Structuring Drama for Reflection and Learning: A Teacher-Researcher Study

by Brian Edmiston

Abstract
The article describes research in which the author studied his own teaching over a two-year period and, based on the research, developed a model for structuring drama to support reflection and learning.

Editor's Note
This study won the American Alliance for Theatre and Education's 1992 Research Award

INTRODUCTION
The significance of drama as an art form is stressed by Jerome Bruner when he states that "drama...is an invitation to reflection about the human condition." We are reflecting, for example, when we think about the important questions raised in plays, muse on the complexities of answers posed, wonder about the actions of characters, and consider how we might behave in dramatic circumstances. In similar ways students in the classroom can think about humanity as they reflect on the events and actions of any informal drama they create together.

As a teacher in both England and the United States, I have worked hard to learn how to create drama with students and to use drama as a medium for reflection and learning. The research described in this article was a seminal part of that process. Lawrence Stenhouse has noted that for teachers "the refinement of professional skills is generally achieved by the gradual elimination of failings through systematic study of one's own teaching." He was an early advocate of "teacher-research" which is aimed at improving practice through careful, systematic, and rigorous methods going beyond those everyday methods teachers use to study their own teaching practice.

Reflection on experiences is part of the learning process. When we reflect we create meaning and develop understandings about experiences. The need for reflection is widely accepted; it is central to Piaget's and Vygotsky's theories of development and Dewey's philosophy of education; it is essential for creative and critical thinking.

In the field of drama and education the need for reflection has also been widely noted. A commonly used definition of creative drama states that participants "imagine, enact, and reflect upon human experiences." Dorothy Heathcote has consistently stressed that students will only learn if they reflect. She argues that "without the development of the power of reflection we have very little" and emphasizes that it is not only "the experience arising out of the action which enables them to learn [but that]... without (reflection) there is no learning from the experience." Although the necessity of reflection by students has been acknowledged by most drama practitioners and theorists, little has been written to justify the claim that reflection is essential. In addition, comparatively little attention has been paid to how the teacher may structure a drama (for example, by setting tasks or interacting with students) to facilitate reflection. This study takes a step toward understanding the place and practice of reflection in classroom drama.

When arguments have been made for including the arts in education, it has been noted repeatedly that students should be involved in a variety of different activities that include reflection. It has been argued that students need to make their own art, as well as present it to others; they should also reflect and respond to art and thereby critique, interpret, and evaluate it. However, these processes are too often regarded as separate pursuits and, unfortunately, this separation has been prevalent in classroom drama work where the making of drama, the performing of drama, and the reflecting on drama have been regarded mostly as separate activities.

A central argument in this study is that these processes are actually inextricably interconnected in the improvisational structuring of informal drama with reflection being an integral process. As students interact publicly in drama they are, in one sense, "actors" as they "perform" within the group setting. In another sense, they function as "playwrights" and as "audience." The students are playmaking as they collectively create an imaginary world which they treat as if it were objective reality. They can, in addition, become an "audience" to their own work as they interpret the drama and construct what are actually individual subjective realities in response. In this study reflection is shown to be integral to the processes of both playmaking and interpreting.

METHODOLOGY
Background

Learning how to use drama more effectively is an ongoing journey. The process is rewarding, but also
long and difficult in the struggle to recognize and change patterns in teaching. In early years as a teacher I used drama with varying degrees of success in exploring themes in literature and social studies with students. My practice gradually changed during a year of study with Dorothy Heathcote, through graduate studies, work with Cecily O'Neill, and especially by teaching. However, I still regarded my planning as too arbitrary and realized that I was often unaware of why I was successful or unsuccessful with a group. I felt I needed to study my own teaching more systematically. When an opportunity arose to return to the classroom full time in Summer 1987, in an innovative suburban school in Ohio, I took a position as a grade 3-4 teacher.

Data Collection

In October 1988, I began data collection on my teaching as part of a teacher-researcher study.11 This was the first of two years of classroom data collection; the second year took place in 1989-90 when I was a full-time lecturer in drama at Ohio State University and taught regularly in other teachers’ classrooms. Sixty-eight sessions of drama teaching were videotaped over the two years of formal data collection in grade 1-9 classes of varying size and student “ability,” on a variety of topics, in sessions ranging from single lessons to lessons lasting several weeks. The two main ways of recording data in the classroom were videotaping and keeping field notes. The videotapes provided an ongoing record of my teaching. I had few technical problems, and other teachers were willing to videotape if I was teaching. The students largely lost interest in the camera if they were given an opportunity to look at it before tapping began and then were asked to ignore the camera. Its presence did not seem to affect their behavior.

Hopkins’ description of field notes fits with my use of them as a tool for tracking work with students. He states that field notes are “a way of reporting observations, reflections, and reactions to classroom problems,” and as Hopkins suggests, I tried to write field notes as soon after a lesson as possible.12 I recorded plans for all sessions and kept post-session notes. Although I always thought about previous lessons, actual written field notes ranged from a few scribbled comments on a particular student to extended reflections over several pages on a structuring decision I had made. I also used field notes for planning, always reviewing a session as part of planning for a subsequent session.

When possible, I reviewed the videotapes during the course of the data collection and kept notes about my reactions. I also kept extensive notes on my changing understandings about drama teaching; these were compiled as responses to readings, experiences as a student in graduate classes in drama, and thoughts as a lecturer in drama. It is important to emphasize that the collection and analysis of data in this study went beyond classroom practice. In addition to reflecting on and analyzing experiences as a teacher using drama, data included reflection on and analysis of practices of Dorothy Heathcote and Cecily O’Neill and their ongoing reviews of their own teaching. There were also many books on the theory and practice of other drama specialists that I read and reread several times during classroom data collection and analysis. My analysis of others’ writings and practices informed understanding of my teaching.

Data Analysis

There was no neat distinction between the collection and the analysis of data; analysis was ongoing. Analysis of my teaching, others’ practices, and theoretical writings all affected what I did in the classroom and how I subsequently analyzed my teaching. I systematically analyzed the sixty-eight sessions of videotaped teaching. As Hopkins notes, videotape not only shows unedited behavior of teacher and students, it also allows for review and for patterns to be identified in retrospect, both within sessions and over time.13 Looking for patterns allowed me to see beyond specific examples to underlying structuring trends (for example, in the way I established tasks and interacted with students).

Initially I sampled over time and watched about ten hours of my teaching, looking for moments when students seemed to be reflecting, and taking notes on what the students were doing and what I seemed to be doing as the teacher to enable this to happen. I both described and evaluated the teaching as I reviewed it.14 Patterns began to emerge which were initially based on assumptions that I developed during the collection of teaching data.15 These patterns led me to look for further examples in other videotapes. I discovered what I believed was a broad distinction between my first and second year of teaching with significant improvement during the second year. Consequently, I viewed several more tapes from the first year but nearly all the tapes from the second year. I analyzed several drama sessions task by task and in some cases phrase by phrase. I looked both for examples of the emerging patterns and for “negative evidence.”16

For others who might contemplate such data analysis it may be important to note that I found reviewing my teaching a frequently humbling and painful experience. It was often extremely difficult to watch myself when I did something that in retrospect I wished I had not done. At first this seemed almost masochistic but as I forced myself to continue analysis I gradually began to realize aspects of structuring that affected whether or not a drama “worked.” One technique that was particularly useful was to describe myself as “the teacher.” This gave me the distance needed to separate myself as “watcher” from myself as “teacher” and to critique what I saw on the tapes.

In analyzing my planning and teaching I gradually became aware of planning and interaction patterns, both positive and negative, of which I had been unaware and which I was able to compare with the teachings of Heathcote and O’Neill. The process I followed is similar to that described by Kemmis and McTaggart in their explanation of Kurt Lewin’s now classic model of “action research.”17 Lewin described action research as a spiral of steps or “moments” each of which is composed of planning, action, observation, and reflection, with action and reflection overlapping “to allow changes in plans for action as the people involved learned from their own experience.”18 This was what was happening as I read and planned what to
look for in the videotapes, observed parts of lessons, and reflected on what I saw.

As I found my understanding of structuring for reflection become more complex I decided to analyze in detail a film of a lesson taught by Dorothy Heathcote, *Building Belief*, for examples of teacher structuring for reflection.19 I chose this film because it is widely available, many teachers in the United States have seen it, and it is a short edited example of a complete lesson using drama.

I then returned to tapes of my own teaching and analyzed six representative sessions in more detail, transcribing sections of each. I chose those points when teacher structuring seemed to enable at least some reflection. These detailed analyses led me to amend and extend my tentative findings.

I drew diagrams throughout the analyses attempting to capture the complexity of teacher structuring on a single page. I returned to examples from the Heathcote film, the six sessions of my teaching, and theoretical writings to construct a model in more detail.

For presentation of analysis and results I decided to continue analysis of two examples from my teaching and the example of Dorothy Heathcote’s teaching. I felt that more than three examples could be difficult for a reader to follow and also realized that by selecting examples from my teaching carefully I would be able to illustrate effectively a model of structuring drama for reflection and learning.

The two examples from my teaching were selected because they 1) included a variety of different tasks undertaken in a comparatively short period of time; 2) could be considered independently of sessions that preceded or followed them; 3) had been planned and had educational aims; and 4) had been videotaped in full without any technical problems. One was representative of sessions that I considered “unsuccessful” and the other representative of sessions that I considered “successful” in structuring drama for reflection and learning.

Initially, each example was described in detail and then analyzed, with particular attention to teacher structuring in setting tasks and interacting with students. Each example was then analyzed for teacher structuring in relation to educational aims. Instances of reflection before, during, and after each drama session both in and out of role were identified and also used to analyze the examples. Analyses of the three examples of teaching follow, along with an explanation of a model for structuring drama to support reflection and learning that was developed based on the analyses.

**The Dungeon Drama**

The first analysis is of an example from my teaching. It illustrates the absence of effective aspects of structuring for reflection and learning in drama.

In my classroom, as a part of a unit on medieval life, students were for a time in role as knights and ladies in a castle. My aim for one lesson (which I call the “Dungeon Drama”) was for students to consider how to deal with a king who used his power arbitrarily and put people in a dungeon. Prior to this lesson, students had encountered me in role as the king and had enjoyed setting up a banquet while at the same time avoiding being sent to the dungeon if they displeased the king.

In the Dungeon Drama I took the role of a servant to the king who tells the knights and ladies that the king is so pleased with the banquet that he is rewarding them and taking them to his new castle. Before leaving, however, he wants them to move some prisoners to a new dungeon. The knights and ladies agree and set off with the servant through a secret passageway and down a stairway to where they find the prisoners asleep. The servant says that the king wants the prisoners chained before they are moved and asks the knights and ladies to put on the chains. After moving the prisoners, someone discovers that the door is locked. Someone else thinks that it is the new jester who has done this, takes on the role of the jester, and talks to the others through the door.

In retrospect, I realized that I was too worried about “losing control” as I interacted with the students and my planning was not flexible enough because I had a rigid agenda in mind. I saw many of their ideas as irrelevant or as distractions in the way of what I had planned they would do: move the prisoners and then reflect on what to do about them and the king. At that time I was not able to see that having preplanned exactly what would happen and then telling the students what to do, I undermined their own work. Instead, I could have worked with the students to enable them to generate ideas that expanded on or superseded my initial ideas.

Although the students seemed to create their own “play,” in actuality there was almost no group decision making. I used my power as teacher to control the ideas generated and I became the arbiter of what was or was not acceptable. I did this in several ways: I required them to agree to my ideas; I blocked or ignored many of their ideas; I allowed one student’s ideas to be performed without group approval; and I did not enable the group as a whole to agree on what happened in the drama.

Rather than allowing the students to suggest what would happen and enabling them to perform with tacit or explicit acceptance by the group, I was continually telling them what to imagine. For example, I told the students specifically: “Turn and get the chains... and gently without waking them put on the chains; put the key in your pocket.” I do not dispute the usefulness of narrating action at times, but I point out that in this example the students had little individual and almost no group ownership of the plot.

Blocking student ideas happened without my realizing it. For example, I was unaware of the ridiculousness of suggesting that the prisoners would not wake up when they were moved. Then, when a student volunteered that one prisoner was waking up, I blocked the idea by saying, “He’ll go back to sleep; don’t worry.”

By ignoring the person who whispered that there were bones in the dungeon, this idea was never shared with the group. Rather than proceeding with my description of the dungeon, the students could have created their own dungeon. Who knows what else they might have found along with the bones.

When one student said that the door was locked I...
allowed her to become the jester who said she would not release the knights and ladies "because they were mean." I did not check to see if the group wanted this to happen. It became the arbiter of content: the jester was appropriate, but the bones were not. In addition, rather than creating a space in which the students could realize together what had happened, and consider a response, there were chaotic, multiple, and conflicting responses that precipitated an ending of the session.

These examples illustrate teacher structuring of tasks and interactions that undermine what I now call the "Playmaking Cycle" of the drama. If students are to have ownership of their work they must create or at least actively support what happens in the drama. Teachers can initiate an activity and interact with students, but unless teachers enable students to share their ideas, in or out of role, and create opportunities for the class as a whole to agree to ideas, the teacher will be the only playwright of the drama. The teacher can enable the group as a whole to agree to what happens in the drama world they create together so that students as "playwrights" will in effect "write" what can usefully be called the "drama text."

Some students want to "perform" ideas as "actors" as they move and talk in front of the others in role. Others communicate out of role as they "publicly share" their ideas. All students as "audience" can respond to what happens in the drama. If they are given opportunities to think about what happens in the drama the students will reflect together. Because they are concerned with the external world of the drama which they treat as objective reality, this can be called "objective reflection." If students are repeatedly engaged in objective reflection they will create the drama text together and the Playmaking Cycle of the drama will operate.

Tight control over the action in a drama can be justified on occasions depending on the teacher's purposes and the social health of the class. It may be quite appropriate for the teacher to do most of the work in some instances so that the class may have a dramatic experience. However, if we want students to find their own meanings in the work, we must enable them to interpret what happens in the drama, regardless of whether or not they have had much involvement in creating the drama text. If students are given opportunities to interpret the drama text then what can be called the "Interpreting Cycle" of the drama will operate. As they consider how they respond to the events of the drama they will again reflect but because their attention is now on their personal responses this can be called "subjective reflection."

The Dungeon Drama can also be used to illustrate how the teacher can undermine the Interpreting Cycle. An excerpt from the drama transcript, just after the prisoners were chained, provides an example:

Leslie: It isn't right treating prisoners like that.
Servant: Well I'm not very happy either, but it's just what we've been asked to do . . .
Leslie: (cutting in) But they're babies. Can we feed them?
Servant: I know they are babies.

Leslie: But they didn't do anything.
Servant: They'll be with their parents. They'll be alright.

Leslie: No they won't.
Servant: The king is leaving this afternoon; we've just got to get this done. We're just going to move them from here into this area here through the secret passageway, put them down, and then turn round and come out again. OK?

(Leslie does not respond and begins to play with a friend's hair.)

Not only were Leslie's ideas for plot denied, her interpretations were too. At this moment I was just getting the class quiet and trying to get them to complete the task of moving the prisoners. I was unfortunately too preoccupied to notice at the time, but Leslie was doing exactly what I had hoped the students would do: she was questioning the wisdom of the king's actions.

Rather than blocking her response, I could have enabled Leslie to perform her idea so that the whole class could hear and have an opportunity to think about the fairness of what they were asked to do. If this had happened the class would have reflected "objectively" if they accepted that there were babies in the dungeon and the Playmaking Cycle would have operated. They would also have been able to reflect "subjectively" as they considered how they felt about what they were asked to do and the Interpreting Cycle would have operated.

Explanation of the Model

Figure 1 summarizes much of my thinking about how the teacher can structure drama to facilitate both objective and subjective reflection by students. The model shows the interface of the Playmaking and Interpreting Cycles. These two ongoing interconnected cycles must exist in any drama for learning to happen. The Playmaking Cycle illustrates how the events of an improvised drama are created by agreement among students. The Interpreting Cycle illustrates how individual students can interpret the events of the drama differently. Surrounding the cycles are the educational aims of the teacher, stressing that all structuring decisions are made in the light of overall aims for the work.

In the center of the diagram are the public actions of teacher and students that become objects for reflection by students. Throughout the work the teacher's or students' public actions are in role (when they are "performing" and functioning as "actors") or not in role (when they are "publicly sharing"). When the teacher or a student acts, with others watching, there is usually an implicit acceptance of these actions as part of the drama. If this is the case the group has effectively "written" part of the ongoing improvised text of the drama. Sometimes such acceptance is formalized in a particular agreement out of role when the group may well disagree about the unfolding drama text. In all cases, however, the students reflect on the actions (or possible actions) in the drama and make decisions about what happens.

Students' individual objective reflections create
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Figure 1. Teacher Structuring of Drama for Reflection and Learning
drama text if their objective meanings are shared or performed and there is general agreement about the details they imagine in the shared world of the drama. Just as in improvised play or in theatre there must be agreement about details of the imagined world which are regarded as objective reality by the participants. When there is such agreement by the whole group drama text is created and the Playmaking Cycle operates with students functioning as playwrights. In contrast, students’ subjective reflections may lead them to very different interpretations of what is happening in the drama. When they reflect subjectively the Interpreting Cycle operates with students functioning as members of an audience to their own work.

The model represents the teacher’s structuring of the drama. Though the group can and does work together without the teacher, all decisions by the teacher (including decisions not to intervene) influence the drama and are structuring decisions. These include: how a task is set up; what questions are posed directly and indirectly; what the teacher says and does in role; and what the teacher does in response to a student’s idea. The solid lines all represent structuring decisions by the teacher which influence playmaking and interpreting by students. The thick solid lines represent agreement by the whole group as drama text is created. The dotted lines represent unplanned connections which students may make but of which the teacher is unaware.

The Heathcote Drama

Analysis of an example of Dorothy Heathcote’s teaching illustrates how the teacher can enable the Playmaking and Interpreting Cycles to function. As mentioned earlier, the example is from Part I of Building Belief (which I call the “Heathcote Drama”). In this film Heathcote’s stated aim for the 29 nine- and ten-year-old students is to reflect on the meaning of the words: “A nation is as strong as the spirit of the people who make it.” They are in role as people who are trying to survive in a dry, barren, rocky, new land. During most of the film, students are in role primarily remembering what has happened to them as a means to build background for and belief in the dramatic enactments that occur toward the end of the film and that continue in Part II of Building Belief.

Heathcote assists students to share their written and spoken narrations of past events and requires them to listen to one another and to reach agreement. These agreements include: the state of the land; the hardships they endured; their intentions to “trust, communicate, and share;” and their decision to divide up the land. This enables the students to reflect objectively together and to create drama text.

At the point at which they agree to divide the land, Heathcote removes herself in role from the group, presumably to see how this rather passive group will work together without her to make drama. The students talk together, disagree about the size of groups to form, and try to shout each other down. Some force a vote; others passively go along with dividing the land into six segments. Some students “perform” but it is unclear if any drama text is agreed to since there is no apparent overt acceptance by the whole group of what has happened.

In role as an old woman, Martha Sharp, Heathcote returns to the group. She asks the group members to tell her what they have done. In so doing she enables them all to reflect objectively on their actions. Some recoil what happened; one quiet student is unheard. She amplifies his words by repeating them: “Somebody here says that you have left no space for the community.” The students talk together and reach agreement that there should be a central commons created for all to share. She asks that the amendment be drawn on the blackboard and requires everyone to look at the drawing and to make sure they agree with the plan.

In contrast to the Dungeon Drama where the teacher created the drama text, Heathcote structures the activity and the interactions so that the students create drama text together. Individual student ideas are generated as she leaves the group; she requires the students to think about what they have done; she assists one student to perform his response; she requires the whole group to listen and reflect; she makes the amendment public so that the division of the land can again be thought about; and she asks the whole group if they agree with the change.

Without her structuring, the work would be disjointed, the loudest person would dominate, and the students would not have the opportunity to reflect objectively together to agree on what they want to happen in the drama. Heathcote enables them to use the Playmaking Cycle.

Heathcote also repeatedly structures so that students use the Interpreting Cycle. Following the example just referred to, she asks the students if they have done what they said they would do. She asks if they “communicated carefully and clearly” in making their decisions and thus structures for possible subjective reflection. One boy responds quietly: “If we were communicating why should everybody have their own land?” This boy is performing an idea that is an interpretation of what has just happened and that seems to question the whole premise of land division. Again, Heathcote helps a student perform for everyone; she brings him to the front where he repeats what he said so that everyone can hear. She responds by turning to the group and saying, “You can answer him,” and thereby requires them to reflect on what he has said. She promotes subjective reflection in requiring them to think for themselves about the meaning of communicating.” One boy responds: “Well it’s not like private property . . . It’s so hard for 30 people to work together but it is easier for 5 or 6 or 4 [the numbers in their groups] but you’re still communicating.” At this point the film ends.

The significance of this moment towards the end of the film should not be missed. The students had agreed on an action (the division of land) and they were then in a position to reflect subjectively and consider their personal meanings of this event. In the drama this is the first time that the students think about their own actions in this way. The students reflect on actions in which the “strength” of the “spirit of the people” can be examined.

In this example, Heathcote structures tasks and the interactions so that both the Playmaking and Interpreting Cycles operate. She repeatedly enables
students to perform their ideas and to reflect on what happens in the drama. In role she does not dominate and promote her ideas, but responds to students and enables them to perform their ideas. Her attention is on the students’ reflections. She assists them to create drama text as they reflect objectively and to interpret as they reflect subjectively. Students’ ideas are accepted and then presented to the group as a whole for response. Heathcote directs attention but she does so to enable the students to reflect together as playwrights, and to reflect individually as audience.

The Arts Drama

Analysis of a second example of my teaching (which I call the “Arts Drama”) provides additional illustrations of how a teacher can enable the Playmaking and Interpreting Cycles to function.  

The overall aim of the drama was to consider the value of the arts in society. The students imagined that they were going on a spaceship to another planet. The Playmaking Cycle operated, for example, as they invented together what and who they wanted to take with them, and what happened when they arrived on the planet. As teacher, I promoted the Playmaking Cycle by structuring tasks so students invented ideas as they interviewed applicants, depicted events in tableaux, and told stories which became the “history” of the planet. Ideas were agreed to explicitly or accepted implicitly as the drama proceeded. The students generated the drama text.

In addition, as I interacted with students I consciously enabled them to create the drama text. In one session of the drama, the students were in role as descendants of the original colonists. It had just been agreed that it is a special day in their lives: the day they return to the time capsule with an elder of the people to where the records of the past (their stories) are kept on stone tablets. In role as the elder, I wanted to see what drama text they would agree on:

Teacher: What have you been told?
(Pause)
What do we all do?
Michael: We are serious.
Derek: We have to take an oath that we won’t steal anything and . . . .
Teacher: Do you have the words of the oath there?
Derek: (giggles) No.
Teacher: (whispers) You can make that up.
Derek: Oh, OK.
Teacher: Do you have the words of the oath there?
Derek: Yes. (He comes to stand facing the group.) Everybody raise their right hand. (Teacher and students all raise their right hands. Derek laughs, so does Teacher.)
Teacher: (to Derek) You have to be serious, that’s the important thing.
Derek: (stumbling over the words) We, the people of the planet Jeridan . . .
Teacher: (and students join in) We the people of the planet Jeridan . . .
Derek: Swear that we will not vandalize . . .
Students: Swear that we will not vandalize . . .
Derek: Or disturb the sacred tablets.

Students: Or disturb the sacred tablets.
Teacher: Was it enough that we said that?
Students: (General agreement).

I did not use my role to dominate the drama but rather in and out of role assisted Derek to perform his ideas. I watched to see how the rest of the group responded to his ideas. As they recited the oath they implicitly accepted what he performed. I then directed group attention to objective reflection to see if all agreed and to see if anyone wanted to add to the drama text. Significantly, the oath was used later to establish a mood of thoughtfulness before encountering the tablets.

Two brief examples from the Arts Drama illustrate the Interpreting Cycle. Immediately before the event just described, students created drama text as they reflected on who should be allowed to go to the time capsule to see the tablets. I structured their discussion so that ideas were shared and so everyone was able to listen and to reflect. In objective reflection they created drama text as they agreed that every generation would go to the capsule to see the tablets which had to be preserved. They also agreed that people should go when they were, as Michael said, “old enough to understand but not too old to forget” and that the people should be “knowledgeable enough.”

I pressed them to interpret what it meant to be “knowledgeable enough.” Rather than allowing this idea to pass I encouraged their subjective reflections by assisting students to perform their ideas and listen to others. Their interpretations of what it meant to be “knowledgeable enough” are particularly interesting because these students had been labeled “gifted.” Different suggestions about how “knowledgeable enough” would be decided included: the CTBS (California Test of Basic Skills); IQ tests; not being “dumb”; watching how the people acted; “willing to learn”; “smart” or “qualified” people who would pass on what they found out to the “dumb” or “unqualified” people. Their heated exchanges contrasted with their earlier reticence to share and led to a protracted period of interpretation.

The students agreed that they would be the people to go into the capsule to read the history of the planet, which actually consisted of their own stories. The stories became part of the drama text as they were read aloud. I structured the task so that they would have to listen: the stories were read aloud individually as if written in stone. I also enabled them to reflect subjectively as they pondered what important “truths” the stories contained for the people. They shared the truths they discovered as they interpreted their own work. They identified the ideas that without friendship “we could not have made it,” that “people do things differently,” and that there is a need to write down and remember the past in order to pass it on to the children.

CONCLUSION

This paper has summarized some of the major findings of my teacher-researcher study of structuring drama for reflection and learning. As students and teacher perform and share ideas during a drama, students can create drama text and interpret it. In doing so
they reflect objectively, when they function as playwrights, and reflect subjectively, when they function as audience to their own work. The teacher can undermine these processes and thereby frustrate the learning of the students. Alternatively the teacher can enable the students to create work which is meaningful to them both in content and direction, and in how they personally interpret what happens. Dewey wrote (please pardon the gender specific language): “He has to see on his own behalf and in his own way the relations between means and methods employed and results achieved. Nobody else can see for him, and he can’t see just by being ‘told,’ although the right kind of telling can guide his seeing and thus help him see what he needs to see.”22 My hope is that this study has provided “the right kind of telling” for us as teachers so that we may become better guides for what we and our students see in our classrooms. In drama, of course, we can imaginatively see beyond the actual classroom because “drama . . . is an invitation to reflection about the human condition.”

NOTES


3 As I argue in “The Dramatic Art of Theatre and Drama,” The Drama/Theatre Teacher 1.4 (Winter 1992): 21-24, provided we are not talking about didactic teaching, I see no contradiction between a desire to educate students and an intention to create dramatic art with them.

4 Lawrence Stenhouse, An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development (London: Heinemann, 1975) 39. Teacher-research is synonymous with action research. It is a type of qualitative research whereby a teacher or other professional engages in recursive analysis of his or her own practice pursuing a research question of interest to the practitioner. This type of research is well-established in Great Britain and Australia. A readily available overview of teacher-research can be found in Theory into Practice 29.3 (Summer 1990).

5 In this study “learning” is regarded as the construction of meaning and understanding. Central to Piaget’s work [see especially Howard E. Gruber and Jacques Voneche, The Essential Piaget (New York: Basic, 1977)] is the observation that we actively construct understandings of the world. This requires us to reflect upon our experiences. Lev Vygotsky in Mind in Society (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1978) similarly argued that in play, and thus by extension in drama, participants attend to the meaning of their actions and reflect as they actively construct the imaginary world. Although Dewey has been seen simplistically as the champion of a theory of “learning by doing” he actually argued in “Why Reflective Thinking Must be an Educational Aim” (anthologized in Reginald D. Archambault, ed., John Dewey on Education (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1974) that “reflective thinking” must be an educational aim because without it we do not learn from our actions. The centrality of reflection in creative and critical thinking is considered in Robert J. Mazzino, et al., Dimensions of Thinking (Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 1988).


8 I use the term “structuring” to refer to any decision made by the teacher that influences what happens in either the actual context of the classroom or the imaginary context of the drama. In particular I use the term to refer to how the teacher sets tasks, and interacts with students in and out of role. Some structuring decisions can be made in planning while others must be made during the process of creating the drama. Cecily O’Neill and Alan Lambert’s Drama Structures (London: Hutchinson, 1982) is one of the few texts which actually analyzes drama lessons for the thinking behind teacher decision-making. The term “drama structure” has come to be used to refer more specifically to a mostly preplanned sequence of activities like those outlined in Drama Structures.


10 See, for example, “Discipline-Based Art Education” where these are separated into the distinct activities of creating and responding to art.

11 Although I planned much of the study before I began collecting data in the classroom, much of the research design emerged as the study progressed, which is frequently the case in a teacher-researcher study. See, for example, Gail McCutcheon and Burga Jung, “Alternative Perspectives on Action Research,” Theory into Practice 24.3 (1990): 144-151.


13 Hopkins 71.

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15 Matthew Miles and A. Michael Huberman,
Qualitative Data Analysis (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1984)
216.

16 Miles and Huberman 241-242.

17 Kurt Lewin, "Action Research and Minority

18 Kemmis and McTaggart 7.

19 Dorothy Heathcote, Building Belief, Parts I and
II, Northwestern Film Library, 1974.

20 See Lev Vygotsky, Mind in Society (Cambridge:
Harvard UP, 1978) and Martin Esslin, The Field of
Drama (London: Methuen, 1987).

21 The "Arts Drama" was conducted with 11 "gifted"
students in grades 6-8 who were at a summer arts
camp. This teaching also was incorporated into a sum-
mer institute for teachers. It is important to stress that,
in terms of structuring, the different circumstances
seemed to make little difference.

22 Dewey 151.