MORE THAN TALK: A BAKHTINIAN PERSPECTIVE ON DRAMA IN EDUCATION AND CHANGE IN UNDERSTANDING

Brian Edmiston
The University of Wisconsin

Abstract
Drawing on the writings of the Russian theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin, the author argues that teachers can promote changes in understanding if they engage students in Bakhtinian dialogue. Bakhtin’s theories of dialogue are examined in some detail before these are applied to an example of a drama session with eleven year-old students.

Brian Edmiston grew up in Ireland and is a former full-time classroom teacher of both secondary students (in England) and primary-aged students (in the U.S.) where he continues to work regularly with students of all ages.

"Some people have the power to decide what gets told and what does not."

The words quoted above were spoken by a boy in a discussion at the end of a recent drama. Eleven-year-old students had said that they were interested in working on “castles and the Middle Ages.” This same boy had begun the work by trying to get his peers to laugh as he imagined he was a medieval knight. He also had not commented when we talked about what life was like in Europe in the Middle Ages. However, by the end of the drama he had actively discussed heroism and exchanged ideas with his peers about how we cannot be sure which stories from the past have been recorded and which were not. He had become highly committed to the dialogue which the class engaged and his understandings about both power and story seem to have changed. If we embrace Bakhtin’s theories, he and many of his peers “ideologies” had also been affected.

Gavin Bolton (1979: 45) has argued that “change in understanding” is “the most significant learning directly attributable to drama.” Though drama theorists and practitioners have implicitly agreed with Bolton, little has been written to explain how and why such changes in understanding might occur. The writings of Mikhail Bakhtin (1982, 1984, 1986, 1990, 1993) provide us with a framework for analyzing how meaning is made and understandings change in Drama in Education.

Bakhtin’s central theories of dialogue and his related ideas on discourse, point of view, meaning, authorship, acts, and ideology are all relevant in considering meaning-making in drama. Bakhtin argues that dialogue is much more than the conversational exchange of ideas. A dialogic interaction is a struggle to create meaning which is central to the way we think, understand, read, interact, form beliefs, acquire ideologies, and thus, for Bakhtin, “author” meaning. The terms dialogue and dialogic interaction will be
used interchangeably, but as I will use them in this paper they are not synonymous with talk. The change
in understanding which can occur in dialogue is much more extensive than a fleeting moment of insight or a
glimmer of recognition; in dialogue students may radically alter their sense of how they think about issues
and their relationship with them. It is closer to David Perkins’ (1988: 114) relational and “weblike” descrip-
tion of understanding; we understand when we appreciate how one view is placed in a web of relationships.

Changes in Ideology

Bakhtin argues that as we use language we always express values and attitudes; we cannot use language
without expressing opinions and adopting points of view about the topic being discussed; these are our
ideologies. Our language and thinking is always ideological.² Bakhtin’s use of the term ideology
includes the idea-systems, assumptions, or paradigms which are always within people’s language and
thought; the term goes beyond any specific political attitudes. How and why we use words is part of what
Bakhtin calls our discourse. Discourse is “language in its concrete living totality” (1984: 181). Our
discourse, our ideologies and dialogue are all interrelated. Others’ discourse suggests their ideologies to
us and our ideologies generate our discourse; new discourse and new understandings about ideologies are
generated as we interact in dialogue.

Earlier in the drama noted above (which I will refer to as the medieval drama), students had made a
tableau to represent a tapestry of “Heroism” in medieval life. The students interpreted the tapestry from
the position of archaeologists. They generated discourses about heroism as they created and reflected on
their images of knights rescuing royalty from dragons and poisoned cups. Their discourse suggested that
they did not question a patriarchal ideology about heroism.

Bakhtin argues that ideologies have been formed in all of our previous interactions with others.
Ideology has been “gradually and slowly wrought out of others’ words that have been acknowledged
and assimilated” (1981: 345). We position ourselves and find ourselves positioned in every interaction;
different positions give us different perspectives on life. We develop discourse about ideas as we act and
react, as we talk and write, and as we interact and reflect. Bakhtin goes further and argues that, “In all
areas of life and ideological activity, our speech is filled to overflowing with other people’s words” (1981:
337). In our discourses he argues that we “ventriloquate” the voices of others; we borrow not only their
phrases and words, but also their points of view which become integral to our ideological framework for
making sense of the world.³ Meanings of all the words, phrases and metaphors we use, remember, react
to, hear, read, and write are value-laden. The students’ views of medieval life were informed not only by
the particular books, movies, pictures, and stories they had encountered in school, but also by the implied
and expressed attitudes, opinions, perspectives and explanations in the discourses of the authors, their
teachers, and others.

Our ideologies need not remain fixed. As we engage in dialogue we actively re-form, forge and author
our ideologies as we encounter and react to different positions. Bakhtin (1981: 346) argues that, “Our
ideological development is an intense struggle within us for hegemony among various available verbal
and ideological points of view, approaches, directions and values.”

Though our views of the world are inextricably bound up with others’ perspectives, we do have agency.
We can choose though our choices are always limited. A person authors meaning in dialogue when in
response “the speaker populates [language] with his [sic] own intention, his own accent, when he appropri-
ates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention” (1981: 293). In dialogue we can
respond. We are always drawing on ideologies, however, if we allow others’ ideas and positions to affect our
thinking and then speak and/or act in response we will be forging our own new angle on the topic of concern.
In dialogue we can become more aware of patterns in our thinking and our attitudes towards issues. We may also become aware of viewpoints and opinions which we may regard as somehow natural or obvious; we may become more aware of the reality that those views, like all others, are actually constructed. In dialogue meanings cannot remain fixed; they are in process as one idea is affected by another in the struggle for meaning among interacting voices.

Change in understanding can thus go far beyond a superficial change in ideas; our ideologies and thus our ways of viewing the world can be changed and become more complex. However, Bakhtin argues that such changes will only occur in dialogic interactions.

**Internalizing Dialogue**

Dialogue (or a dialogic interaction) occurs as discourses intermingle. Dialogue is both an external and an internal experience. When we are talking with others, in a genuine dialogue we also internally experience a struggle to create meaning. We can be regarded as *internalizing dialogue*. In effect, we project into others’ positions and viewpoints and in doing so we experience from their perspective at the same time as from our own. In addition, there is a dialogue in our internal conflicts and debates as we deliberate about a problem; as we oppose one possibility with another, weigh options, and struggle to decide what to do, we listen to different discourses which we have internalized from previous interactions. If others are similarly internalizing dialogue, Bakhtin describes this as *interillumination* since one person’s views are enlightening another and vice versa.

However, we tend to resist internalizing dialogue. In our interactions with others we may focus our attention more on *their* patterns of thoughts than on our own; we may externalize debate rather than internalize it. We may concentrate more on dealing with their problems and their ideologies and less on how *our* conceptions and ideologies may need to change. Dialogue not only requires us to listen actively to others’ ideas, but also to accept confusion in our own ideas, to amend or let go of previous patterns of thought, to acknowledge that other points of view are valid and thus engage in a productive struggle to create and embrace new ways of looking at the world.

Dialogic interactions can occur in drama. If we want students to change their understandings then internalized dialogues must occur. In an initial discussion with the eleven-year-old students some students shared factual information and expressed opinions. However, there was almost no dialogue. Students did not seem to be listening to each other; at best they made comments, but no one asked a question. No one picked up, amended or commented on another person’s idea. In contrast, by the end of the third session the students were hearing, adding to, amending, and disagreeing with the ideas which I and other students were presenting. At the beginning of the work there was a sharing of fixed ideas, whereas by the end there was dialogue and change in understanding.

**Dialogue and Monologue**

Bakhtin contrasts dialogue with monologue. Monologue (or monologic discourse) presents fixed non-negotiable meanings. At its extreme, monologism “denies the existence outside of itself of another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities” (Bakhtin 1984: 292). Monologue is when ideas are given the status of exclusive truth or presented as something which ought to be accepted without question. People who view themselves as final authorities, from dictators to teachers, frequently use monologic discourse. They might say, “That’s the way it is and the way it is supposed to be.” Textbooks, dictionaries, constitutions and confessions are texts which can similarly be presented or interpreted as giving fixed meanings or unalterable truths. What may be called *monologic interactions* may give an
appearance of dialogue but in reality the parties remain unchanged by the process of interaction since there is no genuine dialogue, no interillumination and no change in ideologies. In contrast, what may be called dialogic interactions do result in ideological change among the parties; in dialogue we change our understandings about discourse. Monologue is undermined when ideas are in dialogue. This occurs because dialogic interactions, in Bakhtin’s phrase, dialogize discourse. In other words, when we dialogue about a topic we will change our understandings about the topic in the sense that we see ideas less monologically.

Bakhtin argues that all meanings are actually dialogic because meanings can never be finally fixed no matter how much we might wish they were; meanings are always provisional since words are always re-interpreted again in further dialogue. “Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth” (Bakhtin 1984: 293). For example, the word heroism changes its meaning depending on who and when people are thinking about it. Monologic discourse ignores or denies the need for others to interpret rules, laws, words, and all ideas of the way things ought to be. The meaning of heroism in a dictionary or for a medieval king may be very static but their meanings can actually always be reinterpreted by others.

The problem with the fixed ideas of monologue is when it is not recognized that we choose to fix ideas and suspend dialogue temporarily. This results in monologic discourse if we fail to realize that our ideas are provisional, in process and can always become more complex. In Bakhtin’s words,” … there can never be a first nor a last meaning; [anything that can be understood] always exists among other meanings as a link in the chain of meaning … this chain continues infinitely” (1986: 146). The dictionary is useful as a tool for making meaning but not as a dictator of meaning. The king can make pronouncements but his ideas can be challenged.

Dialogic thinking is dynamic and open; it is the reforming of ideas like water continually recycling and combining with elements in nature. Monologic thinking is static and closed; it is the crystallization of ideas like thinking that water always was and always will be ice. In dialogue students can open up meanings which had seemed closed and raise questions about issues which perhaps had not occured to them before. In other words, when students dialogue about a topic their understandings will change in the sense that they will see meaning more in process, more fluid and less fixed. They may realise something they had not before - that there is always a place for an interpretation.

Monologue is actually more prevalent than we might expect. Political debates, talkshow discussions, family conversations, and drama sessions can be highly monologic interactions. Participants and teachers may be so caught up with giving their opinions that their understandings remain unchanged; they do not allow others’ ideas to intermingle with their own ideas. Everyone not only encounters but uses monologue every day. Ideas are always in a constant tension between dialogue and monologue. We continually overgeneralize and undergeneralize in our thinking - we have to do so in order to conceptualize.⁴ Our ideas about heroism and power include and exclude different interpretations of events, relationships, and contexts. Everyone has different understandings about the same ideas because we all have had different experiences and have formed our understandings differently. As we change our understandings we always struggle between looking for difference and similarity, between seeing diversity and unity, between undergeneralizing thus missing commonality and overgeneralizing thus missing individuality.⁵ Making meaning in dialogue is a dance between seeing similarity and difference - finding one illuminates the other.

If a monologue of similarity is, however, seen within a dialogue of difference, the discourse is dialogized. In the medieval drama, students had expressed similar views about medieval life - knights are heroes
when they kill dragons. Later in the drama the students questioned the assumption that this was the only type of heroism. The meaning was not denied it was just recontextualized as part of a dialogue. In other words, the tendency towards monologue in the discourse about heroism was dialogized.

Monologic discourse needs to be resisted. This is because its tendency to deny alternatives can reify our thinking and actually begin to dehumanize us. The more monologic our discourse the more we fail to become the authors of our own understandings; the more we tend to become automaton passive receivers of other people’s understandings. Our understandings of what heroism is or our ideas about who has the power to control meaning-making will atrophy if we never dialogue about these ideas. In dialogue we literally re-cognize monologue as such because we re-think our understandings. In dialogue about discourse our tendencies to solidify and fix ideas are resisted as meanings become more fluid. Our understandings of heroism, power, and any other discourse will become less simplistic and more complex. Thus, dialogic interactions involve not only dialogue between voices but also dialogue about discourse. In dialogue, monologic ideology inherent in discourse can be recognised and re-formed.

Dialogizing Student Monologic Discourse

Maxine Greene (1991: 32) argues that, “the arts offer opportunities for perspective, for perceiving alternative ways of transcending and being in the world, for refusing the automatism that overwhelms choice.” In other words, the arts can resist monologic discourse, dialogize discourse and thus give choices where none may have been perceived. Theatre can offer choices of interpretation to audiences; participants in classroom drama can have opportunities to both interpret and act on their choices. Resisting monologic discourse in drama does not mean that the teacher should deny it. Students’ monologic ideas (which inherently imply little choice of interpretation) will always be present. However, these should not be denied; they need to be dialogized.

Students’ monologic ideas are useful touchstones; they provide entry points into enquiry and future directions for the work. Monologic interactions can be very divisive and counterproductive in the classroom if they degenerate into yelling or other behaviours which are destructive of cooperative group work. But if we can become aware of students’ monologic discourse we will uncover likely productive areas to explore in drama work. Even though students may engage in thoughtful dialogue about a topic there will always be monologic assumptions they seem to be making which we may decide would provide an appropriate future direction.

Much of my early work with classes revolves around attempting to discover students’ monologic discourses within a topic. Later work dialogizes discourse and promotes the internalization of dialogue. Monologue may be clear from discussion. In work with ten-year-old students on health care, the students felt it was wrong not to provide universal coverage for all people at all times. The drama work focused on having to prioritize procedures and make impossible choices because of financial constraints. Sometimes monologic discourse is revealed in a frivolous tone and little willingness for serious thought or exchange of ideas. Adults who wanted to imagine they were passengers on a cruise ship giggled their way through difficulties with passengers and crew. However, when they were repositioned as lawyers representing the shipowners concerned with possible negligence claims by passengers, they engaged in serious dialogue about safety conditions on the ship. On other occasions, monologue will be implied in the words and images the students create in serious drama work. In the medieval drama, students’ work on the tapestry suggested that they shared fairly restricted ideas about heroism, bravery, and medieval society. As I planned the remainder of the drama work I thought about how I could enable the students to begin to question and extend these ideas.
Dialogic Sequencing

We can sequence interactions with and among students in order to bring about changes in students’ understandings. This is what I call dialogic sequencing. In doing so we both internalize dialogue and dialogize discourse. If we do not promote the conflict of ideas in internal dialogue then exchanges between students may become an unproductive us-against-them conflict. If we do not dialogize discourse then students’ monologic thinking in their previous discourse will remain largely unchanged.

Dialogic sequencing involves three cycles to drama work: 1) students develop some extended discourse about aspects of a topic from one position, 2) they develop additional discourse about similar aspects from at least one different position, and 3) their discourses are dialogized and dialogue is internalized. If students’ monologic thinking is dialogized and they internalize dialogue then students’ understandings will change and their ideologies will become more complex.

Students always adopt positions in drama work from which they observe, act, reflect and interpret events. In dialogic sequencing the students take up several positions. Position has similarities to both role7 and Dorothy Heathcote’s (1984) notions of frame4; I find the term position more useful and less confusing. Part of our negotiations with students at the beginning of work is to agree on an initial position or point of view for them to adopt.

We cannot avoid adopting positions when we make sense of actions and what we experience and observe. However, I do not intend to imply that when participants take a position they are or should be emotionally detached from events either as they are happening or in retrospective reflection. On the contrary, I would argue that it is only when students have had significant and emotionally charged experiences that they are able to move beyond superficiality and experience depth and breadth in a particular position. William Gaskill (1980) describes such experiences as vivid “moments of realisation” and these are integral to all discourses and ideologies. In such moments, the participants are feeling and thinking as well as seeing from a particular point of view. As the medieval drama progressed, more and more students seemed to have such experiences, many of which seemed to be intensely felt.

In the medieval drama students initially took up the position of contemporary guides at a medieval castle. As guides, the students could imagine the details of a castle and could also observe and interpret for a tourist. Later the students agreed to adopt the position of archaeologists. Though they talked about the same objects and events as the guides, as archaeologists they talked about them quite differently. The students had changed their position and thus the way in which they viewed and interpreted events.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Cycle of the Medieval Drama</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In pairs the students imagined that they were guides showing tourists round a castle. The students drew pictures of what they found in the castle: swords, crowns, robes, goblets and a chained Bible. Then as archaeologists they set up and shared what had been found as if at a medieval exhibition. They agreed that the exhibition included a tapestry found hidden in a vault with the subject of “heroism.” They worked in small groups to create the tapestry in tableaux. From the position of the museum curator I asked them as archaeologists to interpret the panels of the tapestry. They were agreed that they depicted heroic deeds.</td>
<td>Students developed discourses from several positions about medieval life and heroism in particular. They did so from the relatively detached positions of guides and archaeologists who were presenting artifacts and information about the period as well as from the more involved positions of the people represented in the tapestry. Some of their work suggested monologic discourse. One recurring image in the tapestry was that of knights rescuing royalty from likely death. Heroes were male. Heroes were knights. Heroic deeds were rescuing royalty from likely death e.g. from the jaws of a dragon and from a poisoned cup.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During and after the first cycle of the drama I neither questioned the students’ ideas nor discussed issues such as heroism, bravery, or social hierarchies. I had enabled them to adopt positions on aspects of medieval life from which they could develop some discourse. In order to dialogize their discourse about heroism I could have encountered them in their position of archaeologists (for example, from the position of a woman who wanted to include female warriors in the exhibition) or I could have stopped the drama and reflected in discussion. However, if I had used either of these strategies at this stage in the drama there would have been no shared or extended alternative discourse with which the students could dialogue. In addition, there would have been less likelihood of internalizing dialogue; students might have just defended their positions and views rather than allowing alternative ideas to change their understandings. The first positions the students adopted were more similar than different - they both viewed European medieval life from the point of view of the nobility. I wanted the students to view an aspect of medieval life and act from a very different position. Thus, in the second cycle I chose to switch the students’ positions. I did so to enable them to create and have alternative experiences of aspects of the work which had appealed to them - saving lives and the threat of danger.

**Second Cycle of the Medieval Drama**

The students eagerly agreed to imagine that they lived in medieval times in a village which was a day’s walk from a castle. In dramatic playing with and without my interactions the students chose and worked at trades and occupations. Some were smiths making armor and tools, others made cloth or pots; all helped bring in the harvest. I asked what difficulty might have arisen for them to overcome; they chose a drought. They decided that not everyone would survive. They imagined that the water became more and more scarce. They prioritized needs and shared the water they had; dug for a well, buried the dead, sang and danced for rain, and celebrated when the drought ended. In pairs, as grandparents they narrated the story of the survival of the village to their grandchildren and then switching pairs the grownup children narrated the tale again to the next generation of grandchildren.

**Analysis**

All students developed more discourse about medieval life, but from different positions - those of peasants who lived in a village. All students had extended experiences and the opportunity to develop views, and attitudes in the multiple interactions which centered on village life and the survival of the drought. In retelling the account of the survival of the drought, the students interpreted the meaning of those events for themselves and their grandchildren. In retelling, the students also experienced the passage of time so that the events became “only stories” in the memories of villagers.

In the second cycle of the drama all students created additional discourse about life in the Middle Ages from very different positions than those they adopted in the first cycle. Many of the experiences were shared by all students, for example, gathering the harvest or celebration and most experiences were shared by some, for example digging for water or singing for rain. Thus, students had opportunities to develop extended and shared discourses which would be very different from those expressed in the first cycle. They were, however, alternative discourses on similar aspects of life in a medieval society.

In planning the third cycle of the work I wanted to give the students the opportunity to allow these different discourses to intermingle. I wanted students to dialogue not only with me or with each other, but also with themselves. I wanted them to have to internalize any dialogue we would have. To do so, I positioned the students by encountering them as the king’s representative.
As teachers, we position students when we interact with them. When we take up a position we also implicitly require the students to react to our point of view. They react not only to what we say or do but also to the position we are adopting. In doing so they position themselves in reaction. As the king’s representative I took up a point of view on previous events. When the students interacted with me they positioned themselves relative to this point of view.

**Third Cycle of the Medieval Drama**

In the third cycle of the drama I took up the position of a representative from the king who was travelling the countryside long after the drought collecting tales of heroism to be depicted in a tapestry which was to be made at the court. He arrived in their village and asked them if they had any tales of heroes. For the next 20 minutes we dialogued about heroism. They wanted to tell me about the great drought and how their great-grandparents had survived it; they were adamant that this was a tale of heroism which should be included. The king’s representative opposed them. He was sceptical of what had happened and confused as to why they were telling him the story. He asked if a dragon had been overcome, if anyone of noble blood had been rescued, if any knights had helped them. The students said that not only knights but anyone, male or female, could be a hero. It was also argued that anyone may need to be rescued, not only royalty. He left promising to tell the king what they had said.

**Analysis**

The students were repositioned by the arrival of the king’s representative. I chose to return to the topic of heroism directly. I wondered how the students would interpret what happened during the drought from the perspective of the nobility’s discourse of heroism which they had developed in the first cycle. To do so I chose to adopt a position which would require the students to bring all of their previous perspectives into focus at the same time. The king’s representative required them to explain to him why they thought an action was heroic. He also referred directly and indirectly to ideological positions they had adopted in the first cycle of the drama.

A discussion ended the work. They all thought that the story of the village would never have been written down or recorded in an official document like a tapestry. They talked about how some stories never get recorded. One student said she had just realised that stories like folktales may be just as true as the pictures or words we see in books. The student previously quoted said he realised that some people have the power to decide which stories are recorded and which are not. Now the students were able to reflect on the work as a whole and make broader connections about history, story, and power relationships in general.

In the medieval drama students’ discourse was developed in the first two cycles of the work from different positions. In the third cycle and in the final discussion dialogue was internalized and discourse was dialogized.

In the first two cycles of the drama students developed discourses about European medieval life and heroism in particular. They developed their discourses from at least two very different positions: those of the nobility and those of the peasants. In the third cycle, the students’ discourses from the previous two cycles were dialogized as they interacted with the king’s representative. As they reinterpreted events for him the students were dialoguing about the ideas, actions, and attitudes they had experienced and expressed both when they had made the tapestry and when they survived the drought. They were dialoguing about
the previous events in the drama; the subject of their dialogue was their previous discourses. What they talked about was not new. However, the position from which they viewed these events was different.

In addition, much of the students' dialogue was internalized. Because the students were encountering the king’s representative they could not avoid engaging in dialogue. Opportunities to internalize the dialogue were created for the students because as the king’s representative I made repeated reference to actions, points of view, and ideas which they had previously adopted. Thus, students could not avoid having to reconcile the discourses they had created as archaeologists with the discourses they had created as peasants. They could not avoid having to reconsider their previous positions.

**Teacher Functions**

I regard my function as teacher as different depending on the cycle of the drama. In the medieval drama I was initially more of a facilitator to enable them to develop their discourses about medieval life from initial positions. I was less concerned with what their ideologies might be than with enabling them to express and extend their positions. In the third cycle I was representing an ideological position which the students had already articulated. I was also enabling a dialogue between previous positions to occur so that previous discourse could be dialogized and thus re-examined, re-considered and re-thought.

In the third cycle I represented the noble position but drew on the students' ideas for what to say. The dialogic interaction between noble and peasant positions on heroism was not an us-against-them exchange of monologic views. I was giving back to them what they had already said and done. My purpose was not to contradict them but to enable them to explore their own internal conflicts and contradictions between one discourse and another. An observer of the third cycle of the drama would have been impressed by how much the students were engaged in dialogue with each other and with the teacher. However, an observer would not have realized that students were dialoguing with themselves as much as with the teacher or with each other. They were having to weigh two very different points of view on heroism, both of which they had adopted: those represented by the tapestry and those represented by the village.

I initially positioned myself as completely in agreement with the viewpoint which had been represented in the tapestry. I also referred directly to what they told me about their survival story as well as indirectly to everything which I as teacher (though not as king's representative) also knew. I could thus challenge, support, or question points of view as I upgraded some ideas and belittled others. In addition, I could introduce more perspectives on heroism. However, I was always mindful of my purpose: to deepen and extend their dialogue on what is a hero.

The teacher’s overarching function is to facilitate dialogue. Doing so through dialogic sequencing is a cyclical process which is never completed - we just choose to stop at certain points.

In every drama students can be enabled to develop discourses from one position and then another: the students will develop multiple perspectives on many concerns. The monologic discourse of students will be dialogized if they allow other viewpoints to change their way of thinking. If their discourses are dialogized and students are placed in positions where they have to reconcile conflicting perspectives on a topic then change in understanding will occur.

**Conclusion**

Bakhtin’s theories have great significance for Drama in Education. His central theory of the dialogic nature of meaning-making complicates notions of what changes in understanding might be for students and also how we as teachers might bring these about through drama.
Applying Bakhtin's ideas to Drama in Education places the power and responsibility for understanding firmly with each student. However, this is in the context of the continual need for teachers to engage students in genuine dialogues both with each other and with themselves. In doing so we can remind students and ourselves of the need to resist the tendency to reify meaning. We can never be certain that students' understandings have changed. However, we can know that the circumstances for change are present if our interactions with the students and our sequencing of the drama are dialogic.

There is no single understanding of anything to be discovered, and no simple conclusion to either drama work or to an academic paper. We can decide at some point to pause in the dialogue, to present a voice for others to dialogue with, and in Bakhtin's (1990, 1993) phrase to "become answerable" for our current understandings. It is in this spirit that I close this paper.

Works Cited

Footnotes

1 John O’Toole has considered Bolton’s claim in some detail in Chapter 8 of his recent book *The Process of Drama: Negotiating Art and Meaning*. He does so as part of his extensive discussion of dramatic meaning making. He notes the way in which meaning-making is collective and thus limited because it is socially negotiated.

2 Vygotsky (1978) argued that thought and language are inextricably interconnected.

3 Useful parallels can be drawn between Bakhtin’s theory of ideology and Pierre Bordieu’s (1991) central concept of the “habitus.” In his Introduction to Bordieu’s book, John Thompson describes the habitus as “a set of dispositions… inculcated, structured, durable, generative, and transposable” (12). By virtue of the habitus, “individuals are already predisposed to act in certain ways, pursue certain goals, avow certain tastes, and so on” (17).

4 Piaget first proposed the process of constructing understandings as an interplay between assimilation and accommodation. See Gruber & Voneche (1977) for a collection of Piaget’s most significant writings. We overgeneralize and see similarities as we assimilate new ideas; we undergeneralize and see differences as we accommodate new ideas.

5 For an illuminating analysis of the need for contradiction and struggle in the creation of meaning see Peter Elbow (1986).

6 In proposing dialogic sequencing I am relying, in particular, on Bakhtin’s (1981, 1984) analysis of the structure of the novel.

7 I find the term position much more useful than the term role. I find the term role increasingly problematic since it suggests too static a meaning of what students do as they interact in drama. Students are ideally engaged in a dynamic process of repeatedly positioning themselves and being repositioned as they interact with each other and with the teacher.

8 Heathcote drew on the writings of Goffman (especially 1974) and indirectly on Bateson (1972) in developing ideas about “frame.” She argued that frame was a central concept in thinking about drama; unfortunately she wrote little about the topic beyond brief references in her collected writings (1984). Kate Denning’s (1993) recent article is a useful overview. Heathcote’s nine “frame distances” are broad ways of categorizing positions from which we make sense of events. Frame has also been usefully analyzed and applied by Carroll (1986), O’Toole & Haseman (1988), and O’Toole (1992).