and save us.

Sincerely,

A welfare person

Nancy wrote to the President:

Dear Mr. President,

I realize I do not have a job, but haven’t you ever heard of someone making a mistake or having problems beyond their control? Tell I have but I’ve learned and I’m solving my problems. Now I’m being sent to outer space. My family is coming with me just because I’m going but I’m worried that my children won’t get an education and will forget all about earth.

I didn’t think this is what America was about but now I know that it’s true. We were not all created equal. We’ll take advantage of the weak as long as it doesn’t hurt the strong. Also, do you realize you’re not solving the problem, you are running away from it?

P.S. It’s not fair. I have suffered for my problems that were not even my fault and now I am suffering a second time.
Ron, who had previously dismissed prisoners as “worthless,” now saw worth in individual people who should be “loved” and “respected.” He asked the governor to be ethical, “do the right thing,” and imagine someone as a member of his family—something he had not done previously.

Nancy had previously regarded all people on welfare as at fault for being lazy—thus, they should not complain if they had to be sacrificed for the benefit of others who were hard working. In her letter, she repositions the “weakness” of those on welfare to see not wholly individual “faults” but sociopolitical and power issues. She critiques the previous decision as an abuse of power by the “strong” and extends her argument to question the discourse of equality in American democracy.

**Space Traders Drama—Day Three**

On the final day of the drama, I entered as the warden to load up the welfare recipients (or prisoners) onto the alien spaceship. When Ron’s group staged a sit-down strike and refused to board the ship, I adopted the position that Ron, Nancy, and other students had voiced earlier. “You’re just worthless. I don’t know why the aliens want you—you are dirty rotten criminals who don’t want to work! You can’t even follow the rules of society. You are scum!” The students, many of whom had spoken these exact phrases, were angry and retorted that “You’re no right to talk to us like that!” and “You don’t even know our stories!” Ron yelled, “Did you ever think of helping instead of kicking people who are down?” Among the welfare group, one boy said, “You know nothing about work. You’ve never lost your job!”

When students have previously expressed strong opinions these can be ventriloquated later in drama to create powerful moments of intense ethical dialogue. The teacher can adopt and present students with a position that they have previously expressed. In effect, the students then encounter and face themselves. Such forceful statements must be distinguished by the teacher in role from merely hurling such positions at students. The students are not trapped in a humiliating put-down, but on the contrary are in a powerful ethical position to critique their previous attitudes and thus the discourses which supported these views.

As our final episode, we reconvened as the Senate to reconsider our vote. After a debate, the Senate voted not to send the welfare recipients. In Ron’s class twenty-five were against, with one still for the Space Trade and one abstention. When the Senators were interviewed by TV journalists about why they had made this sudden turnaround and how they were now going to solve the nation’s terrible problems, Ron said, “I’ve
changed my mind. You can’t decide for people. Even if we need the money we can’t make them go—they’re people too... and we have to consider their families and their feelings and what’s really fair... I think we would just be causing more problems than we solved.”

Later, in discussion the groups dealing with welfare discussed the complexity and justice of making people take jobs who had small children or who had trouble taking care of themselves. Although the students recognized that they could not find the solution, they did make various suggestions of how government policy could be changed to be more humane and yet solve the problems of helping everyone to engage in useful work.

In an incredibly trenchant discussion for a young adolescent, Nancy later admitted in an interview with Jeff that “I originally suggested this [Space Trade] but when you look at it from their [the welfare recipients’] point of view it’s really different. I thought we could eliminate welfare by getting rid of the welfare people. Now I see that this is a big ill—not a personal ill. We’ll still have the welfare problem because people will still be treated unfairly and people will still lose jobs and people will still have problems. It’s not the people—it’s human nature—it’s society. Eliminating welfare isn’t even the point to me now. The point is making it clear what we care about, how we want people to behave and how we will help them to do that before and when they have problems, because the problems will happen.”

The final episode and the subsequent discussion provided opportunities for Ron and Nancy to further explore and clarify their new views and critiques of discourses. Ron decided that in this case he could not make a decision for someone else. Nancy continues to shift her ground from an individual view of the “problem” of welfare to a societal perspective, which revolved around a central ethic of caring.

CONCLUSION

Maxine Greene (1990) has succinctly stated that by “Naming, articulating, affirming the dissonances and contradictions in our consciousnesses, we may be able to choose ourselves as ethical in unexpected ways.”

This chapter has illustrated how, in drama, teachers can assist students to discover both old and new viewpoints on matters of great significance. Further, teachers can protect students into challenging yet affirming dialogic experiences of internal conflict between views. In doing so, students are placed in powerful positions from which they can critique their previous views and forge new ones that they can carry into action.

As a teacher, I have come to realize the awe-full power that we have to enter into deep and significant conversations with students that change the
ethical ways they view the world and themselves. I continue to learn how
we can extend the circle of care and the web of relationships in the class-
room as we interact with students.

Some students have healthy, vibrant dynamic interactions with their peers,
the world, and with themselves. Other students are less open to dissenting
opinions and dissonant voices. However, all students have many more voices
to share than the ones they first show us—including more ethical ones.

Ethical selves can be chosen, forged, and burnished in drama—not
static individual selves, but dynamic relational selves that acknowledge and
embrace internal contradictions in their views. Bakhtin imagines the self
as “not a particular voice within, but a particular way of combining many
voices within” (Morson and Emerson 1990, 213). For him the self is “a
conversation, often a struggle, of discrepant voices with each other, voices
(and words) speaking from different positions and invested with different
degrees and kinds of authority” (Morson and Emerson 1990, 218).

In drama, students can explore and encounter multiple voices. As teach-
ers, we can assist our students to choose themselves as ethical characters
when we deepen and extend the conversations they have with each other,
with us, and with themselves.

NOTES

1. Mimi Chenfeld is an inspiring teacher who has written several books and many
articles on teaching. See especially Chenfeld 1983, 1987, and 1993. This quote
comes from a personal conversation.

2. For a discussion of conflict in drama see my 1994 article. Conflict in plays is most
often between characters. Teachers who think they are being “dramatic” when they
pitch one student’s views against another’s miss the point that conflict is always ex-
perienced internally by the audience in the theatre. In the classroom, it is only when
students internally experience conflicting points of view that drama exists.

3. Gavin Bolton, one of the foremost practitioners and theorists of drama, believes
that “change in understanding” is “the most significant learning directly attrib-
utable to drama” (1979, 43).

4. Jeff also noted how influential Neil Postman’s recent book The End of Education
has been for him.

5. I use the terms “morality” and “ethics” interchangeably. Philip Jackson in The
Practice of Teaching (1986) has shown how there are moral messages and meanings
in every classroom interaction and every teacher choice.

6. For an illuminating example, see Melanie Fine, Habits of Mind, 1995 p. 55. In a
tolerant progressive classroom where students talked about current issues when
faced with strong tensions between positions over Israeli Jews, students and
teacher became more entrenched in their own initial views.

7. The writings of Mikhail Bakhtin are central to the views of ethics explored in this
chapter. See my 1995 chapter for a more detailed analysis of ethics and drama.
Bakhtin's views are in contrast to mainstream ethical discourses based primarily
in Kantian morality which rely on notions of abstract principles of justice and
moral codes by which we attempt to live. Kohlberg's views on moral development
drew on Piaget's stages of development and were grounded in mainstream dis-
courses of ethics. Critiques of these positions, especially by Gilligan (1982), re-
oriented away from sole attention to abstract principles of justice and toward
specific contexts and the relationships between people. Bakhtin extends this cri-
tique further in arguing that we are only ethical when we act with attention to
context and a widening sense of our relationships with others.

8. Shifting perspectives, rupturing, and redirecting the flow of the drama serves to
heighten student awareness, to defamiliarize current understandings, to encour-
ge deep thought, and to maintain high levels of engagement in the drama ac-
tivities which are experienced as repeatedly challenging and fresh. This is true
when any kind of discourse or discourse convention is "ruptured" or changed in
mid-stream (Cazden, 1987; Lemke, 1982; Rabinowitz, 1987).

9. The books used included Rethinking Columbus, Jane Yolen's Encounters and Michael
Dorris' Morning Girl.

10. The term discourse is used in different disciplines with a variety of meanings. I
am not using it as a synonym for talk. I am primarily drawing on the writings of
Mikhail Bakhtin and Michel Foucault. For an overview of Foucault's ideas see
Rabinow 1984.

11. These drama activities were not an attempt to represent "the" Taino point of view
or stereotype them as "Indians." Rather, in the drama the students drew imagi-
natively on their research in order to shift their perspective to how Tainos might
have lived.

12. This idea is based on Bill Bigelow's account of his teaching in Rethinking Columbus
(1994).