

Reading with drama: relations between texts, readers and experiences

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Abstract

This article explores the intersections of drama and reading, specifically focusing on approaches that are situated within “drama in education.” Supported with a retrospective analysis, this article portrays the research, related practice and possible futures in drama education in relation to literacy and in particular to reading fiction as meaning making practice. This study is situated in a reassertion of the value of relational literacies through imaginative practices that dramatic modes generate and support. The article disrupts common misconceptions about the purposes and effects of drama in reading and establishes prominent research discourses and definitions across the history of drama and reading practices. By locating paradigmatic and practical opportunities in our analysis of contemporary research, we bring visibility to the intricacies of drama in education as a generative pedagogy in reading as relational meaning making work.

Key words: drama, identity, multimodality, new literacy studies, play, reader response, reading comprehension, response to literature, reading instruction, secondary language arts

Introduction

This article explores the intersections of drama with meaning making practices in reading fictional texts, specifically focusing on approaches that are situated within “drama in education” (e.g. Heathcote and Bolton, 1986; O’Neill, 1995; O’Toole, 1992; Booth, 1994; Edmiston, 2014; Nicholson, 2014; Taylor, 2000). Traditionally, in literacy studies, drama practice in the comprehension of texts is largely overlooked, in part due to the persistence of a narrow definition of comprehension in most education systems. In this article, we aim to address this gap through an analysis of the research, related practice and possible futures that establish dramatic modes as valuable and, we argue, crucial in relation to reading fiction as comprehension and meaning making practice. The significance of this analysis relies on foregrounding research that articulates and explores the role of drama practices as “literacy tools” (Beach et al., 2010). Drama worlds, we argue, create relational possibilities for embodied, improvisational and imaginative meaning making to take place.

To investigate and provoke engagement of drama in reading practices, and to do this for a community beyond those already within “drama education,” requires a series of expositions to bridge the restrictive divides between discursive and paradigmatic approaches in literacy education. To this end, this article begins by *Disrupting myths of drama and learning*, to provide an examination of research that challenges common misconceptions about the learning purposes and effects that frame traditional views of what drama is and does in relation to meaning making.

This section is followed by *Bridging discourses and establishing the field of inquiry*, to outline concepts and practices that have emerged to underpin the work of drama in the context of reading. The notion of reading and interactions with texts as “meaning making” is explored; the liberal interpretation of “text” in drama practice is also unpacked; and finally a range of strategies and practices common in drama based literacies education is laid out. This leads to the final section of the study, *Locating paradigmatic and practical opportunities*, that foregrounds significant contemporary research that brings visibility to the intricacies of drama in literacy education as a generative pedagogy in reading as relational meaning making work. We articulate future directions and opportunities in this space, as our disciplinary, material and pedagogical contexts continue to shift and evolve. This article takes a critical view of research in reading with drama, with the explicit awareness of the ideological and socio-political nature of all educational practice. We include various examples of practice throughout, drawn from the authors’ own research, not to present them as “evidence” of impact, but rather to bring to life some of the ideas explored theoretically.

Disrupting myths of drama and learning: Evidence and purpose

A common assumption persists that there is a lack of evidence to support the “effectiveness” of dramatic modes in reading engagement and comprehension. This is, in part, fuelled by the idea that drama is just fun, characterised by “games” and lacking an inherent or quantifiable value to learning. Given this challenge, researchers and educators may feel the need to justify

the inclusion of drama within a learning experience based upon the “utility” of the drama work, i.e. to what extent drama improves reading scores. We value subjective experiences that may not be measurable in pre-determined and precise ways (e.g. art-making, joy, community, cultural understanding, etc.) and expand on these later in this article. We also hold critically the paradigmatic assumptions that drive outcomes-based learning assessment and the consequent “one size fits all” views of reading (Freebody and Luke, 1990; Tatum, 2008). At the same time, we acknowledge the clear empirical evidence that has been produced by decades of research on the effects of drama-based pedagogies on learning outcomes (Anderson and Donelan, 2009; Walker et al., 2011).

In a meta-analysis review of the effect of drama on student outcomes (Lee et al., 2015) a broad picture across multiple quasi-experimental studies estimated the impact of drama on various outcomes. Drawing together 32 studies of drama practices in relation to literacy related outcomes, Lee et al. (2015) found that drama has a significant positive adjusted effect on literacy achievement, 21st century skills, arts skills and motivation. Referring to the meta-analysis of studies, the researchers tested the potential moderating variables that significantly affect an outcome. For the studies included, Lee et al. (2015) found that there is a significant positive moderating effect on achievement when 1) drama is used 3–10 hours in a learning experience (as opposed to less than 3 hours or more than 10 hours); 2) drama is led by a classroom teacher (as opposed to a teaching artist); 3) drama uses prior experiences and learning to extend the learning (as opposed to an anticipatory set or throughout an entire lesson); and 4) drama is focused on reading comprehension (as opposed to other skills like generating ideas around a curricular area). Within the constraints of meta-analysis, the authors were unable to see *how* these effects are present or *what is happening* in classrooms to support such positive growth.

Beyond the association between drama, fun and games; drama is often taken up as benign or even benevolent. A place where students can “be themselves,” take a “break from the norm” or engage with creative and alternative ideas (Perry and Collier, 2018). Exacerbating this misconception, research in the field is dominated by victory narratives and discourses of universal moral principles (see Edmiston and Enciso, 2002 for a critical analysis of these perspectives), transformation and advocacy (Neelands, 2004). We argue on the contrary, that dramatic modes of engagement in reading as meaning making are as political, ideological and instrumental, as any other teaching practice. The facilitation and instruction of drama-based work is substantive to what emerges, as is the context of engagement (space, time, atmosphere, interpersonal relations and so on), the implicit and explicit objectives and the texts that mediate the space. The very challenges that permeate education (e.g. unequal access, transmission models, hierarchies of valued knowledge and others) do not dissolve with the inclusion of

drama practices, on the contrary, they can take on more personal, embodied and affective dimensions.

Bridging discourses and establishing the field of inquiry

Reading and drama as meaning making practices

The work we explore in the rest of this article specifically focuses on drama as textual meaning making with fictional literary texts. Nevertheless, from a conventional definition of reading comprehension, the work we describe as reading as meaning making overlaps with research that focuses on more conventional aspects of reading comprehension. When teachers use drama with literary texts, students are both challenged and supported as they examine details in texts (Gallas and Smagorinsky, 2002), infer and evaluate possible meanings (Edmiston and McKibben, 2011; Smagorinsky and Coppock, 1995) and synthesise perspectives (Crumpler, 2006; O’Neill, 1995). All of these ways of thinking about engagement with fictional texts are vital for deep comprehension and motivation for continued reading. This research supports the key argument in this article, that when students are engaged simultaneously in literacy and dramatic modes, they are able to mobilise knowledge and ideas in ways that value, build upon, or reconfigure the diversity of perspectives, senses and ideas that they bring to each interaction (Edmiston and Enciso, 2002; Dawson and Lee, 2018; Wagner, 1998; Wolf and Enciso, 1994; Beach et al., 2010; Medina and Campano, 2006).

Beyond what we traditionally know about reading, reading interpretation can be taken up as agentive meditative meaning making (Enciso, 1996; Smagorinsky, 2001) and dialogical sense making (Aukerman, 2013). In other words, meaning emerges as relational to “readers’ participation in cultural practices” that dynamically expand and change how readers think about a story (Smagorinsky, 2001 p. 144). In this way reading events are “literary places” that simultaneously connect and defamiliarise readers’ everyday experiences with fictional stories and where new insights emerge as readers actively interpret and construct new meanings (Sumara, 2002). For example, improvising the future actions in the role of a character from a story, asks readers to take a stance that is relational to the readers’ own experiences or world views, those of the character and the emerging imaginative actions that become improvised and possible within and beyond the boundaries of the text. These theorisations position the relationship between readers and texts as unbounded, but also, as culturally and historically mediated.

Additionally, as we will demonstrate through specific examples of research, we understand interactions with texts – fictional texts such as picture storybooks, young adult novels, graphic novels or classic texts – to be agentive, embodied and relational (Perry and

Rogers, 2011), entangled in complex networks of social contexts, life trajectories and imaginary possibilities. As Smagorinsky (2001) argues, readers make meaning “as they employ the associations they make with the text with their broader life narrative, generating new texts that in turn make that narrative more comprehensible in terms of the cultural and ideological drama that composes their life story and locates that story in a broader social community’s political life” (p. 163). This means that in reading events that are framed as dialogical relational experiences and that encourage readings “outside of the institutions bounds” of what is expected, “meaning is responsive, emergent and in flux” (Aukerman, 2013, p. A8). Therefore, and as we will explore, agency in each encounter with a text signifies an opportunity to re-examine what is known, reconnect in new ways and establish new emerging relationships and reimaginings with texts, knowledges, social contexts and people.

These agentic moves, and the new emerging relationships that are constructed, become possible in the opportunities that drama practices provide to negotiate and explore readers’/performers’ multiple social positionings (Davies and Harre, 1990). Positioning – the taking of various social roles as identity performances that are constructed from discourses available – emerge and are recontextualized as new meanings and relations are negotiated. In other words, in the practice of drama and reading, readers/performers have spaces to speak, act and shape new social worlds within imaginative reading moments (Smagorinsky and Coppock, 1995; Smagorinsky and O’Donnell-Allen, 1998; Wolf and Enciso, 1994; Edmiston, 2003; Medina, 2004; Enciso et al., 2016).

This is clearly visible for example, in Medina’s (2001) research, in which students unexpectedly turned an invitation to create a news broadcast into a “talk show” when exploring Anzaldúa (1993) book, *Friends from the Other Side*. This dramatic encounter resulted in a representation created by the students of the violence embedded in immigration border patrolling persecution actions, and the activism and risks taken by local community members to protect new immigrants. This was all presented within the “televised stage” of an imagined sensationalist national television talk show. What seemed like a small community event in the book becomes a public space where students in role take multiple stances – as the patrol, community members, or members of the audience responding and intervening – in highly emotional ways, to critically analyse the patrol’s actions beyond the narrative of the book. These perspectives matter in understanding the contribution of dramatic modes in reading and meaning making, in particular highlighting the following perspectives: 1. The fluid positions and interactions between texts and readers, where both move between centre and periphery locations in relation to intention and interpretation; 2. Multiplicity and dissensus in reading, inviting practices of seeing, enacting and imagining otherwise, across cultural and social differences and realities. In addition, the navigation of

transcultural locations or places such as across the actual setting of a story, the social context of the reader, and new imagined possible places and plots for action; 3. The challenging and unsettling of culturally dominant and expected responses, forms of participation and social practices that frame classroom reading events.

Drama practice can create ruptures for new forms of engagement with texts, new forms of participation in responding to texts and interacting in classrooms, new unpredictable critical understandings that go beyond the retelling of a story, and new identifications to emerge. Harste (2014) suggests that: “to be literate is to be able to elect what identity one wants to take on. Our goal needs to be to create agents rather than consumers of text” (p. 100). Similar to Harste’s advocacy and research on reading as inquiry and meaning making through the arts, including drama, the examples we present point towards the possibility of creating meaning through deeper, new and critical interactions.

Repositioning texts in drama. The shifting perspectives of literacy from technical to social and material practices draw particular attention to the ever-changing designations of how texts circulate and get remixed in ways that generate new texts, meanings and literacy engagement experiences (Blommaert, 2005; Harste, 2014; Paris, 2011). In drama education, text has long been a very loose term to describe a prompt, provocation, or script element that may or may not involve printed words. This characteristic of drama is productive as it engages with contemporary theorisations of literacy studies (specifically in relation to drama see Beach et al., 2010; Franks, 2004; Macro, 2015), but more importantly, it resituates fictional texts from that of authoritarian meaning carriers, to something within a larger repertoire of texts and socially situated discourses from which meaning is constructed. In her redefinition of texts into “pre-texts” Cecily O’Neill (1995), through the practices of “process drama”, resituates texts as dynamic, malleable and inviting of change. Although in her work a pre-text can be any text (i.e. a story book, an artefact, a photo); coining the term “pre-text” is significant. This move challenges and rearticulates traditional forms of text-centred reading and linear forms of interpretations in the field by deposing literature as the sole centre of a reading experience.

The purpose of a “pretext” is to “activate the weaving of the text of the drama” as it “generates text in action” (O’Neill, cited in Taylor & Warner, 2006, p. 25). The possibility of weaving a new text within a dramatic encounter in relation to other texts – a short story, a picture book or a novel – shifts centre/periphery relations, creating new relationships between text and reader that affects how and what meaning is constructed. Furthermore, entering into a dramatic experience means that a new “script” will emerge, and its meaning and purpose be actively negotiated. These emergent and making “in action” scripts that

happen within drama as reading interpretation tend to be driven by the participants' embodied collective work. A private reading then becomes a public event where readers can become witnesses or participants within or at the edges of a text (Wolf et al., 1997) and where meaning is negotiated and reframed across improvisational dramatic moments.

A reader's ability to re-imagine and re-contextualise what they are reading from the text in relation to their own set of beliefs, attitudes and experiences (Booth, 1985) shifts the position of the text to one that is more personalised, social and relational. We understand text as compared to our own stories and the stories of others (Bruner, 1986). Wolf et al. (1997) articulate well the expansive power of readers deepening their own understandings through dramatisation at the *edges of the text*, where every part of everyone can potentially become a part of the story.

Drama strategies, relations and transactions. We take up drama expansively in this study as an approach to practice. When considering drama in classrooms, we assume a broad range of models, modes of engagement and disciplines that blur the boundaries between drama practice and performance, between inquiry and representation and between the acts of reading and

making meaning with texts. Drama practices such as hot seating, role-play, tableaux and writing in role are some of an always expanding repertoire of performative, embodied and pedagogical tools that provide opportunities for students to become critical observers and effective problem solvers as they actively and playfully negotiate meaning within and around texts. Table 1 provides a summary of key dramatic practices particularly those that we often see related to engagement with meaning making reading events. These practices are grounded in process-oriented approaches from key scholars such as Dorothy Heathcote, Gavin Bolton, Cecily O'Neill and Augusto Boal, among others who have developed drama practices wherein participants are able to *imagine in action* with "an intention to create or take part in or solve something" (Bolton, 1984, p. 153). In this light, drama builds student experience from a practice of simply interpreting the text from looking at it from the outside, to a place where readers can become fully immersed in exchanging dialogue and actions *as* the characters, *with* the characters and *in* situations. In this way, drama can push the boundaries of engagement within and beyond the limits of predictable meanings and expected, generalised or superficial responses (Booth, 1994; Edmiston, 2014; Medina, 2004; O'toole, 1992).

Table 1: Sample of key drama practices, from <https://dramaresource.com/drama-strategies/> (grounded in the work of drama experts such as O'Neill, Bolton, Booth, Heathcote, Boal)

Drama Practices	Description
Freeze Frames/Tableaus	Images with no movement representing characters, tensions and situations in a moment in time.
Mantle of the expert	The creation of a make believe world where students are positioned as experts in a particular situation.
Hot seat	Interviews and questions to one or a group of characters by the larger community in the drama.
Teacher-in-role	Teacher assumes and plays a role within the dramatic encounter. The role can be of a leader, equal or lower status in relation to the students.
Image Theatre	Sequences of still images created with bodies to explore social issues or conflicts and propose possible solutions.
Forum Theatre	Open ended scenes that represent a social conflict where audience members intervene in proposing different possible solutions.
Flashbacks and flashforwards	Dramatising and improvising a moment in a story to the past or future.
Conscience alley	Participants form two lines representing an alley. A key character walks down the human alley while the participants/associated characters voice possible advise and thoughts to him/her.
Writing in role	Participants write a piece of text as explicit or implied characters in the story (a journal, a letter, a newspaper, a flyer, etc.)
Narrations and dramatisations	Participants narrate or act a story from of the audience.

The past publications of scholars such as David Booth, Cecily O'Neill and BJ Wagner are among the key historical works that provide documentation of how drama can function in reading as a meaning making practice. In broad strokes, the history of scholarship and practice in the field reaches towards reading and meaning making through three overlapping avenues: 1. reader-text relations particularly through the lens of reader-response theories (Enciso and Edmiston, 1997; Rogers and O'Neill, 1993; Crumpler, 2006; Enriquez and Wager, 2018) 2. critical literacy and dialogical meaning making (Booth, 1985; Edmiston, 2011; Medina, 2006b) 3. multiliteracies and more specific work on embodiment, performativity and the imagination (Schenider et al., 2006; Weltsek and Medina, 2007; Whitmore, 2015). Significant to the history of dramatic modes and meaning making of texts across all areas of inquiry is how this work challenges the passive role of texts, readers and interpretative practices. For instance, Booth (2008) argues for a "critical and creative reading comprehension" through drama practices where the student *becomes* the literacy by using reflexive and enriching response activities that deepen and extend the students' meaning making. In his words "everything matters" (p. 18) and "students need to *do* something with what they read" (p.10) which points to a variety of forms and modes to construct experiences with the reading and interpretation of texts.

Historically, within research and scholarship on dramatic modes in reading practice, reader-response based theories (Rosenblatt, 1978) and pedagogies are most prevalent. As Enciso and Edmiston (1997) remind us, "Rosenblatt argued that readers must have aesthetic experiences out of which any afferent re-readings for information and reflections for information can take place" (p. 89). Findings from research in drama and reader response frameworks bring visibility to significant aspects of reading interpretation in relation to the ways readers make connections to characters; engage in deeper analysis of characters and situations; provide context and experiences from where the students can raise questions; make significant inferences and make connections between smaller parts of the text and the whole meaning of the story (Crumpler, 2006; Enciso and Edmiston, 1997; McMaster, 1998; Rogers and O'Neill, 1993). This can be widely demonstrated in process dramas approaches (O'Neill, 1995) where improvisational worlds are constructed by taking multiple roles to explore different perspectives and situations. For example, in Wilhelm and Edmiston's (1998) exploration of *The Incredible Journey* (Burnford, 2013), about the travels of three domestic animals who get lost in the wilderness, they use a "revolving" role play process, where each student takes on the role of multiple explicit and implied characters in the story to explore the big ideas in the book. In this case, students were able to pretend, interrelate and play with multiple roles and tasks taken from the contexts and storylines of the book. This process ensured student engagement, analysis of connections and interrelationality in the text, developed

understanding of contexts and expanded collective experiences from which to build reading and meaning making skills in the classroom context.

Locating paradigmatic and practical opportunities in the field

Drama practice as dialogic meaning making: Reading as dramatic inquiry

Of major significance in our review of research in drama and reading meaning making is the work on *Dramatic Inquiry* (Beach et al., 2010; Edmiston, 2000, 2008, 2014, 2015). Edmiston's extensive research, practices and theorisation of dramatic inquiry align with sociocultural perspectives on reading discussed earlier and provide an expansive view of reading as fluid, dialogic and unpredictable meaning making practice. Edmiston explains that while "dialogue is *active* meaning-making using words and/or deeds, dialogue is *dramatic* when people act and communicate as if they are other people and/or as if they are elsewhere" (2014, p. 7). Thus, dialogic dramatic inquiry becomes a tool that fosters active engagement for meaning-making that extends beyond the walls of the classroom in the ways people act across real and imagined worlds (Edmiston, 2014). Dramatic Inquiry as a pedagogy in Edmiston's work is highly influenced by his nuanced understanding of the practices explored by drama-in-education leading figure Dorothy Heathcote (Heathcote, 1984; Heathcote and Bolton, 1986). Through approaches such as "mantle of the expert," Heathcote proposed a reframing of the relationships in learning events to investigate and build knowledge and experiences in classrooms. Repositioning children as "experts" in role play, teachers "in role" work *with* "expert children." Meaning emerges from the improvisational encounters where "things happen" and new relations are established. Edmiston works to reframe readers' interactions with texts from a different set of positionalities and social practices that promote meaning in reading as happening within co-constructed make-believe worlds.

According to Edmiston (2007), when learning is shared by the teachers and students, the drama in the classroom "can extend the horizons of meaning making and competency" (p. 344). Through dramatic inquiry students can begin to investigate complex problems which enable them to dialogically evaluate their own actions and experiences along with their peers (Edmiston, 2000, 2011). Rather than teachers positioning themselves as the facilitator, they become co-participants who are an integral part of the co-construction of the learning environment. Through this approach to instruction, participants – both students *and* teachers – collectively can encourage shifts and changes to each dramatic experience in order to push everyone to further interrogate their own contrasting viewpoints and nuanced understandings within and beyond the boundaries of a text. The ability

to make meaning from a text at higher levels becomes more readily available as learners reflect on their own interpretations and ethical actions as juxtaposed with the perspectives and ethical actions elicited by their peers. A shift away from the idea or aim of a “correct” interpretation becomes explicit in these contexts where participants through drama critically work with texts to “adopt multiple positions in addition to those of our everyday lives” (Edmiston, 2000, p. 66).

Agency and imagining otherwise in reading meaning making. Dramatic modes that centre imaginative experiences are integral to the practices of reading as meaning making. When drama is articulated and proposed to participants as fluid and improvisational, drama becomes a “making” and a “doing” within a particular improvisational event; meaning and experiences can be negotiated in the tension between what, who and where is available. The text, the participants’ experiences, other social discourses and the emerging possibility of producing knowledges work together to prompt how things could be seen and done otherwise. In this way, meaning is constructed in active dialogue with the text, the reader and the world by means of complex identity negotiations (Sumara, 2002) and layering self upon self and experience upon experience (Wolf and Enciso, 1994). Furthermore, the embodied, collective, active and relational aspects of engagement with drama creates locations for “other” meanings, new meanings and or hidden meanings to emerge. In alignment with contemporary ways of looking at agency in literacy education practice (Campano, 2007; Lewis et al., 2007; Paris, 2011; Stetsenko, 2012), drama creates new spaces of participation in classrooms; centring students’ voices where new forms of knowledge are made available and where complex remixing of texts and discourses emerge.

Drama in reading can allow for the multiplicity and fluidity of students’ experiences to be centred, recentred and decentred (Enciso et al., 2016; Medina, 2006a; Medina and Campano, 2006). Instead of seeing drama practices as a set of activities to follow in order to respond to a text, dramatic practices can become a powerful pedagogical practice where students become “subjects in the instructional process” (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Likewise, working towards an “activist transformative stance” grounded in Stetsenko’s (2012) work on agency, Enciso et al. (2016) demonstrate in their research how “[t]hrough practices with dramatic inquiry before or during direct engagement within a fictionalized community, it is possible to ‘stand up’ in the midst of imagined conditions and discover our impulse to act, to feel bold, to question assumptions, and to speak up in defence of oneself and others” (p. 337).

The practical and political implications of this work are highlighted further when the conceptual and discursive binaries are unsettled between texts and readers (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Derrida, 1978); between readers and their bodies (Butler, 1993);

and between fiction and reality (Britzman, 2000; Davies, 2000, 2005). With these entities in dynamic relation as opposed to opposition, we can think about drama as an agentic partner in literacy learning in education. Put another way, if we stand to shout in the “role” of an imagined protester depicted in a book, we are not only embodying character, building a relationship between self and fiction, awakening energy and engagement in the classroom, we are also actually *standing* and *shouting*; we are thereby changing our lived experience with our teacher, our peers, our voice. How often do you hear the sound of your own voice shouting in the classroom? And what might that do to your next actions, sensations, decisions?

Another example of these dynamics at play can be seen in Medina’s research, involving immigrant emergent bilingual children working with the text *My Diary from here to there* (Pérez, 2002); a text that narrates the story of a young girl moving from Mexico to the United States (Medina, 2006a & 2006b). In the classroom the story was extended to imagine the future of the girl starting in a new school in the United States. The participating students in the actual classroom were 5th grade students who had migrated from countries such as Mexico and El Salvador to a town in the US Midwest. Within the context of the drama, the facilitator, “in role” as a member of the school leadership team, recruited the students to work with her, given their first-hand knowledge in coming to a new school. The students created a document for the school community on what newcomers need in order to navigate, survive and feel supported in their new context. In this process the students (in role) were repositioned as knowers. As they worked through this task, two key shifts happened: First, the pressing need for communicating significant pieces of knowledge and stories about their experiences resulted in the students collaboratively and authentically playing across English and Spanish, translanguaging. In other words, their urgency to engage superseded their typical awareness of Spanish as a forbidden language to communicate in schools. Second, the dramatic moment created a space to reposition themselves as critical knowers of how to act and talk back to the power structures that frame immigrant children’s experiences in schools.

In this work, as in dramatic inquiry, the students, through drama, were able to perform “how literacy shapes social and cultural lives inside and outside of school” (Edmiston and McKibben, 2011, p.88). Additionally, agency in identity making emerges within the “collaborative, social process of negotiated meaning aimed toward intellectual emancipation and learner equality” (Rhoades and Daiello, 2016, p. 5). These forms of emancipatory intellectuality and learner equality are produced in between the story in the book and the students’ experiences within and outside the drama that generate a different set of relations and identifications. New relations are established with the text, between each other as participants, with an imagined school leadership, with the issues of schooling for immigrant children, and reading, writing and

speaking practices. These dynamic “new” encounters result in the creation of a new order within the classroom *to be* and *act* differently from the normative ways of doing literacy work for immigrant children.

Embodied reading engagement. It is hard to overlook the body in drama work with texts (students stand, move, act and physically express), and yet it is equally hard to analyse or evaluate the body in this practice. In social constructionist paradigms – broadly, the theoretical framework within which the majority of research in drama education research is carried out – the body is considered as representational and subservient to the mind, furthermore, it is the mind that we are most practiced at knowing (Davies, 2000; Perry, 2010). As a result of this perspective, the body is rarely positioned as a focus of analysis; it is considered as a tool for inquiry and representation only in as much as it is a signifying object (Osmond, 2007; Perry and Medina, 2011, 2015). Despite the challenges in addressing embodiment in drama practices for reading, the embodied experiences that happen through dramatic encounters give learners new ways to live through making meaning with the text (Enriquez et al., 2016; Medina, 2006a, 2006b; Perry and Medina, 2015). Embodiment in literacy work can be seen as a “place of learning” (Ellsworth, 2005; Pineau, 2005) that goes beyond an understanding of the body as representational into also considering the body as both producing and being produced by the experience of reading interpretation within the drama. Trajectories of socially inscribed or marked bodies (Butler, 2007) enter the reading interpretation space in the drama that creates unexpected and emergent new relations, actions and imaginaries in improvisational encounters. Foregrounding the body or positioning it at the same level as language, means asking what is represented through texts in relation to what is emerging anew? How are norms and knowledges reinscribed and/or disrupted? What new relationships and dynamics emerge between bodies, positions, material and immaterial contexts and actions? And finally, what and how are changes, events, creations occurring? (Medina and Perry, 2014).

When we position language and bodies on the same level, the engagement in dramatic practice in reading opens up the opportunity for the physical and sensational events that emerge to be transformative, unpredictable, and ultimately, to guide and form the experience and meaning made of the text in question. Put another way, the meaning of a text (and the level of engagement with it) becomes dependent on the embodied experience it prompts.

Drama and reading across time, place and perspective

As we conclude this review of drama practice in reading as meaning making and imagined new possible futures for this work, we relate this work to the

contemporary contexts of education where lines between cultures, disciplines and geo-political spaces have been redrawn and are in ever more visible states of flux and contestation. What counts as drama today in a literacy classroom is a slippery thing to pin down. In an era of multiple, new and post-digital literacies, the lines between practices are as complex and dynamic as the spaces they bridge. In this light we acknowledge the predominantly discipline-bound and privileged location from which the majority of the field that we have represented in this article originates. This is an important body of work to foreground, to honour, and to learn from, and ultimately beckons us to build onwards. However, in a landscape of globalised educational contexts and trans- and interdisciplinary cultural practices, a perspective on drama, reading and meaning making can embrace a multiplicity of practices, places and perspectives on these constructs. In this light, we call for scholars and educators to seek out and acknowledge the drama and cultural production that occurs in and around all literacy education contexts. The shifting nature and role of performance and play that emerges in spaces such as YouTube and social media fora is one example (Nelson et al., 2020; Peters and Seier, 2009). Creative engagements with media (Collier, 2015), out of school (Vasudevan et al., 2014) and cultural practices (Bartlett, 2008) are additional areas that can contribute, enrich and be enriched by, a commitment to reading relationally with drama.

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