EDUCATIONAL DRAMA and LANGUAGE ARTS
WHAT RESEARCH SHOWS

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Chapter 6

Repositioning Views/
Reviewing Positions
Forming Complex Understandings
in Dialogue

Brian Edmiston and Jeffrey Wilhelm

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

The words quoted above were spoken by Ron, a thirteen-year-old student, as he talked about the two forty-five-minute drama sessions that Brian led with him and his friend Buddy as part of their inquiry into the Vietnam War. They were two of the thirty students in Jeff's seventh-grade classrooms who, near the end of the 1994-95 school year, opted to use drama with Brian and/or Jeff as the students pursued their own research.

In this chapter we show how, in the dialogues that occurred in drama, students formed complex understandings. We argue that understandings are “better” when they are more complex and thus, for example, more “generative,” more “open-ended,” and “depend[ent] not only on more knowledge, but also on finer distinctions” (Perkins 1989, 128). We agree with Elbow (1986), who argues that rather than rest in an acquisitive desire merely to know “more,” it is more important to embrace a sense of the “unknown”
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(242). In recognizing what we do not know, we become receptive to dialogue with other views and interpretations. Like our student Ron, we begin to think about facets we'd "never thought about" and become "more open" to other opinions that may change and deepen our understandings.

Ron and Buddy seemed to assume that we understand a topic as complex as the Vietnam War if we know sufficient facts, have a reasoned opinion that is supported by examples, and can defend a position in discussion. Before they used drama, their inquiries led them to acquire more information and solidify their strong antiwar position.1 Buddy, for example, was initially incredulous that anyone could have supported the war. He had stated: "Who could be for a war? A war you chose to be in and that had nothing to do with you?"

They were initially most interested in the 1960s and 1970s music associated with the "protest movement" against United States' involvement in the Vietnam War; in the drama sessions they imaginatively entered into and explored in dialogue some of the social contexts in which the protest music was first heard. They decided to begin their drama session by imagining that they were musicians playing at a protest outside an army recruitment center. They wanted to experience being arrested and then agreed to imagine that they were army personnel talking about the problems being caused by the protesters; concerns with access soon turned to concerns about violence. Over two drama sessions, they adopted additional perspectives: political advisers to the president; American soldiers in Vietnam; Vietnamese villagers; and, finally, the members of a family with one son who was in Vietnam and another who was engaged in antiwar protests. The boys engaged physically, mentally, and emotionally as they interacted and dialogued with each other, with Brian, and, later, with Jeff. They viewed their topic from multiple positions, reviewed their original positions, and changed their understandings of the war and their relationships to it.

Ron's and Buddy's words illustrate the potential of dialogue in drama to make understandings more complex. Ron discovered that other opinions can be "strong" even though he "might disagree with them." He also formed a new opinion that was "stronger" but "less sure" than his previous one. Buddy similarly developed a moral uncertainty that seemed to complicate his previous
superficial sense of war as being just "wrong." He noted that "lots of people would argue that wars can do a lot of good, make things better and all. Some people would say that some wars, like World War II, well there was no way out of it. It had to be fought and maybe we avoided it for too long which hurt the people the Nazis had under their thumbs." Yet he also wondered, "Maybe wars are always bad, but what they do can be good. It's so confusing!"

After considering the classroom context, the research design, and theoretical perspectives on dialogue and learning, we discuss the following aspects of forming complex understandings:

- the adoption of informant and researcher positions
- the adoption of additional points of view
- the discovery of connections between students' own lives and those of others in books and in everyday life
- the exploration of new questions
- the promotion of further research
- the effect on students' views of inquiry—fostering student engagement and motivation as well as the creation of a community of exploration and inquiry

The Classroom Context

Ron and Buddy were 2 of the 130 12- and 13-year-old students in Jeff's rural Wisconsin middle school classroom during the 1994–95 school year. Jeff's 5 seventh-grade classrooms were organized around integrated inquiry-based curricula. The students' inquiries were part of a unit on "social change and civil rights," their fourth and final unit of study in the school year. Students in each of Jeff's classrooms worked in teams of 2 to 7 students on both individual and group projects. There were 30 teams, and their findings were shared with peers through the use of hypermedia and video. Teams were self-selected and they determined their own inquiry questions based on their interests within the parameters of the curricular unit. The team projects in this inquiry unit culminated in the creation of a "video documentary" on an aspect of civil rights. The video was presented to all of their peers in the seventh grade as well as to students of the same age in another rural Wisconsin school.
Throughout the school year, Jeff focused students' attention on the questions that arose for them as they read, wrote, and talked in class. He followed Dewey's ([1902] 1956) insistence that inquiry begins with content but also with what interests students (11). He agreed with Bakhtin (1986), who notes that, "Without one's own [serious and sincere] questions one cannot creatively understand anything other or foreign." The students' questions crystallized the problems and difficulties that students experienced as they thought about their units of inquiry. These were formalized into "research questions," which organized and focused students' individual and group inquiry over several weeks. Toward the end of the year the research questions also became a locus for drama sessions with Brian and Jeff.

The research questions for each team grounded students as they inquired into the "problems, issues, and concerns" of different people's lives (Beane 1995a, 622). After several weeks of considering the theme of "social change and civil rights," the students wanted to know, for example, about the "lives" of protesters during the Vietnam War, Jews in the Holocaust, people caught up with the Mafia, enslaved people escaping on the Underground Railroad, the African American baseball star Hank Aaron, and those who were out of work during the Great Depression. The students' research questions included the following:

- What was the most important protest music against the Vietnam War?
- What was life like in the concentration camps?
- Why would anyone ever join the Mafia and do things like kill people?
- What was the Underground Railroad all about?
- How did Hank Aaron get to be so great at baseball?
- What was so bad about the Depression?

During this particular school year, Brian had helped Jeff and his students use drama to create experiences that were an integral and coherent part of their classroom inquiries. Throughout the first semester Jeff explored with students how they could use several
simple dramatic conventions for the representation and interpretation of texts. These included:

- dramatization of episodes through story theater
- use of tableaux to depict still images of significant scenes visually
- pair interviews of characters from stories
- writing as a character, writing scenes that could have been in a story
- games that explored characters’ emotions
- choral montages

Brian then introduced extended uses of drama with whole classes of students during one week in March. In May, students were researching their final projects. Teams scoured the school library for information, read stories, interviewed relatives and other informants, and began to write and rehearse scripts. Students began to use drama on their own as a research technique and as a way of representing and exploring what they knew. Many students were also keen to use drama again with a teacher. When Jeff checked for interest in early May, thirty students in nine of the thirty teams from the five classes wanted to work with Brian or Jeff to use drama as they pursued their research questions. Brian and Jeff led drama sessions with teams; students continued their research; and in June, after four weeks, teams presented their video documentaries to conclude their inquiries.

Drama had a critical effect on the quality and depth of the students’ inquiries. The webs of meaning spun with students in drama created significant changes in their understandings of the issues they were researching.

Research Design

This was a collaborative teacher-researcher study between Jeff, the classroom teacher, and Brian, a university professor. Our research questions were:
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- How effective was drama in the facilitation of students' ongoing classroom inquiries?
- How effective was drama in enabling changes in students' understandings of the issues they were researching?

These questions were qualitative; Jeff paid more attention to the first question, Brian more to the second.

Our individual field notes recorded our teaching plans, our conversations, students' comments, and our personal reflections. We also gathered data from students in formal and informal interviews and asked for their written reflections.

We both kept detailed field notes. Jeff throughout the whole year, Brian during the week in which he led teams in their drama sessions. We talked on the telephone, and we talked briefly before and after each of the drama sessions. Brian led forty-five-minute drama sessions with seven groups and Jeff led sessions with two additional groups.

In addition to our field notes, several forms of data were collected from students throughout the project. First, the students kept a learning log throughout their research. This included a log of their activities and reflections after each drama session, whether it was conducted by Brian, Jeff, or on their own. Drama sessions were also audio- or videotaped as the situation allowed. Some students watched or listened to these tapes and commented or reflected on them. As part of monitoring each group's progress in their inquiry and video documentary work, the groups had to provide Jeff with a daily plan and an exit report of what they had achieved that day. Jeff often conferenced and interviewed the groups about their research, which included a focus on their drama work. At the end of the project, Jeff asked all of the students who used drama to fill out a survey sheet. When the video documentaries were presented, each student filled out a presentation sheet to make sure that they were prepared and had reflected on their project. In addition, all students submitted a final portfolio of their best work from the year with a letter that identified and analyzed what the portfolio demonstrated about their learning. All of the students in this study included their video, learning log, and research materials (notes, article copies, photographs, artifacts, and
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so on) as part of their portfolio, and all specifically addressed their drama research in their letters, though this was not required. All of these materials were considered as data.

Jeff conducted a preliminary domain analysis of the data as part of his year-end evaluations (Spradley 1980). He was able to share this analysis with the students and get their input and comments about the emerging themes. Later he conducted a systematic domain analysis and identified themes. Brian also conducted ethnographic analyses of the material.

Brian was an “action researcher” and a “reflective drama practitioner.” He was reflective both during the process of teaching and in retrospect as he planned each subsequent drama session and reflected on his actions in the classroom. He was researching his own teaching—paying attention to how the drama could be structured and how he could interact with the students in order to enable them to pursue questions that were important to them (Edmiston and Wilhelm 1996). He was particularly interested in making his interactions with students dialogic in order to promote more complex understandings (Edmiston 1994, 1995).

Our intentions and research purposes were clear to the students. Our idea for this study arose in the process of classroom activity, and we shared our emerging interest with the students. However, rather than make our research questions central, we foregrounded the functional aspect of drama for the students—drama was primarily presented as another way of conducting research through which students could explore questions that were of interest to them.

Theoretical Perspectives

The sort of drama with which we are primarily concerned is “process drama” (O’Neill 1995), which is grounded in the pioneering work of Dorothy Heathcote (see especially Johnson and O’Neill 1984) and Gavin Bolton (see especially 1979, 1984b). As its name implies, process drama is concerned with the process of creating drama together. Process drama “freezes a problem in time” in a fictional context, and students engage in the process of dealing with the problem. Students imagine that they are people who are “here, now, and under pressure to act in situations” (Johnson and O’Neill
1984, 115, 129). Ron and Buddy, for example, imagined that they were the parents of a soldier who were pressed to explain to him the actions of their other son who was a war protestor.

Rather than being concerned with following a script or performing for an external audience, in a process approach students and a teacher improvise fictional interactions and compose images to share with each other. Students function not only like actors, but also like directors and audience members (Edmiston 1993b). They do so to create fictional drama worlds in which they can explore questions that arise for the group about a particular topic (Edmiston and Wilhelm 1996). The teacher is integral to the interactions, shaping encounters like a director, setting up scenes like a stage manager, responding like an audience, and engaging with students like a fellow actor (Johnson and O'Neill 1984). In process drama several scenes or encounters are sequenced by the teacher so that students experience a topic from several angles (Wolf, Edmiston, and Enciso 1996). Together, students and teacher can go far beyond the superficiality of a "skit" to create moments of intensity that, though always in process, are nevertheless part of an experience of dramatic art (Edmiston 1992, O'Neill 1995).

The students we worked with regarded themselves as "researchers" in their ongoing inquiries—including the inquiries they conducted in the drama sessions. They considered themselves, and most important were treated by us, as "experts" inquiring into questions that were important to them. Students drew on their process drama sessions as they planned and scripted their video documentaries. Many teams turned their process work into a product as they videotaped themselves and performed for their peers. However, an external audience was only a tangential aspect of the drama sessions.

Underlying our classroom practice were constructivist and social constructivist theoretical stances toward learning and understanding. Piaget (Gruber and Voneche 1977) notes that as we experience the world we individually construct our conceptual understandings. Vygotsky (1987, 1978) extends this position in recognizing that interpersonal interactions are integral to the construction of meanings. As Wells and Chang-Wells (1992) put it, "knowledge is collaboratively constructed, validated, and modified in the purposeful activities in which [people] engage with others" (28). Harste,
Short, with Burke (1988) summarize one of Vygotsky's key ideas that "learning begins in social interaction and . . . these social processes become internalized and determine our thinking processes" (12). Thus, we took as a given the need to facilitate productive classroom social interaction among students and teachers. Such interactions were central to the drama sessions.

Students interacted in small groups throughout the year and spent a majority of their time talking, writing, reading, planning, reflecting, and making presentations with others. Students were given ample opportunities to construct understandings on their own through these activities and a variety of other artistic activities as well as hypermedia reports on the computer. However, knowing that learning happens between people as much as it occurs alone, Jeff expected students to work with others in cooperative groups. These groups ranged in size and duration—from pairs who talked together for a few minutes to the teams of two to seven students who researched a topic over several weeks.

Throughout the year, and especially in the drama sessions, the students were encouraged to consider the social contexts of information critically. A social constructivist perspective on learning can extend beyond facilitation of students' group interactions to an uncovering and analysis of the social contexts in which meanings have been previously constructed (Bakhtin 1981). Thus, we were much less interested in students' knowledge of factual information than in their analysis of the social, historical, political, and cultural contexts in which meanings are located, generated, and used. Drama was integral to this critique. Drama contexts gave students experiences in different contexts and enabled them to see from novel perspectives; in drama the students drew on their prior understandings but also generated new ways of thinking about topics.

A social constructivist stance toward learning foregrounds the need for social interactions that enable us to build on and extend previous understandings as we grapple with others to make meaning of events and situations. However, Bakhtin (1981, 1986) stresses that our social interactions do not necessarily generate new understandings—we may just become more entrenched in previous positions. For Bakhtin, new links of meaning are forged only when we engage in "dialogue"—where two perspectives intermingle to generate new points of view, new positions, and
new understandings. As students imagine the world from different people's points of view they adopt different perspectives on events; they dialogue and create new understandings when they encounter their own previous points of view or the perspectives presented by others—students and teachers.

Imagining the world through others' eyes is essential if we are to understand some of the complexities of other people, times, and places. If we want to create our own understandings and not passively receive other people's views, then we need to experience two points of view—our own initial perspective and the perspective of another person. As Bakhtin (1986) emphasizes, we will only create new understandings if at the same time as we experience the world through others' eyes we also look at what we are attempting to understand. As he puts it, "In order to understand, it is immensely important for the person to be located outside the object of his or her creative understanding—in time, in space, in culture" (7). Much of drama's power comes from students' being able to experience at the same time the world both from others' points of view "inside" an experience and from "their" position—this enables them to be both "inside" and "outside" an experience. Students' interactions are "dialogic" when they experience this double perspective, what Bakhtin (1981) calls being "double voiced" (324) and States (1985) calls having "binocular vision" (8). More complex understandings are forged in an internal dialogue as students experience the differences and dissonances between these points of view.

Bakhtin's theories echo Heathcote's insight that both drama and education are about "juxtaposition . . . shattering the human experience into new understanding . . . and developing the ability to assess the situation in which they [the students] find themselves from a variety of angles, and find appropriate responses within their framing of the situation" (Johnson and O'Neill 1984, 122, 139).

Through drama, Ron and Buddy struggled to reconcile conflicting positions as they dialogued with each other, with Brian, and with themselves. They experienced some of the deep contradictions over Vietnam that they had not previously considered. Ron, for example, considered the points of view of Vietnamese people and the United States military for the first time and tried to reconcile those perspectives with his previous "war protester"
position. He articulated that “My whole opinion changed with looking through both opponents’ eyes and arguing for what I’m against.” Similarly, Buddy wrote the following: “I learned about the other side like the people who wanted war and the reasons they had . . . because we got to act it out we could see how everyone felt, not just one side.”

Both Ron and Buddy reconsidered their initial points of view as they adopted different perspectives and then dialogued from these positions. They reconsidered their previous dogmatic points of view and began to recognize that understandings are relational—parts of larger wholes that form “webs of meaning” (Perkins 1989).

Incompleteness is part of the complexity of our relationships with others, especially when they live or lived in different times, places, and cultures. There is always another position from which we could reconsider our views and always more views we could adopt and then reposition. Simplistic understandings tend to ignore the unavoidable incompleteness of understanding life—the holes in the webs of meaning. As Bakhtin puts it, “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).

Students who begin with simplified understandings are not challenged if they read or think superficially about their topic—they will only solidify a position. However, in drama they can review their positions and reposition their views, experience dissonance, and recognize more complexity. Ron and Buddy “revisited” Vietnam and discovered more links in the chain of meaning. They were challenged in their thinking. Their prior understandings were problematized and became more troubling, and the students constructed new understandings that were more tentative and more complex.

Bakhtin is emphatic that meanings are provisional, are always in process, and are being renegotiated in every dialogic interaction—understandings are always being complicated in dialogue. If students begin to recognize this reality and desire more complex understandings, then they will seek out others with whom to dialogue. Drama is a powerful way for students to create contexts with teachers in which effective dialogue can take place. Drama can also generate further dialogue outside the drama. Alicia, who
researched women's rights, was one student who recognized this ideal. She stressed that "you have to keep talking to people all the time, trying to figure things out. You can't give up. Things aren't as obvious as they might seem. And there might be things you've missed, too."

Adopting Positions of Both Informants and Researchers

It is important to stress that drama was being used with these students in the context of their ongoing inquiries. Though the students adopted many new perspectives as they used drama, in each session with Brian and Jeff they always retained their positions as researchers as they made sense of their reading, discussion, and imaginary experiences.

As well as being researchers, however, they adopted as participants in drama sessions the positions of informants—in other words, they imagined the viewpoints and experiences of people whose perspectives they considered might inform them about their topic. Many students had already interviewed informants in the flesh—parents, grandparents, neighbors, and other people they located through sources at the local university. However, most informants were locked inside books and could not be interviewed in person; for example, soldiers in Vietnam, victims of the Holocaust, and people who used racist slurs to attack Hank Aaron. Many of these informants were released in some students' imaginations as they read, but many others remained imprisoned in dense prose, abstractions, and fleeting references.

However, all imaginary interactions were seen through an additional perspective—that of the researcher. Heathcote's repeated insistence of the need for students to both experience as participants and reflect as spectators on a drama (Johnson and O'Neill 1984, 130) echoes Bakhtin's insistence on the need to be "outside" as well as "inside" whatever we are trying to understand. Students were "inside" events as they imagined from the perspective of informants. The students' researcher stance provided a ready way to access the spectator's "outside" viewpoint.

As teachers, we shifted students' attention toward either their experience or toward their interpretation. We emphasized imaging
the world as others see it or emphasized a critique of that perspective. As a drama session progressed we would intervene in order to remind students of their research questions and ask them to think about how the drama was helping with the exploration of their question. All of these moves enabled the students to reposition previous views and review an alternative position.

An example from another session illustrates this. All four boys who were researching the baseball player Hank Aaron imagined they were informants as they spoke the sort of racist remarks Hank might have heard behind his back in the locker room. Brian asked the boys how they thought Hank would have felt—immediately they switched into researcher stance. One boy said that he would have wanted to hit them—another said he couldn't because it would have made matters worse. A third boy, Mark, said he would have walked out and gone home. He wanted to represent Hank, and they all returned to informant stance. Three repeated the racist slurs as Mark listened without expression and then made a move to leave. Brian stepped forward to whisper, "Do you want to be remembered as a quitter? How will you explain this to your grandchildren?" He was asking the group to reflect as researchers on the meaning of such an action. All four boys stood still in silence as the bell rang to end the session.

Students also shifted between informant and researcher stances in order to interpret the significance of an event in the drama, without teacher intervention. For example, the four boys in the Hank Aaron group imagined and wrote what might have been contained in the death threats sent to Aaron. Anthony noted how he had shifted perspectives from experiencing as an informant to interpreting those views as a researcher. He recalled that "we wrote death threats and then read them as his family. That made me think for the first time of his life off the [baseball] diamond."

Reflection as researchers on events in the drama continued after the drama sessions. The drama interactions had given the students positions that they could take up again when they returned to their inquiries and consulted the books and people they had sought out to provide views and information. They reviewed those positions later. The Hank Aaron group provides an example of how groups made significant changes in their research as they reflected after the drama sessions. Anthony noted, "We
changed the script, music and everything when we realized what he went through off the field to break the [Babe Ruth Homerun] Record." As all the groups did, they reviewed their research question. Mark explained that reflecting on the drama sessions "made me realize that the [original] research question... missed the point. I kind of thought [his greatness] had to do with practice, but now I see it had to do with being Black and being great and overcoming prejudice and discrimination. That's what was really hard [for Hank Aaron]."

Adopting Additional Points of View

Students can adopt other "positions" from which they can dialogue, including the positions of two informants, viewpoints they had established before the drama, and any newly formed positions. Taking up the perspective of other positions is critical for dialogue. Buddy explained, "We got to see that there were other ways of looking at [the war]. . . . It helps you see other points of view that you can work from." Ron noted, "We were so many people. We were everywhere... I was inside so many different characters. I was protesters, Vietnamese, in the army, a parent [of a soldier], a politician." He reported that he had "never really thought about what the Vietnamese people went through," until doing the drama. "That really changed me," he added.

Yet everyone resists identifying with some points of view, and thus we limit our potential for understanding. We tend to identify with the points of view that are privileged in the texts we read. Stories are written from the points of view of particular people, and reference books usually adopt detached positions. However, in drama we can shift point of view at will and imagine from multiple positions, including those of people not mentioned directly in a text. For example, Buddy and Ron had not previously examined the perspective of presidential political advisers.

Students will most easily adopt the points of view they have already identified with or personally experienced. The Underground Railroad group had read some slave narratives, and they readily examined the perspectives of enslaved people eager for news of Harriet Tubman.
However, in drama, students can also imagine the world from points of view that initially may seem quite peripheral or difficult to adopt. The Great Depression group began to understand more about being unemployed people in the 1930s. Mary recalled how significant the drama perspectives were for her: “After reading, finding the photographs, and even interviewing people I didn’t get why people couldn’t get jobs or money. [After the drama] I knew how it could happen, because I had a chance to be like people back then. I know now how people felt without jobs and how they helped each other cope.”

Some perspectives may be difficult to adopt because they are painful for the students. Jenna, one of the girls in the Underground Railroad group noted the following soon after their drama session:

[The hardest part of the dramas] was when we had to pretend we had to leave older and weaker people behind, because we knew we would have to run... we didn’t want the dogs to get them or for them to drown... so we didn’t even tell them we were going, and we knew we would never see them again... That was so hard... After we felt the dangers, what it would be like to run away, the risks, the excitement, being so afraid, being almost caught... we knew we made the right decision [not to bring the others] but our being happy at being free wasn’t the same because they were still slaves, and we wondered what had happened to them.

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

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

In drama, as we imagine with students, “we create a drama world and live, however briefly, by its laws” (O'Neill 1995, 152). We can create the world of the Mafia or Auschwitz as we wonder “what if . . . ?” We can wonder what the world would look like from multiple points of view and we can wonder how we would have fared according to the laws of gangsters or Nazis. We can imagine from multiple points of view and thus see the world from the positions and perspectives of countless people. We can think and feel what it might have been like to have lived a different life in another historical or social context. And we can dialogue from these positions. In doing so we will always discover more than we expect because, as Maxine Greene (1995) reminds us, “experience always holds more than can be predicted and . . . imagination creates openings to the unpredictable” (145).
Discovering Connections Between Lives

One important way in which students' understandings became more complex was in their realization of connections between their own lives and the lives of others. Clearly, students connected with the lives of people who had lived at the times they were researching. In addition, many felt new connections between their research and their own lives in 1995 in a small Midwestern town in the United States.

Troy had this to say in his final portfolio letter about drama and his group's inquiry. "[Brian] not only helped us understand how Hank [Aaron] reacted, but also helped us understand how we may have reacted. The most interesting part of [Brian's] technique was that he showed us how to use our life to make the drama in our video way more interesting. So we understood Hank, but we understood because we looked at ourselves." Thus the drama helped Troy to connect his research to his life, and also to perform the reverse operation, to connect his life to the research.

The group also began to realize that there were connections between the past and the present—similarities between America in the 1950s and in the 1990s. Significantly, their group had largely resisted the notion that racism still exists in America when they had begun the unit of study on social change and civil rights. They had imagined some of Hank Aaron's experiences with racism, and these had become central in their video documentary. After completing their video the group sought out Jeff to talk about how they might try to understand and address racism in the present. As Troy said, "What we're really wondering now is what can we do about racism now?"

Connections can be a realization of difference as much as one of similarity. Kathy had resisted the notion that people could not find work during the Depression, but eventually came to accept that living through the Depression was tremendously difficult, stressful, and very different from her own experience. She learned that she needed to reframe her understanding from a more sophisticated perspective. Kathy admitted, "I didn't believe what I'd read... or what I'd been told." After the unit, though, she knew that "It was just totally different [from now]. It seems that maybe when things are
tough, people get tougher . . . both tougher and kinder . . . people have to find the hard way to get by."

As Kathy reflected on her group's completed video, a new question emerged for her that reminded her to explore connections with her grandparents. "Now I want to know how living through the Depression changed the rest of their lives." She resolved to interview her grandparents during the summer to pursue that line of inquiry.

Ron also felt more connected to the present when he realized how his views paralleled some of those of his family. During the creation of his video documentary with Buddy, he said "[the drama work] gave me something to talk with my parents and uncles about. They had a lot of the same [conflicting] feelings about the war as I did. They talked a lot about being really frustrated. It made me think of how can you really change things?"

**Exploring New Questions**

All students who used drama changed their research questions. As students dialogued, they not only realized complexity in moments of understanding, they also realized that their initial research questions were inadequate to guide the explorations they now felt a need to make. In the drama they had stepped into worlds of imagination, dialogued there, and realized that their previous positions and questions had to change.

In researching the Great Depression, they moved from asking an abstract general question about what life was like at the time—"What was so bad about the Depression?"—to asking questions about personal struggle in specific contexts. In the end-of-year survey, Mary reported, "Drama helps you to answer unanswered questions. But it helps you ask new questions and add stuff that we didn't even know to ask about before."

Ron and his partner, Buddy, asked themselves new questions. They did so after their drama sessions but again as they used drama on their own in the preparation for their videotaping. They started their project with the preliminary research question: "What was the most important protest music against the Vietnam war?" After two drama sessions, the boys reviewed and changed their question to "What kind of protests were most effective?" Ron explained to Jeff,
“We got to see that there were other ways of looking at [the war] and so protests were not going to . . . automatically work.” Buddy wrote in his journal, “So I will put both sides in my story, not just the antiwar side.” As they researched the Vietnam War from both sides, they added a question that acknowledged the way they had extended their attention: “How were people in the military affected by the antiwar protests?” As they prepared to tape their video, they finally extended their attention to the broader question, “How can you change opinions to help peace?” They scripted dramatic encounters that extended their work with Brian; these involved a protest demonstration, musical and artistic statements, conversations, a family scene, a debate, and a letter writing campaign. In their final video, key encounters dramatized arguments that both supported and protested the war in Vietnam. These included a family with one son in college and one in Vietnam, and a debate between two politicians.

Promoting Further Research

The students’ new research questions led to substantial additional inquiry. Further research was also prompted by questions that arose during or after drama sessions as students realized there were gaps in their knowledge.

As teachers we can always suggest further research, but one of the powerful aspects of drama is that the students themselves often realize that they need to know more. Further, they are motivated to review what they know, revisit sources, and rethink ideas. Some students considered gaps in understanding at the time they were realized, whereas other groups discussed them later. In any event, after working together to create fictional contexts students often sensed that they needed more information and additional perspectives. They then returned to the library or sought out other people to talk with.

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

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

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

Adopting new perspectives in drama not only promoted dialogue and new understandings about the topics of concern to the students, but also allowed students to adopt new views on inquiry itself. Student engagement and motivation were fostered in drama as was their sense of community.

Drama engages students’ intellects and their emotions as they imagine the world as others might experience it. In his end-of-year survey, Stan wrote about the research techniques he had used over the year. For him, drama was “the best way of knowing something.” He stressed that drama “includes the feelings most research leaves out.”

Drama can engage and motivate all students. Ned, an LD-labeled student, contrasted his experiences with drama and with reading in his final portfolio conference at the end of the semester. Significantly, he stressed how questions can both arise for students and be pursued in the drama:

When you read an encyclopedia, you have to follow what the book’s telling you . . . in drama you get to follow your own questions and interests . . . and if you don’t get something, you can go and do it over again and do it different until it makes sense . . . If you go back when you’re reading it’s the same words you didn’t understand in the first place.

Like Stan, Ned articulated that his feelings were engaged in drama; he also had a sense of the control he had over the direction of the inquiry. He explained, “You could feel it and you could be part of it. You’re not just there. You’re part of it, and you have some control over what is going on.”

Drama brings “life” to inquiry in the sense that students imagine from the perspectives of people who “live” in the contexts of their research. As Greene (1995) notes, “Imagination allows us to particularize, to see and hear things in their concreteness” (29). Abstract ideas and generalized descriptions become particularized events populated with people who can move and talk. The events are experienced in contexts that are embedded in more complex
situations and relationships than the students may have previously considered in their discussions or in their individual reading.

As we mentally engage with life even when we are silent, questioning observers of it, so in drama students can be deeply engaged even when they say or do very little. Dewey (1938, 1963) argues that experiences are only educative when they engage students in "an active quest for information and for production of new ideas" (79). Dewey's "active quest" may or may not involve much physical movement, but it is engaging for students when they have interesting problems with which to grapple. For Dewey, the primary responsibility of educators is to ensure that students' experiences are "educative"—experiences in which they have to exercise their intelligence to overcome problems and difficulties that both grow out of the conditions of the students' current experiences and that are within the range of the capacities of the students.

Thus, it is the lifelike problems that students face in the fictional contexts that are central to what engages the students. In drama, students experience and view the "problems, issues, and concerns posed by life itself" (Beane 1995a, 616).

However, drama is not life—it is art that has to be created by the students and teacher. As well as being made, it can also be interpreted. Perkins (1989) notes that in the creation and interpretation of art we form more complex understandings if we experience a disturbance of the sort of "simple surface coherence" that is implied in bald facts or sketchy texts (128). In making and interpreting drama, students work together and dialogue in an art form that can "disturb" them into richer understandings.

If students agree to create drama together, they will begin with at least marginal engagement. Drama encourages all students' participation because it is so inclusive, drawing on multiple modalities of learning and communication. Students who find reading and writing barriers to comprehension and communication are not excluded from what we could call a kind of "drama literacy club." Drama can include reading and writing, but these activities always take place within contexts that students imagine and that thus support their examination of text. Drama has also been found to support more engaged and sophisticated reading and writing (Wilhelm 1995, 1996).
Drama occurs in a fictional world where new ideas, attitudes, and perspectives can be explored without the penalties of everyday life. As Heathcote stresses, though drama "demands . . . some change in understanding . . . it does this in a no-penalty zone of agreed depiction" (Johnson and O'Neill 1984, 197).

The students in Jeff's classroom did not feel pressured to talk or move in public or feel judged or "put on the spot." Mental engagement was supported in more physically active and more public participation in interactions that drew on different ways of knowing, and most students became more engaged as they embraced the active, hands-on construction of meaning that drama offers. As Tim, one of the boys working on the Mafia, reported, drama is not like "reading word for word. It's acting out what it means step by step . . . and trying things out to see what happens."

It is difficult to "fail" at drama since passive participation is sufficient initially and students can be mentally engaged even when they say and do very little. Those students, like Ned, who may be labeled "disabled" yet are skilled in talk or movement, often find their abilities valued by peers in drama since they can sustain a fictional world and extend imaginary interactions. Those who like to work visually or aurally can have the opportunity to create visual images or make appropriate sounds. For example, the Great Depression group created visual tableaux of Hooverville; one showed a family gathered around and listening to a radio. Interspersed with family discussion of their problems and current events, the family listened to news, an extract from a radio drama, and a song from the 1930s—all had been created by the students.

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

Drama and inquiry only function if students work together productively. To create what Wells and Chang-Wells (1992) call a “community of collaborative inquirers,” students need “the values of caring, collaboration and curiosity” (23). Jeff’s students were curious since they had come up with their own research questions. They had learned to cooperate over the year, and the process of making drama together in self-selected groups helped to create a community of collaboration and caring about the work.

Many groups realized the cooperative nature and community-building power of drama. If students want to make drama together, they must learn to share ideas, listen to each other, and build on each others’ suggestions. Teachers support community building whenever they help students listen to each other and focus on tasks, purposes, or deadlines. However, drama also has an intrinsic cohesive quality that draws students cooperatively together. As Mark said, “By doing the drama, we had to become a team and put everything we knew into our play book—for everybody.” In their subsequent research, each member of the group read different material and then shared information with the whole team. They cooperated in scripting scenes for their documentary but also critiqued each other's work. Mark explained the supportive tone of their critiques that were “to help the team”: “If one person knows more and plays better, the whole project is better for all of us.”

Students also realized how in drama meanings are contextualized and constructed among people when ideas are productively shared. Rather than encouraging students to talk abstractly about ideas, drama not only enables students to experience interactions but also necessitates that they show their ideas and understandings in context to each other. Thus, in subsequent reflection, ideas can be critiqued. This happened with many groups as the students reflected on scenes that they had explored in drama with Brian or Jeff. In some cases whole scenes were later amended and incorporated in a group’s video documentary. Stan, another member of
this group, stressed, “In the drama we were always helping each other, adding stuff and asking stuff. We came up with almost all of our good ideas for the video by doing the dramas.”

Troy’s thinking extended beyond group sharing and choice of “good ideas” to how their ideas might be received. For him, in a community of inquirers we take account not only of our own views but also of their reception by others. As he said of his group of three boys, “Doing the dramas helped us teach each other, because everybody knew things that the other guys didn’t.” Drama helped their group not only see “what would be interesting to put in the video” but also “what kind of things the audience would want to know and how to make it exciting for them.” Troy’s peers, in fact, gave his group the highest possible rating for “audience consideration” as well as for “interesting and informative content”—two of the five criteria agreed upon by the class and Jeff.

As they used drama in their small groups to prepare their video documentaries, students discovered more of drama’s meaning-making potential to contextualize and explore the implications of information. Nancy, working on a video regarding women’s rights, explained, “You use the information you found out to make the drama. You have to know what the facts meant. If you didn’t know, you could find out by making the drama... the point is that drama makes you know.”

Conclusion
This chapter shows how students’ more complex understandings were created, how when in dialogue points of view were repositioned, and how students adopted new viewpoints on prior positions. The students’ words testify to the significance of the drama sessions and to the changes in their understandings of the subject matter of their research, and in their attitudes to the process of inquiry itself.

Whitehead ([1929] 1959) argues succinctly that “there is only one subject-matter for education, and that is life in all its manifestations” (10). Heathcote reminds us that our understandings of life change gradually: “We slowly grow in understanding and change our perspectives ever so slightly inch by inch” (Johnson and
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O'Neill 1984, 103). Dewey ([1938] 1963) stresses that understandings develop among students and teachers when education is "a continuous process of reconstruction of experience" (79, 87). This chapter has highlighted some of the students' experiences and their realizations of some of those moments of "reconstruction" in which significant changes occurred in their understandings. We have shown that when students experience dialogue among different points of view, then gradual changes in understanding may crystallize for them into more complex understandings.

The drama sessions we describe were "coherent" (Beane 1995b) experiences for students. They were integral not only to the students' inquiries but also to their changing understandings of themselves and the social worlds of literature, history, and everyday life. Many of the students in Jeff's classrooms might agree with Beane (1995b) and say that we "develop[ed] broader and deeper understandings of ourselves and our world, to make sense of our experiences, and to come to terms with large and significant ideas" (171).

In the creation of drama with students we can be instrumental in repositioning numbing perceptions and forming novel and significant ways of seeing the world. With Heathcote it is our hope that in working with students they begin to "see the world" instead of "numbly recognizing it" (Johnson and O'Neill 1984, 128). Heathcote stresses that "It's where you are [and] how you understand that makes you deal with your way of life" (Johnson and O'Neill 1984, 121). Thus, in working with students she asks in effect: "From where you are, how does this problem seem to you? And when it's been dealt with, let's look at where you now are" (121). We have recorded many students' answers to these questions and shown how students' views of their prior positions and understandings have changed.

No matter how many positions and points of view we explore with students in dialogue, we always discover new perspectives and construct new and more complex understandings. Maxine Greene (1988) stresses that no view is ever complete: "To recognize the role of perspective and vantage point, to recognize at the same time that there are always multiple perspectives and multiple vantage points, is to recognize that no accounting, disciplinary or otherwise, can
ever be finished or complete. There is always more. There is always possibility” (128).

Notes

1. Each boy had a parent who had been supportive of antiwar protests.

2. Jeff's five classes included all of the students labeled LD (learning disabled), ED (emotionally disturbed), ADHD (Attention-deficit, hyperactivity disorder), and ESL (English as a second language) at the seventh-grade level. Over the year all of the students used drama, and interestingly many of the labeled students found it a particularly motivating and engaging way to learn. For further details see Wilhelm (1996, 1995).

3. Jeff's curricula were integrated in the sense that they were centered on the inquiry that arose out of the concerns and questions students raised about the books and topics they read and studied together (Beane 1993). His classroom was similar to the model of a “center of inquiry” as described by Wells and Chang-Wells (1992). The aim was to “integrate learning experiences into [the students'] schemes of meaning so as to broaden and deepen their understanding of themselves and their world” (Beane 1995a, 616). Over the year the students developed a high level of ownership and responsibility for their own learning. The students expected to negotiate with Jeff to work in self-selected small groups as they investigated topics of their own choosing within a broad thematic unit of study. They were used to research, pursuing questions that they generated in consultation with Jeff. In addition, they expected to present their findings to their peers. For further details, see Wilhelm (1996).

4. The unit revolved around the reading of Mildred Taylor's novel Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry (New York: Dial Press, 1976) and various other primary and secondary sources including excerpts from Harper Lee's To Kill a Mocking Bird (New York: Harper and Row, 1961); Anne Moody's Coming of Age in Mississippi (New York: Dell, [1968], 1995); Martin Luther King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail" in Why We Can't Wait (New York: Harper and Row, 1964); extracts from a video on the changing role of women in the twentieth century; and videos of the PBS “Eyes on the Prize” series, which chronicles civil rights struggles in the United States.


6. For further details see Edmiston and Wilhelm (1996).
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7. There were some similarities to the "mantle of the expert" approach to drama. However, the students did not take on the "mantle of expertise" in the Heathcote and Bolton (1995) sense since they were not experts in a fictional context. Their "enterprise" was their ongoing inquiry.
