

AUTHORING COMPLEXITY WITH DIALOGIC DRAMATIC INQUIRY

In this article, through analysis of several practical examples, I theorize dramatic inquiry, and in particular dialogic dramatic inquiry, as pedagogy in alignment with the illustrations of engaged, critical, future-oriented, and culturally responsive pedagogies described in previous volumes of this journal. Though there is a long history of teachers using drama in classrooms, educational uses of drama tend to be regarded monolithically, and classroom drama in general remains largely un-theorized as pedagogy. Drawing primarily on complexity theories, the theories of Bakhtin, as well as the pedagogies and scholarship of Dorothy Heathcote, I outline an inquiry-based pedagogy that is dialogic as well as dramatic. As inquiry, dramatic inquiry is both constrained by curriculum goals and liberated by questions that teachers negotiate with students. As drama, dramatic inquiry engages children holistically both in the way dramatic play motivates them and in the way that dramatic performance provides opportunities to make the complexity of ideas visible for interpretation. And the dramatic structure of dialogic dramatic inquiry extends the dialogic potential of dramatic inquiry for creating spaces where complex meaning can be co-authored.

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INTRODUCTION

In his Editorial Introduction to the first issue of this journal Allan Luke (2006) stressed the need to understand the complexity of pedagogy.

Profound and sustainable educational change and innovation require that we move beyond a search for a “correct” and accurate meaning and practice of pedagogy – from a less causal and linear model of educational effects to an ecological model that explores the complex embeddings and mediations within cultures and discourses, systems and everyday practices. (p. 3)

Luke’s words could be applied to teachers’ and children’s experiences of education in general as much as to any doomed academic pursuit of “best” pedagogical practices. Education for students of any age would be revolutionized if pedagogy were grounded and shaped by beliefs that knowledge, like life, is always ecologically complex and that understanding must be created in mediated activities.

Using a recent example of work with primary-aged children, in this article I use complexity theory and learning theory to analyze how the activities of dramatic inquiry, and in particular dialogic dramatic inquiry, may promote a more complex understanding of aspects of life. Dialogic dramatic inquiry, at its core, is inquiry-based pedagogy that uses adult-mediated dramatic play and performance to create a sequence of imagined events that promote dialogue and understanding among participants.

When teachers and teacher educators envision an alternative future for their classrooms, schools, and students they are not alone. This journal is one of the sources they can turn to for a pedagogical array of critical, anti-oppressive, democratic, culturally responsive, and progressive theorists and practitioners

whose frameworks and suggestions they may apply to create learning communities where it is appropriate for students with teachers to question, critique, collaborate, and take action to shape their understanding and create new possibilities. For those educators who are not strait-jacketed by the tyranny of testing and the rigidity of teacher-proof curriculum materials, dialogic dramatic inquiry is a complementary pedagogy that promotes a complex approach to learning for teachers and a complex view of life for students.

DIALOGIC DRAMATIC INQUIRY

I recently worked with primary-aged children alongside a teacher colleague of mine, Tim Taylor, in an English rural school in a Pennine village (Edmiston, 2008b). On the afternoon we arrived at the school we discovered that the five-, six-, and seven-year old children we were to work with the following day had been pretending to be pirates. These nine “Infant” children had relished the pirate pictures in the informational book their teacher, Kate, had shown them. And armed with highly generative stereotypes the children in disparate groups on the playground had imagined threads of narratives that collectively created experiences and images of firing cannons, slashing swords, boarding and sinking ships, and burying treasure on desert islands. Some of these exploits had been explored by children in the play corner at free choice time and transformed into drawings.

The children were delighted when, with their teacher’s approval, we suggested that we work with them on the topic of pirates and the next morning they eagerly brought their playground energy into the classroom. At first sight,

this might seem a strange pedagogical move but we had several reasons for turning to pirates. First, we were unknown to these children and their teacher and wanted to harness the children's shared enthusiasm to demonstrate a pedagogy that was new for everyone in the school. Second, local history and transportation were topics on the school curriculum. Tim and I invented a plausible tale that contextualized the 19th century road and sea transport, and theft, of silver from the nearby lead mines that they had recently visited on a field trip. Sharing this narrative would both introduce a topic and begin to move the children beyond the historical stereotypes they had reproduced on the playground. Third, in school the twenty-nine children, aged 5-11, had a calm, ordered, quiet, highly adult-directed life of prescriptive curriculum study. Yet these young children were all drawn to active play in an oppositional violent world. Exploring the topic of pirates would create an imagined space where the children could collectively experience, but with adult guidance explore and critique, a fictional noisy, disruptive attack on order. Inquiry that was both critical and dialogic could begin that day.

Dialogic dramatic inquiry is my term for the pedagogical use of dramatizing for learning and teaching through dialogic inquiry (Edmiston, 2000; 2008b) that is rooted in the pedagogies and scholarship of the drama-as-education pioneer Dorothy Heathcote (Wagner, 1976; Johnson & O'Neill, 1984; Heathcote & Bolton, 1995). Heathcote introduced and demonstrated the power of a revolutionary idea: adults can mediate transformative learning activities by participating alongside children as if they too are various people in a world that is

at the same time both imagined and actual (Wagner, 1976). Analysis of the effectiveness of drama in terms of learning outcomes (e.g. Wagner, 1998) has tended to view drama monolithically drawing together such disparate approaches to classroom drama as brief role play, student performances, and teacher-led simulations alongside Heathcote's very different extended negotiated improvisational use of drama as pedagogy. Heathcote's process approach to making drama in the classroom has been theorized structurally, most notably as improvised theatre (e.g. O'Neill, 1995) and as sociological explorations (e.g. Bolton, 1999). Where attention has turned to pedagogy scholars have been most concerned with socio-cultural context (e.g. Gallagher, 2006), with teaching (e.g. Morgan & Saxton, 1987), with pre-planned lessons (e.g. O'Neill & Lambert, 1983), or with how to use dramatic conventions (e.g. Neelands, 1990). And though Heathcote's sophisticated use of drama as a vehicle for curricular learning (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995) is internationally respected (Bolton, 2001), little theorizing has occurred in terms of how her approach is inquiry-based or how teachers using drama in particular classrooms are actually mediating learning. Learning theory in general has not been applied to analyze how drama can be used as pedagogy. In this article I take a socio-cultural and post-structural approach to learning and teaching applying, in particular, the theories of Vygotsky (1967, 1978), especially his view of teaching as mediating learning, and the theories of Bakhtin (1981, 1990), especially his ideas about the roles of imagination and discourse in creating understanding. I have coined the term dialogic dramatic inquiry in order to shift connotations from the theatrical toward

an educational position valuing inquiry-based pedagogy that is most educational when adult mediation makes students' experiences both more dialogic and more dramatic.

In terms of participants' imaginative experiences I place dramatic inquiry on a continuum between dramatic play and dramatic performance. Like both dramatic play and performance, dramatic inquiry is not just talking about the people and situations in the cultural worlds encountered in stories, but rather in imagined spaces children and adults create a shared narrative as they enact and experience events in dramatic action as if they are actually inhabiting other times and spaces. Tim and I focused the Infants' inquiries by creating the beginning of a story that I illustrated on a white board. With student input for specific details, we told how an early 19th century merchant ship loaded with silver from the lead mines nearby was attacked off the coast and nearly sunk by marauding pirates who struck the sails and hull with cannon-fire, boarded the ship, and made off with the treasure. After talking briefly with Tim, as if he were the captain, the children were eager collectively to imagine and enact the attack. We shifted the tables and chairs and used pieces of material to evoke parts of a ship: the hold, the captain's cabin, and a rowing boat. When given an open choice, two of the boys, Tony and Peter, wanted to imagine they were the pirates in another ship as the other children wanted to place them selves on the ship under attack.

Like dramatic play, dramatic inquiry is rooted in children's love of narrative, their everyday social and informational knowledge and life experiences, as well as their desire and ability to imagine they are other people

living in different social spaces and cultural worlds filled with events that may be both orderly and transgressive (e.g. Dyson, 1997). These young children were captivated for over two hours by the unfolding narratives we created that morning and afternoon. With our guidance and input, they collectively imagined events by transforming their limited knowledge of ships and sailors, the information they had acquired on their field trip to the former lead and silver mines, and their social knowledge of confrontation and collaboration into imagined events.

Like all play, dramatic inquiry is always voluntary (Vygotsky, 1976). Children choose to play with one another and adults must also choose to participate. Tim and I were ready to imagine for short periods of time that we too were the people the children wanted to imagine (e.g. pirates and the crew on the merchant ship that was attacked) as well as anyone else whose perspective we wanted to introduce for exploration with the children (e.g. the ship's captain, the owner of the ship, and the family of a dead sailor).

Like dramatic play, dramatic inquiry is filled with a myriad of imagined possibilities and curricular opportunities (Hall, 2006). Adult mediation can focus students on questions and concerns to extend their curiosity into inquiry that over a sequence of activities creates multiple opportunities for learning. Like other critical inquiry-based pedagogical approaches (e.g. Short, Harste, & Burke, 1995; Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2007) agreed-upon questions that lead students to critique power relationships are the locus of learning in dialogic dramatic inquiry. Their teacher's broad curriculum goal was to assist the children to understand more about the social and cultural dimensions of 19th century transportation while

acquiring relevant information. This goal focused and constrained imagination while inquiry questions liberated it. Our core inquiry question was a socio-historical one: What was life like at the time of pirates? This question spawned more critical questions as we proceeded to extend the narrative with the children: Who benefited from the attack? What were the consequences for the people involved? Who should decide the fate of the crew? Why would people turn to piracy? We explored these and other questions in imagination as the children, with our assistance and guidance, invented a sequence of events.

As in dramatic performance, in dramatic inquiry children and adults may enact parts of narratives for others to see and interpret. However, as with all process approaches to drama, sharing is never for an audience outside the room but is rather to extend classroom discourse within the classroom community. Tim initially represented the captain of the ship so that the children could ask him questions about what had happened and thereby begin to enter into a nautical world. Later, the two boys who imagined they were the pirates were eager to show their peers how the attackers could have forced open the captain's cabin. They shared an event they had imagined but did not do so for applause. I could then use that event to focus the children on narrative details and interpretative possibilities. I asked what the sailors did in response to the attack. Did they move to protect them selves, another person, or the cargo of silver?

Whereas performance can be more about entertainment than learning, and play can be repetitive, escapist, and formless, by mediating children's dramatic experiences adults create more potential for learning through dialogic

inquiry. Adult mediation assists individual children or groups to make meaning socially that they cannot make alone (Vygotsky, 1987). By joining in as a narrator I could assist in structuring an order of events that revolved around investigating inquiry questions. By imagining I was a pirate I could negotiate with the other pirates the best way to achieve their clear objective of capturing the treasure and by imagining I was a member of the crew of the merchant ship I could help the other children plan and execute their response to the attack. Similarly, Tim imagined he was first the captain of the ship and then its owner. At the same time, as teachers we focused the children's reflections, from different perspectives, on the meaning of what was enacted from the viewpoints of those on board both ships and then afterwards as we met the ship's owner and the family of a person the children had decided had been killed. Our mediation created dialogic spaces where children could take up other perspectives to reexamine their own and others' previous assumptions

Unlike those who use the term dialogic to mean dialogue (e.g. Wells, 1999) I use the term as Bakhtin does. Dialogic spaces are not necessarily created in exchanges between children and adults in dialogue or conversation. Dialogue is only "dialogic" for a person who imaginatively enters into another consciousness, takes up a different perspective, and uses it to change their understanding (Bakhtin, 1981; 1990). Students who are critical of how power is used to dominate and exclude may fail to critique their own positions and use of power (Ellsworth, 1989). However, in dialogic spaces mediated by adults, especially when using dramatic inquiry, students' critical lenses can be turned

back on themselves to view the world from within various power relationships (Edmiston, 2000). Students of any age may reassess their assumptions about how power operates to experience and evaluate dialogically some of the complexities of acting to affect power relationships (Edmiston, 2008).

LIFE IS COMPLEX

Seeking to understand life is a complex enterprise because the physical world, as well as the cultural worlds, we inhabit and experience form complex systems, communities, and ecologies. All are “complex” in the sense that “a great many interdependent agents are interacting with each other in a great many ways” (Waldrop, 1992, p. 11). For example, the complexity of the interrelationships among weather, the atmosphere, pollution, human activity, industries, organizations, politics, and climate has become widely appreciated in recent years as scientists and social activists have struggled to understand how climate change happens, and how it may be reversed, through small but significant changes in people’s daily actions.

All living systems, as Waldrop (1992) summarizes, are complex, self-organizing, adaptive, and creative (p. 11). Using complexity theory, both a classroom community and the individuals within every classroom can be regarded as diverse interrelated living systems. People, alone and in groups, learn by creatively adapting to changing situations. They adapt through organizing themselves differently and by adapting they then change the situation to which others must respond.

As Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler (2008) have shown, complexity theory can usefully be used as a theoretical lens to stress commonality across constructivist, socio-cultural, and ecological assumptions about learning for understanding. Though these different theories cast the net progressively wider in terms of who and what to include in learning relationships, all regard understanding as made in interactions between people, as well as between people and the physical world, rather than in individual mental or behavioral events.

People interdependently participate, interact, and learn in social activities within families, professional groups, and other communities which are interrelated diverse, complex cultural worlds that intersect with the physical world. Schools and classroom communities are similarly cultural worlds even when not recognized as such by teachers or students. All are cultural “worlds” in the sense that across diverse but interrelated social spaces people, who participate in shared activities, experience considerable predictability and coherence in terms of how people act. At the same time, though people within a cultural world share assumptions that have been created across time and in groups that have never met, they also act differently because they have diverse and conflicting views and positions on aspects of the particular cultural world (Holland et al, 1998; Wenger, 1998). Children in every classroom will share common cultural assumptions, for example the need to listen as a story is being told and only ask relevant questions. At the same time, the questions that children ask and how they interact as they ask them will show the diversity of

experiences and views among the children. In every cultural world, including every classroom, there are not only multiple intersecting perspectives, but among those viewpoints there is both commonality and diversity.

Using dramatic inquiry makes the complexity of classroom communities more apparent and visible and thus the possibilities for learning more extensive than in classrooms where children are not imagining that they are in other spaces. Participation in sequences of social activities in imagined spaces using dramatic inquiry begins to create a world of imagination in the classroom that grows in complexity out of, and in intersection with, the existing classroom community. The cultural world of pirates at sea that may be studied by anyone interested in 19th century history is populated with viewpoints, words, and imagined deeds beyond those that would usually be shared and experienced in classrooms. When students with teachers invent the discourse and actions of imagined people this provides students with different possible frameworks for interpreting their relationships with one another and with the world. The social use of imagination affects both how learning happens and what understanding is created, or authored.

In the remainder of this article I use Waldrop's four dimensions of living systems (complex, self-organizing, adaptive, and creative) to analyze how the understanding students author with teachers (alone and within a community) is affected by the use of dramatic inquiry.

LEARNING IS COMPLEX AS WELL AS COMPLICATED

Developing more complex understanding of pirates, or anything else, is an ongoing pursuit that changes and evolves when additional intersecting viewpoints, events, and situations are considered and taken up. Dialogic dramatic inquiry creates the possibility for many more viewpoints to be explored in imagined situations and events than would usually be possible in classrooms. For example, ship transportation and piracy will be understood in more complexity when considered from the viewpoints of the crew of a 19th pirate ship, people on ships that are attacked, owners of ships, the families of people injured or killed, former pirates, and the authors of 21st century books on pirates.

Theories that assume the complexity of life can be contrasted with theories that only theorize life as complicated. Scholars and teachers may frame their understanding of learning using complicated or complex theories. Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler (2008) provide a detailed analysis of the implications for education of these two broadly contrasting worldview frameworks.

A complicated theory “reduces phenomena to basic components, root causes, and fundamental laws [so that] full understanding would arise from a detailed knowledge of each of its parts” (p. 76). Teachers who view classrooms as complicated phenomena will tend to have a mechanistic approach to the study of a topic as well as to how individual children learn. For example, relying on government-produced activities related to curriculum goals, Kate had already planned lessons that she intended to follow during the weeks after our visit. And when a child is seen as a complicated individual, for example resembling a computer or a clock, to understand a child a teacher applies generalizing laws in

order to understand or explain the particular behaviors of the individual. Kate, for example, described Tony in the following way, “He has difficulty paying attention. He’s new to the school so he’s not made many friends yet. He wants to work with Peter but Peter loses focus too and they really work better on their own. I’m sure things will come together for him soon this year.”

Similarly, a complicated framing of the study of any topic or skill proceeds by rationally pre-dividing it into parts that are studied assuming ordered predetermined relationships to each other. Packaged “teacher-proof” curricula are rooted in such assumptions and so are lesson plans that are followed with little regard for children’s lives or classroom responses. Though Kate was keen to participate in our open-ended inquiry-based approach, she regarded this as a break from her usual routine. As she said when we shared out ideas, “We can do this today, but tomorrow I’ll need to get back to teaching them their phonics.”

Though information may sometimes be transferred from knowledgeable teachers, or other adults, to receptive learners in pre-packaged parcels of time, the development of life-long skills or deep understanding is a complex endeavor. A person’s realization may feel instantaneous, localized in the moment, and individual but one meaning-making event always builds on prior events, discourse, understanding, and relationships. At the same time, one person’s idea may dialogically be taken up by another person to forge a new idea. The web-like connections among people across present and previous spaces and times means that one person’s moment of making meaning may have an extended effect on their own or other people’s understanding.

In tension with complicated theories, complexity theories view children, classrooms, computers, clocks, and all people and objects as a part of many complex webs of relationships and meanings. Davis et al summarize a complexity theoretical approach.

[A complexity theory embraces a complicated approach but] also argues that an understanding of a clock demands an attention to the fact that the clock is embedded in social and natural environments, which compels considerations of the roles that a clock plays in shaping social lives, the historical conditions that supported its inventions, the materials involved in its construction, the effects of its use on the natural environment, and so on. (p. 76)

Teachers with more complex views of the world create very different classroom communities in comparison to those who hold more complicated assumptions. Based in constructivist, constructionist, critical, and cultural theories that view humans as meaning-makers, teachers who adopt complex approaches to education put students' attention on new possibilities for understanding themselves in relation to other people, and vice versa. Ecological and spiritual approaches extend those relationships to the rest of creation. Students are encouraged to raise and pursue questions in order to create understanding that may be new to others as well as to themselves. Knowledge is seen as shared, distributed, situated, and embodied within and among complex, interrelated, evolving systems and communities, including classrooms, that are changed by the words and actions of people as well as by the events of non-human actors.

Kate seemed pulled between her complicated assumptions about learning and her framing of school life as complex. Despite curriculum guides, pre-

planned lessons, and individualistic assumptions about children she did not rigidly follow classroom routines. In the classroom there was time for free choice, including play, and how she related to the children was affected by what she knew of their lives outside school. Her warm joking manner coupled with her responsiveness to children's collective mood created an overall sense of a caring family in the classroom.

Adults who operate out of complicated assumptions tend to view knowing as replication, understanding as additive, and teaching as transmission. They assume that to know something or someone it is sufficient to accumulate bits of information. Based in Behaviorist views of people as trainable individuals who have to be controlled, and/or mechanistic theories of information processing, teachers put students' attention on acquiring other people's ideas from authoritative sources. A student's role is not to question but to acquire in parts, and then reproduce for a teacher or an "objective" test, what is already known. Using a computer as a metaphor, knowledge is seen as downloadable inputs to individual brains from textbooks and other "hard drives" made available to children in schools. From this viewpoint, children would likely learn about pirates, if this were an approved topic, by reading informational books and individually completing pre-planned tasks.

Though other cultural worlds may be introduced into classrooms via textbooks, stories, the Internet, etc. in classrooms where complicated theories of learning are dominant, much of the ecology of how people, creatures, and environment interrelate in particular groups is likely to be excluded, and cultural

worlds that are alluded to, each with alternative ideologies, are too often presented superficially and as if they are detached from, and unrelated to, children's lives (e.g. Taylor, 1983; Lemke, 2007). Teachers who use dialogic dramatic inquiry can begin to redress this imbalance.

Bakhtin's (1981) theory of discourse is useful for understanding how teachers' complicated or complex theoretical frameworks affects how they structure activities, what their assumptions are about learning-teaching, and how they view students in relation to adults and the worlds outside the classroom. Complicated theories support assumptions that ideas or pieces of information should be presented through "authoritative" discourse. Teachers and texts, like curriculum guides, are assumed to be sources of authority that should be accepted and replicated by students. Adults, or dominant students, are viewed as the authors or arbiters both of what it is important to know and what meaning to make of that knowledge. Whether using spoken or written language or visual images teachers use discourse that is assumed to have fixed meaning. Learners' interpretations of texts or knowledge of events are minimized or dismissed when students are addressed "monologically." It is assumed that important understanding has been formed prior to classroom interactions so that each student's primary response is required to be broadly the same. They are expected to reproduce similar replications of what has been presented to them. Existing knowledge contained in books, and in the prior knowledge of teachers and some students, are assumed to be the best sources of information and ideas on pirates or any other topic.

When adults assume that knowledge, learning, and teaching are complex, they value creating a very different classroom community. They view knowing as evolving coherence, understanding as created, and teaching as affecting the possibilities for learning. Humans are regarded as knowing something by conceptualizing it in relation to everything else we know by working, and often struggling, to accommodate diverse views and new ideas. Using Bakhtin's theory, people make meaning "dialogically". Children cannot know something merely by taking it apart. They must view it both holistically and relationally. For example, what I understand about pirates will be changed by how I collaboratively make meaning about pirates with other people I talk with in person or encounter in texts in addition to how I respond to what they know and believe about pirates.

POWER AND SELF-ORGANIZATION

Living systems organize themselves. For example, though flocks of geese have social hierarchies, or "pecking orders", when they fly all take turns to lead without being told to do so. Social and cultural communities also organize themselves but hierarchies are socially created, internalized, enacted, and perpetuated in power relationships even when in relation to instinct or genetic differences. Social hierarchies can begin to realign when situations affect power relationships as can happen when using dialogic dramatic inquiry.

Foucault's theories of power and discourse are useful for understanding how discourse creates, perpetuates, but may also undermine, power relationships in any group of people and how that is affected when using dialogic

dramatic inquiry. Classroom communities may be regarded as self-organizing in the sense that people interact hierarchically in relation to imposed or established power relationships that affect who has more authority to act and whose ideas count more than others (Foucault, 1977; Mac Naughton, 2005).

Teachers in schools and classrooms have more authority than students over both the classroom discourse and what actions are permissible. As power circulates among adults and children in relationships over time, some children and adults accumulate more authority in one situation than in another. They use that authority in discourse when they assume that they can tell others what to do or what to think. With the Infants, as in any classroom, in brief or extended discussions the ideas of some children tended to have more authority with the classroom teacher while other children's ideas were passed over. Tony and Peter were both the edge of the power relationships promoted by the teachers. They were the least cooperative children in terms of following directions and shifting from self-directed to teacher-directed activities. The teachers consistently exercised more authority than any of the children. But when social situations changed, for example on the playground, then adults' authority diminished and children's power relationships changed in response. Tony and Peter both had difficulty negotiating with one another and with their peers but outside the classroom each could shift their power positions in relation to other children attempting to tell others how to act, for example, when playing soccer.

Social situations and relationships may change radically when children play. Teachers using dramatic inquiry may shape social interactions to change

the power relationships among children and adults. In play, existing power relationships become destabilized, and through dramatic inquiry more complex relationships may develop, as imagined communities begin to grow in classrooms. Parallel and overlapping power relationships may be introduced. People may imagine attacking others in play, they may be hurt and die, but they may also more deeply care for one another than is usual in the context of schooling.

Tony tended to interrupt when adults spoke and disrupt classroom tasks when he lost interest and he was often excluded from activities by peers and by teachers. Peter was less disruptive and more of a loner. But like the other Infant children, both were productively engaged for over two hours in the creation of the story of the pirate attack and its aftermath through activities mediated by Tim and myself. One significant change was in the power relationships between them, the adults in the room, and the rest of the class. Tony and Peter had extensive imagined power as pirates. For example, they had the power to shoot cannons, board a ship, fight sailors, and steal treasure. All children had more individual and collective power within the classroom community than was usual as they created intersecting parts of an extended collaboratively created and enacted tale.

The self-organizing nature of the classroom community changed, and became more visible, when children had to interact in the parallel worlds of dramatic inquiry. Power relationships became more complex. Our power relationships with Tony and Peter, as with all the other children, was based in an

assumption that we should as much as possible share power with children rather than impose control on their actions or ideas. Though fictional hierarchical relationships could become highly oppressive and authoritarian in the imagined discourse of pirates at the same time we insisted on a parallel classroom discourse of collaborative relationships. Tim and I used our authority as teachers to ensure as much as possible that everyone would collaborate in the creation of the shared narrative. No child was allowed to impose his or her ideas on how others ought to act in the fictional world or how to interpret those actions.

As we moved back-and-forth between public negotiations about what might happen in the narrative or what an action meant to small group interactions in the imagined world we were more aware of who attempted to use their power to dominate whom. For example, Tony and Peter both desired to enact their ideas without recognizing the social consequences for the whole group. With all the children at different times, Tim and I both mediated many interactions in order to affect the power relationships in the classroom. At the same time, in imagined spaces children had control over their own inventions but we would mediate discussions if necessary. The children could exercise a high degree of agency as they moved between, and adapted to, the changing imagined and actual situations in the classroom.

ADAPTATION, AGENCY, AND PLAYFULNESS

Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler (2008) stress that playfulness is at the heart of a complex approach to learning. Learning is “a playful phenomenon [that is] about moving into and through an evolving space of possibility” (p. 83).

All complex systems, from cultural worlds to classroom communities to individuals, learn in the sense that they adapt and evolve in response to changing situations. Rather than thinking of learning as adding something on to a static being, applying complexity theory conceptualizes learning as a playful change in a whole system in response to new possibilities. People within a cultural world become different as they take up fresh perspectives, “see” life differently, and can thus act in new ways in a playful adaptation to changes in spaces that may be physical, social, cultural, and imagined.

Teachers create different possibilities for learning by changing the environment, their situation, or the tools available for making meaning in a space. New materials, alternative modes of meaning-making, new people, and classroom field trips all create new physical, social, and cultural spaces and tools that open up different possibilities for learning in schools. The dramatic tools and what can be thought of as the imagined field trips of dramatic inquiry similarly open up new spaces for learning which may become more complex than is usual in classrooms.

Teachers using dramatic inquiry with students of any age can explore some of the complexities of any actual or imagined time and space. A playful but serious trip across time and space to the world of pirates immediately offered the Infant children the possibility of imagined ships and weapons, the ability to move like pirates or sailors, and the possibility of talking to the captain of a ship represented by an adult, all of which were used to mediate the creation of spaces for playful improvisation and growth in understanding.

From a cultural anthropological viewpoint, Holland et al (1998) argue that people's agency to act arises through the playfulness of improvisation. People's personal and shared agency in any changing cultural world is tied to their limited social freedom to improvise. Between the cultural determinism of "how things are done" across many situations, and the freedom to choose how to position other people in particular situations, lies the playful possibility to improvise action. Cultural worlds of, for example, a sports team, a classroom, pirates, or any social practice predetermines the limits of many actions. Neither children nor adults can break the rules of soccer or refuse to go to school without social consequences and even pirates had codes of honor limiting their behavior. Yet within written or implied social rules soccer strikers improvise offensive moves, children and teachers have choices about how to act in classroom activities, pirates can choose how to coordinate an attack, and people can always improvise responses.

Dramatic play and dramatic inquiry have improvisation at their core (O'Neill, 1995). As they do when they play, children are free to improvise actions and responses within the implicit social rules of imagined situations (Vygotsky, 1976). Change the imagined scenario and you change the social rules and thus the possibilities for action and making meaning using whatever cultural tools are available and appropriate in the new situation.

More than they do in everyday life, when children pretend they are more intuitively aware of, and they implicitly accept but can play with, the social rules limiting their actions. As Vygotsky (1967) argued, this is because imagined

events in fictional spaces and worlds have to be willed into action by participants whereas children are often largely passive spectators of, or unthinking participants in, everyday adult-centered activities. Unlike in everyday spaces where social situations and power relationships are often imposed on children and social expectations are often difficult to change, especially in the heat of an exchange, in play and dramatic inquiry children and adults in imagination can both move in time and space to different situations and can negotiate how actions will be constrained by imagined as well as everyday social expectations.

In dramatic inquiry, children's agency to improvise is constrained by everyday expectations as well as by implicit rules in imagined spaces. The limits of acceptable behavior can shift and expand by negotiation and agreement. What is acceptable on the playground does not have to be acceptable in the classroom where running and yelling are unlikely to occur but where, for example, the slow-motion dreams of pirates and crew could be enacted without fear of upsetting others.

Children's personal and shared agency to improvise possible words and deeds is significantly extended by dramatic inquiry. Children may interact in imagined spaces in ways they never would, or could, in everyday life. In everyday life children are unlikely to engage in or explore actions that are very different from expected social and cultural norms unless they are highly motivated, older, or are emotionally disconnected from the possible consequences. But, as Heathcote stressed, they may explore any possible actions and engage in any possible discourse when they play or participate in

dramatic inquiry without experiencing actual physical or social consequences (Johnson & O'Neill, 1984). Significantly, children improvise what might happen and how those deeds might be interpreted when people don't follow social expectations (Edmiston, 2008a). And because most events are enacted publicly adults can mediate collaboration and dialogic exchanges.

To be able to take up different viewpoints requires that people use what Bakhtin (1981; 1990) calls the "dialogic imagination". To author meaning about fictional or everyday events, in imagination a person projects into the consciousness of another while returning into, or remaining in, their previous consciousness. This creates an experience of "dialogic" or "doubled consciousness" in an aesthetic space similar to those that people create when reading or when creating through the arts. Children, as well as adults, author understanding when at the same time, or in a sequence of experiences, they are "inside" an imagined space and "outside" it. Dialogic dramatic inquiry creates aesthetic spaces for children when they project into the lives and viewpoints of other people, like pirates, but are also aware of their own or other people's viewpoints, as they make meaning about the lives of others, including people in the world of pirates (Edmiston, 2008a).

Discourse that is sustained by, or that grows out of, doubled consciousness is "internally persuasive" or dialogic. In contrast to closed monologic authoritative discourse, dialogic discourse is open to new meaning. Life becomes more complex for people when their understanding changes and grows. In dialogic discourse people author, or rather co-author, new

understanding. People in effect persuade themselves to shift their views, form new ideas, or embrace ways to make meaning when they make sense and create understanding in dialogic interactions. Like all authors of meaning they too may become an authority in a community. But the more interactions are dialogic the more people regard their ideas as open to connect with, and be changed by, the ideas, views, and interpretations of others. Dialogic discourse can occur when people are alone, for example when deeply engaged in reading or writing. However, especially with younger children, dialogic interactions are much more likely to occur in social exchanges mediated by an adult who intentionally keeps discourse both more focused and more open.

A dialogic approach to pedagogy does not mean that the authority of texts, teachers, and other people is dismissed. Whatever the classroom focus of education, students of any age must encounter and learn from important information, ideas, and ways of conceptualizing the world available to them in books and by learning from people. Kate, Tim, and I, provided the Infant children with accurate information and a plausible story about ships and pirates. However, rather than assume that the monologic presentation of texts or people's ideas as authorities to be accepted without question will pass knowledge to other people, applying Bakhtin's theories to classrooms meant that we recognized that children must create understanding for themselves in relation to their own and others' prior understanding. Though children, and adults, will accept some information and ideas with little debate, other ideas or viewpoints require more work to understand while yet others will be contested. For

example, the children immediately accepted the factual information that because cannon had to be reloaded this would slow down the time between shots. On the other hand, the narrative idea of two of the children that the crew of the merchant ship should be dismissed because the treasure had been stolen were questioned by other students who thought they should be rewarded for protecting the captain.

Whatever the response of particular children, a dialogic approach to learning assumes that children are not simply told or given meaning, they must make it their own as they engage in dialogue with the views and ideas presented by others and previously by themselves. At the same time, children in classrooms must not be abandoned to author meaning alone. To mediate the creation of more complex understanding teachers may use their authority to support all children in co-authoring meaning in dialogic interactions.

TEACHING AT THE EDGE OF CHAOS

As Waldrop (1992) stresses, though complex living systems are ordered, they are most alive, most adaptive, and most creative “at the edge of order and chaos”. That is “where new ideas ... are forever nibbling away at the status quo” (p. 12). All communities, including classrooms, must provide some sense of order and predictability, yet imposed order and authoritative discourse also tends to close down dialogue, thinking, and learning. Dramatic inquiry allows a classroom community to move productively to the “edge of chaos” in an imagined space while at the same time staying firmly anchored in an everyday space that while playful feels non-chaotic. For the Infant children, the violence of pirates

clearly represented an imagined life at the edge of chaos. Yet, the children relished our exploration of the attack and its aftermath and were without exception eager to continue. In doing so, we all moved back-and-forth between the imagined aggressive world of pirates and the emotionally safe world of the classroom.

The issue for teaching, if we embrace a complex view of life, becomes for Davis et al (2008), “not how to control what happens, but how to participate mindfully in the unfolding of possibilities” (p. 226). Teaching that affects complex learning is, “about expanding the space of the possible and creating conditions for the emergence of the as-yet unimagined [with an] emphasis not only on *what is*, but also *what might be*” (p. 172). The imagined aesthetic spaces of dramatic inquiry are filled with children’s ideas of what might be that grow out of their understanding of what is. And participation is mindful when people play because they intend their imagined actions and reflections.

The need for new ideas in improvised creative responses becomes more acute in highly dramatic situations. Dramatic inquiry, like all drama, is most “dramatic” when people face an imagined crisis. Unlike in the drama of everyday life (Turner, 19xx), in fictional spaces there are no physical consequences of imagined actions. It was Heathcote (Wagner, 1976) who first showed the educational power of drama that focuses on reflecting with children how to respond to situations with “man in a mess”. Teacher mediation assists children to reflect on the world as they experience it as seen through a lens of how the world might be different. With the Infants we inquired into how to respond to one

crisis after another. As teachers we mediated and grounded the children's reflections. What if ... we were attacked? Should we protect the captain and put our own lives at risk? What should we say to the owner of the ship? What should we do with the body of the person who died? And when reflecting on how the world might be, children are not cut off from their cultural resources. They draw on and connect with what they already know about life: people know how to hide, how to confront other people, how to protect others.

Teaching for complexity, for Davis et al (2008), is "not about telling or directing, but triggering or disturbing [it] comes to be a participation in a recursively elaborative process of opening up new spaces of possibility by exploring current spaces" (172). For Bakhtin (1981), discourse becomes more dialogic and more open to new interpretations whenever discourse that is authoritative (and thus resistant to new interpretations) is disturbed or questioned. And in dramatic inquiry, because the spaces for disturbance are imagined, adults can be more challenging and critical of children's ideas than is possible in everyday classroom spaces. Adults using dramatic inquiry can create spaces unlikely to open up in everyday discourse where they may mediate the enactment and embodiment of additional or alternative interpretations of events that children may then enter into.

Tony and Peter, who were at the social edge of the classroom, tended not to have very productive interactions with other children. They had pretended to be pirates and later, as they imagined they were friends of the ship owner (represented by Tim), they were adamant that he should sack the crew of the

ship for letting the pirates steal the silver. The boys were not interested in dialogue with the other children about what should happen. Though Tim suggested both in the voices of the ship owner, and as his teacher self, that they should hear what others thought, they authoritatively wanted to “throw them all in the water”. It was obvious from the other children’s reactions that they did not want to accept this idea and enact it in the imagined world.

Our mediation helped the boys reevaluate their authoritative assumption by assisting them to enter into another consciousness that dialogically affected their viewpoints. We explored more of the complexity of the situation than they were ready to entertain. In noting an event that the boys may have heard referred to but had not seen I asked Tina to show what she had done. The boys were drawn in to watch closely as Tina enacted how she had hidden during the attack and escaped with a bag of silver. She ended by bringing the imagined bag to the owner and the two boys who stood either side of him. Then, Jane, one of the youngest girls, whispered words in Kate’s ear that she repeated to confront the older boys’ plan. She said, “We saved the captain’s life”. Tina then showed how she had watched during the pirate assault. As I narrated what had happened some of the children who had stood in the doorway in front of the captain to fight off the attackers moved to stand again where they had stood to protect the captain and where I previously had stopped the action so that we could briefly consider how to react to the assault on the ship. Jane concluded with soft words that everyone heard, “Paul died”.

Tim, speaking as the ship owner, again turned to ask the boys what they thought he should do. Peter said they needed a funeral. There was a murmur of approval so that's what we created. Paul did not want to represent the body but Maria did as everyone gathered round to remember what they appreciated about their dead comrade. "He was a good friend. He was brave. He was nice." What to do with the crew? Peter said they should be given a silver coin each and everyone nodded their agreement. Tony helped Peter to distribute imagined coins from the ship owner to each member of the crew. Tony chose to include the mother of the dead sailor, who had been represented by Julie, a teaching assistant.

In a crisis in an imagined space, using dialogic imagination, Peter and Tony were able to make views more complex. The boys were also seen in a different light by their peers and by their classroom teacher. Rather than use their power to retreat from or dismiss others' ideas, after hearing other interpretations and participating in shared activities, they made more dialogic their previous highly authoritative position. By participating in dialogic dramatic inquiry they enacted an alternative view in a social and physical space where they used power collaboratively. Though their teacher had previously told us that there was an expectation that everyone should share and be kind to one another in the classroom on that day some of the complexity of that discourse became more apparent as it was embodied and enacted in the imagined world of pirates. Life became a little more complex for all of the children that day.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

There are profound implications for classroom practices when teachers embrace and apply complexity theories to education in using dialogic dramatic inquiry. Classrooms become more complex spaces when teachers assume that people are interconnected across time and space in expanding situations and settings and have a view of human understanding as evolving within systems, ecologies, communities, and cultures accessible through the dialogic imagination.

In contrast, when schooling perpetuates a complicated view of learning, over time students like Tony and Peter may become closed to making new meaning. Students who learn to assume that academic meaning lies outside them in the words, texts, and beliefs of other people will address others monologically and expect to be told answers and given meaning. They may want to be spoon-fed whatever information is going to be on an upcoming test if they see themselves in school settings as complicated (or not so complicated) machines to be filled up with information and shown new skills. At the same time, students may come to view their own ideas monologically assuming that their opinions are not open to change in dialogue.

When teachers use dialogic dramatic inquiry, classrooms veer toward more expansive spaces of dialogic possibility rather than back toward more rigid closed authoritative spaces. Meaning in such complex spaces cannot be viewed as fixed or static to be simply passed on. Rather, understanding is regarded as fluid and changing in dialogic relationship with other people's discourse, actions,

and understanding of the natural and cultural worlds that can be imagined, enacted, and encountered in productive dialogic interactions.

Brian Arthur, an economist involved in shaping complexity theory at the Santa Fe Institute, developed a more complex view of the world by engaging in the sort of imaginative dialogic multi-disciplinary work with colleagues that I envision as a model for pedagogy in a classroom community that would embrace dramatic inquiry.

A lot of people, including myself, had naively assumed that what we'd get from [participation] would be new algorithms, new problem-solving techniques, new technical frameworks. But what we got was quite different – what we got was very often a new attitude, a new approach, a whole new worldview.

Waldrop, 1992, p. 255

Tony and Peter did not develop a new worldview on the day we worked with them though they did try out a new approach of co-authoring ideas that was available for adults and peers to build on in the future. The boys had listened to their peers and built off their ideas in a community that joined them all, in dialogic imagination, with one another as they imagined the lives of people responding to the consequences of exciting but violent events. Tony beamed at us as he skipped out of the building at the end of the school day. “It was fun when we pretended to be those mean pirates. Can we do that again?”

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Discourse becomes more dialogic when students “make it their own”
rather than accept without question other peoples’ ideas or interpretations of
events. For Bakhtin (1990), new understanding is created in dialogue where
participants use dialogic imagination to raise questions or open up aspects of
topics to new considerations from alternative viewpoints. How people address

and answer one another changes the meaning they make in social interactions. People make discourse their own by “populating other people’s discourse with their own intentions.” Otherwise, ideas about pirates, or anything else, remain those of the writers of texts or other speakers of words to be “ventriloquated” rather than allowed to change understanding.

The hopes or objectives people have in an exchange with others – their intentions – make a difference to the meaning they create in an interaction. People’s intentions affect their back-and-forth dialogue in terms of how they address and answer one another, or in other words, how open or closed they are to making new meaning.

From our first interactions with the Infant children there was no adult authoritative discourse except with regard to social expectations in relation to the classroom as a collaborative community. We addressed the children as collaborative meaning-makers. For example, we were insistent that just as we would listen to them, the children had to listen to one another and to us. At the same time, within the socially created imagined space of the unfolding narrative we mediated the children’s negotiations intending to make discourse more dialogic for all students. As we mediated their enactment of the pirate attack we insisted that each person had the authority to intend their imagined actions. No one could use power to dominate the discourse and silence others. Though the two boys who pretended to be pirates wanted everyone to die, it was up to each

of the other children to decide what happened to them. At first two children, but later only one girl, decided that they were killed in the attack.

Once discourse shifted from creating narrative to making meaning in reflection, we assisted the children to create exchanges which were as dialogic exchanges as possible.

When children and teachers address and answer others dialogically they expect to make meaning by engaging with texts and people, to grapple with meaning, and to forge or shape new understanding in a dialogic exchange of ideas and views. They assume that making meaning is unavoidably a complex endeavor. When people have dialogic intentions they bring a question, an idea, or an assumption to an interaction. Additionally, they expect their understanding to change and evolve as a result of a dialogic exchange in which they answer another person.

Classroom communities and schools, like all communities of people, are intersecting living complex systems that are constantly adapting in response to changing situations. So are individuals. This reality becomes more apparent when an unanticipated event occurs. For example, as was clear from stories told by teachers and students at Wearhead, the Infant classroom and the rural school as a whole became different communities after Tony, aged seven, arrived from an urban school sixty miles away on the coast. Every child and adult already in

the school, as well as Tony himself, had to adapt. Everyone's relationship with everyone else was changed.

Encouraging attacks by pirates or anyone else would never actually happen in classrooms. Nor would children ever hide from attackers, confront them, protect friends, or bury a comrade. Yet these events were all ones that the children were keen to imagine and enact. Just as they did on the playground, because the children were playing they relished these shared improvised exploits and no one was actually hurt or afraid. With the guidance and support of adults, by inquiring into what life was like for the people caught up in deeds of piracy the children could also reflect on how the actions of one group impacted the lives of others in ways they had not previously considered.