STRUCTURING FOR REFLECTION:
The essential process in every drama

Brian Edmiston

The significance of drama as an art form is stressed by Bruner (1986) when he reminds us that "drama ... is an invitation to reflection about the human condition" (p.128). It is as much a possibility in our classrooms, as it is in the theatre, that our students may learn about their humanity. However, as Bruner suggests, this happens in drama not only because students experience but also because they reflect.

Dorothy Heathcote (1978, 1982, 1984, 1990) has consistently argued that students will only learn if they reflect. She notes that "without the development of the power of reflection we have very little" (1984, p.97) and stresses that it is only when students reflect that they can create meaning for themselves and construct their own understandings about their experiences of the events in a drama. She has emphasised that events for students 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" (1984, p.209). Students reflect when they think about their experiences in a drama and find meaning in them.

Though the necessity for reflection by the students has been acknowledged by most practitioners and theorists, little has been written to justify the claim that reflection is essential and comparatively little attention has been paid to how the teacher actually structures for reflection. This paper will develop theoretical support for the need for reflection in drama, suggest that a distinction needs to be drawn between objective and subjective reflection, note how underlying questions in interactions promote reflection, and outline four ways in which the teacher can structure for reflection.

The need for Reflection in Drama

Most of the writers on the practical structuring of classroom drama have stressed the importance of reflection (Bolton, 1979, 1984; O'Neill et al., 1976; Neelands, 1984, 1990; Davies, 1983, Byron, 1986; Booth, 1987; Morgan & Saxton, 1987; Swartz, 1988; O'Toole & Haseman, 1988), but they have not highlighted reflection and shown it to be essential for learning. For example, reflection has been grouped with discussion (O'Neill & Lambert, 1984) or discussed as one of many teacher "strategies" (Morgan & Saxton, 1987).

The argument that reflection is essential actually has long-standing support from the work of Piaget, Dewey and Vygotsky. It was Piaget (Gruber & Voneche, 1977) who demonstrated that children are not passive receivers of information, they are actually constructing their understanding of the world. As Kamin (1984) stresses, Piaget’s theory is in contradiction with strictly empiricist or maturationist assumptions about the nature of learning. Kamin notes (1984, p.1) that Piaget devoted more than 60 years to the elaboration of his theory of "the child's acquisition of knowledge as a process of construction from within, in interaction with the environment, rather than as one of internalization from it." It is in this sense that students are "learning" when they construct meanings for themselves as they interact within the drama.

Though Dewey has been simplistically seen as the champion of a theory of "learning by doing," Dewey (1974) actually argues that "reflective thinking" must be an educational aim because without it we do not learn from our actions. Dewey further argues that by reflecting we not only create meaning, but we can become more conscious of the consequences of our actions and thus less likely to act on impulse. What may only have been a semi-conscious awareness may become conscious as we reflect. Thus, if we reflect upon our experiences and consider the consequences of our actions, Dewey argues we will gain more self-control and the freedom to choose wisely.

Though the mental engagement aspect of reflection has been stressed, this does no mean that reflection is purely an interna mental activity. Vygotsky (1962) recognizes that when we talk, our thoughts come into existence. With older children and with adults this can be in the form of "inner speech", but with younger children especially, they need to talk out loud in order to bring their thoughts into being. Talking may take place publicly in front of the whole group or more privately in smaller groups. Inner speech and/or talk may happen as students move, write, draw, or...
otherwise dialogue with their experiences. To follow Vygotsky’s argument, if the students are engaged in this way they will be actively constructing their thoughts about those events and will be reflecting upon their experiences.

The student will not only be able to discover how they already think about something, they may also discover new meanings which may be expressed as ideas, attitudes, thoughts or feelings. These may be shared in dialogue or as writing, drawing, or other representations. Further, if talk or any other product of reflection is shared with others, this can in turn lead to further reflections by any of the participants, including the original thinkers.

Heathcote has repeatedly emphasized that it is not enough for the students to take action and to be involved as participants in the drama, they also have to reflect upon their actions and the event in the drama in order to discover what these mean for them. As has been shown, there is clear theoretical support for her position.

Subjective Meaning, Objective Meaning, Drama Text and the Drama World

Just as readers create a story world (Benton, 1983; Enciso Edmiston, 1990) and children at play create a play world (Vygotsky, 1976) so the participants in a drama create a drama world. Though each reader constructs a personal story world, the drama world is similar to the play world because both are imaginary yet shared realities. In both, participants create an imaginary world as they interact and pretend that they are different people and/or in a different place or time.

Norman (1981, p.50) has described this process of students creating meaning as “making personal meaning and sense of universal, abstract, social, moral, and ethical concepts through the concrete experience of the drama.” Watkins (1981, p.163) has noted that all drama “both celebrates and challenges the celebratory function of drama”, but argues that its challenging function is the reason why drama could be seen at the centre of the curriculum. Bolton (1979, 1984) argues that through drama the teacher may enable students to change their understandings about concepts. He calls this “drama for understanding.” Any changes in understanding will come about through reflection, though as will be argued, this type of reflection can be described as “subjective” and can usefully be distinguished from “objective reflection.”

Vygotsky (1976) argued that in everyday life we rarely attend to the meaning of our actions but that in spontaneous dramatic play the meaning of actions in the play world predominate over the actual actions themselves and for us to be able to play we must think about what we are doing and imagine a different world. Thus, by extension, in drama in education the participants are attending to the meanings of their actions in the drama world. These meanings are “objective” in the sense that each participant regards the events as happening externally to him or her in the drama world. The “reality” of the play or drama world is constructed by the children both separately and collectively. Their own actions and the actions of others will only make sense if they regard them as happening in the drama world. Each participant will be creating his or her own matrix of objective meanings but as all the participants tacitly accept or explicitly agree that their actions have particularly shared meanings, they will be creating the events and details of what can be described as the “drama text”. Each participant’s objective meanings and the shared meaning of the drama text are regarded as being external to them. The actions and events “exist” in the drama world which has an “objective”, though imagined, reality. These objective meanings are not created by the participants’ actions but as the participants think about their experiences concerning their own or others’ actions; objective meanings and drama text are created in objective reflection.

The following illustration may clarify this important point. If children are using dolls in a drama and pretending to console crying babies by talking to them and rocking them, each child will form his or her own objective meaning. One may be using a handkerchief and thinking that it is a diaper, another may be using a basket and thinking that it is a crib. If all the children are wondering how to rock the baby in the crib then they will need to accept or agree that moving the basket is rocking the crib; rocking the crib will become part of the shared objective meaning and thus part of the drama text if the group as a whole either tacitly accepts or specifically agrees to these imagined details.

An observer might think that the children are talking too loudly or rocking the baby too hard. However, the children may not think this. They are concerned with the objective meaning of their actions with babies and a crib rather than the specific details of the actions themselves with dolls and a basket. In this instance, the children will interact with each other and with the dolls with their attention on consoling babies. They will reflect and respond to each others’ actions on the basis of whether or not they mean that they will console a baby. They each reflect objectively and form an individual objective meaning of what they are doing in the drama world and pay only subsidiary attention to what they are doing in the actual world. As these objective meanings are shared and agreed or accepted they become part of the drama text.

The drama text is what all the children would see and accept as “reality” if they actually were consoling and diapering babies. However, because there are no actual babies, cribs, or diapers the children “see” this reality in their imaginations.
Drawing on Polanyi (1958) and Kelly (1963), Robinson (1980) notes that we can never be wholly objective because the way we see events, the meanings we make are coloured by the attitudes we hold, or in other words our ideas, beliefs, feelings and values. In this sense there will therefore be a "subjective" component as part of each participant's objective meanings.

While accepting that as the students create the drama text they are drawing on their personal beliefs and feelings about every situation, it is nevertheless useful to consider the making of the drama text as separate from students' interpretations when they reflect, think about what is happening and find personal meaning in what they observe. Thus, while accepting that there is no complete "objectivity", it is still useful to consider the drama text which is being made by the participants as comprised of agreed "objective meanings" in the sense that the participants regard themselves as interacting in a shared fictional external world (the drama world) when they are "in role". Conversely when they are interpreting the drama text and finding what the events mean for them, they are discovering their "subjective meanings" in subjective reflection. These are subjective in the sense that these are personal feelings and responses which need not be shared with anyone else and are part of the "internal" reality of each participant's "personal world."

Subjective meanings may, however be shared with others. For example, one student may share his fears about dropping the baby, another may share his worries about getting soap in the baby's eyes and start to dry him. Other students might then reflect on what was said or done.

When students interact, they draw on their understandings and attitudes (even when they are not aware that they have any) while they make decisions, talk, move, and interact to create the world of drama together. Though it may appear that they are just making decisions or doing something in role, students will always be relying on their value systems in order to make those decisions or take a particular action. What students, for example, say and do about diapering or bathing a baby will depend on their prior individual experiences, their understandings, and their attitudes which they bring to the drama situations.

Participants in drama can explore and investigate those understandings or attitudes as they are shared in particular fictional situations. As Bolton (1979) has noted, participants in drama may merely reinforce their existing ways of looking rather than clarify or modify them; however, it will be in subjective reflection, that any clarification or modification may occur. If students discover what the events of the drama mean to them, they may confront a belief or value as it has been expressed by themselves or others in an attitude to a particular situation.

The Need for Teacher Structuring to Enable Reflection

Though student reflection may happen without teacher structuring, Heathcote (1982, 1984, 1990) argues that the teacher must not leave this to chance. She emphasises that drama is a group art form which is created as the teacher and the students work together. Despite criticisms of "manipulation" (Goode, 1982; Boomer 1982), she argues that it is the responsibility of the teacher to structure the drama for both experiences and reflection by shaping it from inside as well as outside the drama. She does this to enable the students to learn. She will make structuring decisions with the students outside the drama (when the students are not in role) but she will also be able to do so from inside the drama by taking on roles in the same way as the students do.

She distinguished between the "enabling" teacher who is manipulating but doing so for educational purposes, and the "unfairly manipulating" teachers who is not. She recognises that she is constantly balancing her need to control behaviour with her intention to enable learning. "If you want to give children power to achieve something, under what circumstances does it become negative to manipulate them so that they may achieve something?" (Heathcote, 1982, p.11).

She argues that the teacher should use her power to enable the students to complete tasks, to create dramatic experiences which will achieve educational aims, and to bring about some change in the students' understandings. She refers to Freire (1987) who distinguishes between the manipulating authoritarian educator who retains power, and the liberating educator who when necessary assumes the responsibility for initiating learning but at the same time seeks to hand over that responsibility to the students.

Freire (1970) argues that learning happens in "praxis" which he defines as "a dialectical movement which goes from action to reflection and from reflection to action" (Heathcote, 1990, p.42). Heathcote (1982, 1984, 1990) has argued that this is how drama should be structured. She was the first practitioner to point out that students could reflect about their experiences in a drama session not only after but also during the drama. If they wait until afterwards to reflect, the students have to remember what happened but also they cannot change any decisions. If they reflect as they are making decisions in the drama world the students can think about what they are doing. She does not propose didactic teaching or the teacher imposing what the students do not want. On the contrary, she argues that by taking on roles with the students and interacting with them in the drama world, she can help the students to create the situations they want and also enable them to reflect on their experiences.

In contrast to teachers of "creative
dramatics” who emphasise the experience and “self expression” of the participants and who do not advocate teacher structuring from inside the drama (Mccaslin, 1974; Heinig & Stillwell, 1981), Dorothy Heathcote has consistently argued that experience is not enough; students need to find the meaning of their experiences in reflection. Robinson (1980) has noted that rather than expressing their “selves”, participants in drama express their attitudes, ideas and feelings about whatever they are paying attention to. He echoes Sartre (1946) who argued for a theatre of situation rather than a theatre of character.

It is however, all too easy to create a whole drama with students and never get beyond “What will I do now?” and “What happened?” Students will often be most concerned with the plot and will not readily think about what the events of the drama mean for them. The teacher can also become more concerned with the events of the drama rather than with getting the students to interpret the events. Realizing that a distinction can be drawn between objective reflection which creates drama text and subjective reflection which allows students to interpret in their subjective reflections, will help us as teachers to be aware of which type of reflection the students are engaged in.

In objective reflection, the students can agree on the details of the external drama world as drama text. In subjective reflection they form subjective meanings as they wonder about what those details mean to them.

Teachers can promote opportunities for objective and/or subjective reflection by their structuring of task and interactions.

Types of Subjective Meaning

Bolton (1979, p.126) lists what he calls three kinds of reflection: personal, universal and analogous. Rather than being different in kind, these are really different types of subjective meaning which may be created as students reflect.

In order to discuss these in context I will make references to a recent drama session which I taught. As part of a unit on racism, a group of fifth grade students had read The Journey, a picture book written and illustrated by Sheila Hamaanka about the internment of Japanese Americans during the Second World War. The group of middle and lower socio-economic students was roughly evenly divided between students who were African American and those who were European American. In the “Internment Drama” the students explored a variety of perspectives on this period of U.S. history.

“Personal reflection” for Bolton is when a student may have “a change in self awareness ... insight into his own psychological makeup or into the social environment in which he lives.” He argues that students’ ideas and feelings about whatever they think about in the drama can be regarded as a beginning “attitude” and that as a result of experiences in the drama, the students may have insights which will change that attitude in some way.

In reflecting on the Internment Drama, some students made it clear in their writing that they had had insights. One student said, “I never thought that people would talk about the Japanese like how they did.” Another student wrote that, “I never thought it would be so bad in America ... even though I wasn’t living back then and I’m happy I wasn’t to [sic], it was wrong of them and I feel bad for them. I never considered it would be so bad.”

“Universal reflection” for Bolton is “the conscious placing of an experience within a higher level of abstraction, a movement from the particular to a generalised theory or principle.” Heathcote’s phrase “dropping to the universal” (Wagner, 1976, p.76) would seem to correspond to this outcome of reflection. The Internment Drama has several examples of students finding “universal meaning.” At one point a student said adamently that the treatment of the Japanese Americans was inexcusable because, “Racism is racism.” Another wrote after the drama that, “Just because someone’s different, they have feelings.” When the students in role as survivors of the internment suggested that they had to educate others so that this should never happen again, one boy stated his belief that, “Nobody can change anybody else, it’s that person that has to change themselves. The only way we can help is to say this is what’s going to happen if you do this. We can tell them what happened and show them. You need to go by what you believe in.”

“Analogous reflection” for Bolton is “a leap from the drama context to another context.” Bolton gives the example of a student who seemed to make a connection between a cover-up in the drama and the Watergate trials which were going on at the same time. No discussion was held which drew parallels between the Internment Drama and other examples of racism, however, one student wrote bitterly, “I’m sick of all this racism. They say America is free, it’s not free at all!” Another drew a thought-provoking analogy: “I think of Hitler and what he did to the Jews but we were doing almost the exact same things to the Japanese. It’s hard to think somebody I know could have put the Japanese in the concentration camps.”

The teacher may be aware when students create these types of subjective meaning, however, subjective meaning is not limited to these three types. Students may be discovering how they feel about what is happening in the drama without an awareness of any universalising, the drawing of an analogy, or of any particular change in their attitude. For example, one student wrote quite simply that, “The Japanese were treated unfairly.” Another noted the paradox that, “They were Americans but they were treated as if they were not.” A girl, towards the end of the drama said, “Even it it is an opinion it
is the truth. We have to speak out no matter what". These were examples of statements that suggested that the students were discovering how they responded personally to the events of the drama; they were creating subjective meaning.

Underlying Questions and Teacher Structuring

It has been noted that reflection may occur during such tasks as writing in role, making a map, making a summary statement in role, performing a ritual or dance, depicting, reading, listening, writing and talking (O’Neill & Lambert, 1982; Morgan & Saxton, 1987). In other words, reflection can happen at almost any time in a drama provided the students are thinking about their experiences.

When students reflect, they are paying attention to particular details or aspects of an event or situation. As the students interact with each other and with the teacher, they will be continually shifting their attention. The term “focus” has been used to describe the object of the students’ attention, but it has also been used in other ways. There is, unfortunately, little consistency or clarity over the use of the term focus. It is unclear whether it describes an external or an internal point of attention and whether it is for the teacher or the students. Some writers (Neelands, 1984; Byron, 1986) talk of deciding on a focus for a drama and use the term almost synonymously with educational aim or objective. Morgan & Saxton (1987) even talk of the educational aim or objective. Morgan & Saxton (1987) even talk of the educational focus. Bolton (1984, p.157) on the other hand talks of a “focus of attention” and a “subsidiary focus” both of which are different for the students and the teacher. O’Neill & Lambert (1982, p.137) note that the focus is “precise” and that it needs to be redefined at each stage of the work but they do not discuss focus in depth.

Heathcote notes that a drama session “hasn’t got to go drifting about unless that is the choice made by [the teacher] and the class together” (1982, p.17). She describes (1984, p.120) focus as the “area of concern” for the students. Though students may have a broad area of concern, what the students are specifically concerned with is actually changing from moment to moment with every interaction. As the teacher can affect student attention by setting tasks and interacting with the students, it may be more useful to restrict the term “focusing” to the way the teacher is attempting to direct or change the students’ attention.

In every task and interaction it can be argued that there is an “underlying question” even when a question has not been asked directly. When students reflect they are in effect “answering” the question which the teacher asks explicitly or implicitly. Morgan & Saxton (1987, p.135) note how the teacher’s question-
However, if the teacher attempts to shift the students’ attention by posing another underlying question, the teacher will be structuring the drama for reflection. For example, in the “Internment Drama” at one point the students were in pairs working in role, one as an FBI agent, the other as a Japanese American who was being arrested. They were answering the underlying question, “What did it feel like to arrest or be arrested?” Some students were very effectively resisting arrest through the use of convincing arguments about their citizenship and their need for more time to prepare, but when most students had been taken to the camp and were beginning to shift their attention to other things, I redirected all of the students’ attention by asking, “What happened to those people who refused to go?” Stepping out of role at this moment was essential in order to find a direction for the whole group and avoid having some students lose their attention. They were all in agreement that the Japanese Americans were made to go by force. This redirection of attention by asking a different underlying question (I actually asked a number of different questions) led the group to create drama text as they decided on some details of the drama world we were creating together. I was then able to move the group on to the next task in which they shared some of the thoughts of the FBI agents and the Japanese Americans in the camps. This task provided an opportunity for subjective reflection and different interpretations of what happened: “This is not their country ... There must be some mistake, we are Americans ... I don’t want to be American if they treat us like this.”

The teacher can thus structure the drama so that the students will have opportunities to reflect in ways which would not arise if the students were left to themselves as they are in spontaneous dramatic play. Teachers can effect what happens in the drama world as they set tasks, and interact with the students who then respond. In doing so, teachers ask underlying questions, and in their responses the students may reflect objectively or subjectively and thereby create objective and/or subjective meaning. Further, the students may then begin to respond to each other and continue to reflect. Whether the students engage in objective or subjective reflection will depend on the underlying questions which arise between teachers and students and teachers need to be aware of the underlying questions which are being answered by the students so that they can make decisions about whether or not to shift student attention.

**Four Ways to Structure for Reflection**

From what Heathcote, Bolton, O’Neill & Lambert, and others have written, four different ways of structuring for reflection can be identified each of which has specific advantages. Each structure can lead to objective and/or subjective reflection.

Donald Schon has categorised reflection in a way which is useful in considering how to structure for reflection in drama. In his analysis of reflection by teachers and other professionals he distinguishes between “reflection-on-action” and “reflection-in-action”. Reflection-on-action is when we “think back on what we have done” (1983, p.26) which can happen “in tranquillity” or if we “stop and think” about what we are doing. In contrast, reflection-in-action is when we “think about doing something while doing it” (1987, p.84). The first three ways to structure for reflection by the students are types of reflection-on-action and the fourth is reflection-in-action.

The four ways to structure for reflection by the students may be shown thus:

**Four Ways to Structure for Student Reflection**

- **R1 out of role** at the beginning or end of the drama
- **R2 out of role** during a drama
- **R3 in role** after an experience
- **R4 in role** during an experience

The first way (as noted by O’Neill & Lambert, 1982; Fleming, 1982) that the teacher can structure for reflection is to reflect after the drama session as a kind of summing up of what has happened; here the students are reflecting out of role and outside the drama. In the Internment Drama the students reflected with structure R1 when they wrote after the session about anything new they had thought or felt during the drama. Examples from their writing are given in this paper. The students could also have had a discussion about what they had done, thought, or felt during the session. They could also have drawn or painted, written poems or stories, created a dance, or made sculptures. All of these would have been using structure R1. If a drama lasts for more than one session, when the students reflect on what happened previously at the beginning of a session, they may also be considered to be reflecting with structure R1. Structure R1 allows the teacher to direct the students attention to a session as a whole.

The teacher’s second way to structure for reflection is to reflect out of role before the end of the drama session. This can be seen as a kind of appraisal (Wagner, 1976, p.78; Fleming, 1982). With both structures R1 and R2 the students are reflecting out of role and outside the drama, but with R2 they have only stepped aside in order to think about what has, is, or may happen in the drama.

In the example from the Internment Drama, when the students were reflecting on why the Japanese Americans had stayed, they initially did this using structure R2 and interpreted what had happened. Again, when they considered what had happened to those who had resisted arrest, the students did so out of role and created drama text. The teacher can use
structure R2 to direct or redirect the students' attention to their experiences but without having any additional pressure of being in role. It may be useful to think about their agreed intentions, or to make a decision about what may happen, or to clarify how they feel about what is happening, as 'themselves'. Not all reflection needs to happen in role.

The teacher's third way to structure for reflection is for the students to reflect in role after they have an experience in the drama (Bolton, 1984, p.169). With structure R3 the students are again thinking about their experiences but now they are doing so from the viewpoint of the people who are affected by whatever happens in the drama world.

For instance, some of the students in the internment camp agreed that they would renounce their allegiance to anything Japanese. After this event, in subjective reflection, students interpreted this differently. For example: "I feel like a traitor changing my culture ... Even though I changed my culture, inside I'm still Japanese ... Nobody needs to know who you are as long as you know who you are that's all that matters." In objective reflection towards the end of the drama the students agreed with one student who said in response to their experiences in the internment camp that they should "Educate the young so that it won't happen again." To do so they agreed that as survivors they had to "tell the truth about what happened." One boy said that they had to write what actually happened for the social studies text-books. A girl in role as a child of a survivor said, "When I was young my mother and father would tell me about it and I wouldn't really care... I didn't know what they were talking about, but now I do I'm going to act on it, I'm going to do something. I'm going to write something, draw something ... do something to show we care." They all agreed that a statue would be an appropriate way to show this.

Much of Heathcote's and Bolton's recent teaching has been structured to enable students to be both reflecting and experiencing at the same time (structure R4). This is the fourth way that the teacher can structure for reflection. Bolton (1979, p.127) has argued that this is perhaps the most powerful form of reflection. Heathcote (1984, p.106) notes that "I have struggled to perfect techniques which allow my classes ... to be able both to experience and reflect upon their experience at the same time: simultaneously to understand the journey while being both the cause and the medium of the work." In Schon's terms, each student's "reflection-in-action" is an "exploration" in which "he understands the situation by trying to change it" (1983, p.151).

This structure allows the students to consider implications and possible consequences of their actions before these are taken. They are finding meaning in action and creating meaning as they experience. However, to be able to reflect in any depth at the same time as experiencing the drama has to 'stand still' so that the students are not rushing into action. The tasks and ways of interacting which enable the teacher to do this need to be described in more detail elsewhere.

**Conclusion**

If we want our students to be learning in our dramas we must structure the work so that the students reflect. Though much more needs to be written about how to structure for reflection, this paper has considered some important aspects of reflection in drama. A theoretical justification for the need to structure for reflection was outlined. In structuring, if we are aware of the difference between objective and subjective reflection, we will be able to ensure that students are engaged in both the creation of the drama text and their interpretations of what happens in the drama. Thinking of the structuring of interactions as asking underlying questions will help us to direct student attention appropriately and thereby create objective meaning and drama text or the different types of subjective meanings. During the drama and afterwards we may use one of the four structures which promote students reflection and thereby provide the students with "an invitation to reflection about the human condition."

**References**


Davies, G. (1983), Practical Primary Drama, (NH, Heinemann).


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Start thinking about booking buses
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Brian Edmison
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The Chaires School, 1270 Brentnell Ave.
High School Cohort Planning Meeting Agenda
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