

## **School drama, terror and television: lessons to be learnt from children's activity in drama<sup>i</sup>**

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The argument here proceeds from an understanding that learning in drama is about participating in forms of cultural production whilst simultaneously engaging thought and feeling to make sense of, and learn about aspects of contemporary life. In an age when acts of war and terror are mediated through television and the Internet and thus given immediate proximity to our everyday lives. As well as having real and terrible effects on people in real situations, acts of violence and terror are constructed with a consciousness of the ways in which they will be framed and broadcast worldwide and the effects of such events and framings on audiences—hence current references to ‘theatres’ of war and terror. How are the effects of terror and war experienced and represented in drama classrooms by school students, and especially those drawn from diverse cultural backgrounds? How might drama educators describe, understand and construct practical approaches under such circumstances? Using an example taken from a drama lesson, this paper applies and explores ideas principally taken from Vygotsky's work, providing a rationale and way of understanding the pedagogy of drama education as well as offering an analytical framework for understanding the patterns and processes of learning in the dramatic mode.

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### **Trouble at the borders—the everyday and the dramatic**

'Life may not be an imitation of art, but ordinary conduct, in a sense, is an imitation of the proprieties, a gesture at exemplary forms, and the primal realization of these ideals belongs more to make-believe than to reality' (Goffman, 1986)

Sociologists, social and cultural psychologists are likely to be acquainted with Goffman's powerful ideas about the presentation of self and the framing of everyday encounters and his employment of the 'dramatic metaphor' as an explanatory paradigm. In early work the status of the metaphor is ambiguous (Goffman, 1971). In later writing, however, it appears that conception of social action and its appearance in cultural life as fundamentally dramatic and theatrical in nature is quite clear. What is meant, though, by use of the term 'exemplary forms' in the opening reference? Does it mean all that is great and good? The tendency is to think not, as earlier in the paragraph he refers to a continuum of public standards that stretches from the 'maximally approved... to the maximally disapproved' (ibid.). If Goffman's sociological insights are guided and framed in reference to drama, what can drama educators take from sociological and cultural points of view to assist in understanding the nature, role and practice of drama on the curriculum? More specifically, what do insights into the proximity between drama and everyday life mean at this particular point in history when events on the world stage, violent events, are calculatedly dramatic and theatrical in design and effect? The effects of public and publicized acts of violence are channelled directly into the private domain of living rooms and bedrooms. In the digital age, the effects are instantaneous. What are the effects on the internal landscapes of imagination, particularly in young and still developing minds? What happens when these imaginings are brought into the drama room and the privatised realm of internal imagination becomes socially active?

In critical cultural theory, the 'dramatized society', a phrase coined some thirty years ago, by cultural critic Raymond Williams has now become commonplace. More than 30 years ago Williams claimed that most people see more drama in a week than previous generations would have seen in a lifetime. But Williams, following from Brecht, is not content with the notion of passive viewing, or mere acceptance of the entertainment value of viewing drama, no matter how it is mediated. Rather he sought the notion of the active viewer, the thinking and critical viewer and that this is now key to active and democratic participation in social and cultural life. The critical stance, the position in which one is ready to move in order to view various aspects of the world and the way it is mediated and represented to us requires a conception of the multidimensionality of social and cultural life. At the very least it requires a form of binocular vision for it to seem anything like fully formed. It is by looking two ways, from drama to social life, that drama can teach us about social and cultural life—

I learned something from analysing drama which seemed to me effective not only as a way of seeing certain aspects of society but as a way of getting through to some of the fundamental conventions which we group as society itself. These, in their turn, make some of the problems of drama quite newly active. (Williams, 1983 p. 20).

Drama is an encapsulation of the everyday and, in the way it focuses attention on particular aspects of social interaction, drama does not simply reflect everyday life, it does not simply present a version of life lived at life's rate, it *represents* life as if seen through a lens. In the cultural activity of making dramatic signs and meanings, the events of everyday life are *refracted* and *transformed*: dramatic signs exist not only as part of reality but goes beyond particular realities and in this way drama will always 'reflect and refract another reality' (Vološinov et al., 1986, p. 10). The process of refraction and transformation, framing and reframing of particular realities in the making of dramatic signs and meanings, is always partial, weighted, allowing for several viewing positions. Dramatic production, distribution and reception are, therefore, inescapably part of an ideological process. And so, in this dramatized society, critical, analytical and active engagement with drama, in lessons at school, for example, engagements in which people can take the part of spectators of or participants in drama, is arguably more important than

it has ever been before. An understanding of the prevalent, pervasive and various forms of drama, and more importantly, of the dramatizing process in which the many and varied aspects of life on earth (and beyond) are represented to us as a form of drama is crucial to full understanding of and active participation in social and cultural life. On this view, the making of dramatic texts in the context of drama lessons can be seen to close the gap between production and critical reception. In drama lessons, the making of drama can be seen as a form of productive and creative criticism, more closely engaging with local and wider audiences, allowing for and stimulating a wider forum for discourse than, for example, the production of an essay in an English or Humanities lesson might produce.

Recent profound developments in the culture of represented realities—particularly in the dramatizing potential of digital and terrestrial television together with an apparent dramatization of everyday life—have raised questions about the nature of separation, the porosity of boundaries and reciprocity between the everyday and dramatic. There is a history to these questions which, in terms of drama, starts with the growing, transnational and global popularity of soap opera and reality television in which representation of the mundane and banal aspects of everyday life apparently hold appeal across diverse social groups. Forms of televised drama take the banality of the everyday more into the realm of the dramatic. If drama, particularly televised and filmed drama, has moved more towards the everyday, then everyday life could be said to have become more dramatic, more subject to the processes of dramatization. Williams wrote thirty years ago that drama had ‘in quite new ways [has been] built into the rhythms of everyday life’, has become part of ‘habitual experience’ and, ‘in the simplest sense our society has been dramatized by the inclusion of constant dramatic representation as a daily habit and need’. From a different perspective than Goffman’s, Williams too senses the flow between drama and everyday individual and social action as being more than a matter of one-way transmission— ‘the real process is more active than that’ (Williams, 1983). Dramatizing processes and particular dramatic framings of particular realities appear to have fed back into motivations and planning for, and execution and framing of specific acts.

Events, located in place and in history and represented (or, in the current idiom of reflexivity by hyphenation 're-presentation') in drama, are always constructed and reconstructed from particular viewpoints and to represent particular interests grounded in particular ideological positions. Events designed to penetrate the everyday, using the principles of plot, enactment, denouement and so forth, and self-consciously constructed and construed as dramatic events are most likely to be acutely ideological in their formation.

### **Dramas of difference: violence, realities and representations**

There is an argument one could make that says that television news has become another channel through which the everyday has become dramatized. There was a particular moment in early July 2005, when, sitting in my office in central London, I heard and felt a loud explosion followed by the rattling and warping of windows. Minutes later, calling up an online news feed on the computer, I watched images of an exploded bus in a street very close to my place of work, filmed on a witness's mobile telephone. An hour onwards, dark and eerie images of confusion in the carriage of an underground train and figures struggling along a tunnel, captured on mobile telephones, were broadcast from a location close by but deep in the underground. There were interviews with casualties who, although deeply shocked and injured, faced the cameras and spoke eloquently about the horrors they had just experienced and witnessed. I was reminded of images that, just over a year beforehand, were broadcast from Madrid and those other famous, or notorious images from Manhattan in September 2001. In each incident, despite or alongside real shock and terror, witnesses and victims knew about register and presentation, made words and took postures with a spontaneous consciousness of the ways in which their words would be framed, edited, broadcast and received.

If this mode of public consciousness, the sense of context and audience, emerges in victims and witnesses as a response to events, it is there also in the planning, construction and execution of acts of violence and warfare. Broadcast videotapes of suicide bombers, filmed before and during their attacks, the humiliation and the execution of hostages have flickered on our

screens. Acts of war and terror are shaped, articulated, framed and dramatized in the narrative flow of televised, and now, webcast news. The facilities of the broadcast media can, to some extent, be said to bring these acts into being and into social consciousness in quite new ways. Perhaps, as dramatic acts, they have ancient antecedents, but the means of their mediation, the ways in which they come into social consciousness and enter culture are newly made and remain, of course, in the process of development.

On the global stage, these incidents constitute what news presenters, academics and others are increasingly referring to as a 'theatre of terror'—not a new phenomenon, but newly mediated by digital means, newly accessible in its immediacy and proximity to our lives and, as such, constructing new meanings with particular social, cultural and political effects. This is not by any means meant to trivialise the real impacts of acts of terror, but to acknowledge that these acts are both real and representational, they are acts meant to kill and designed for broadcast on the news networks. In these acts, in their representation and distribution, the concepts of drama and theatre overspill conventional categories. If drama can be seen as a 'mode of intervention', either in schooling or in fields such as applied theatre, there is now an urgent need to review and reshape ideas about the place and purposes of drama as an educational approach, as a medium for bringing about social change (Hughes, 2005).

There has therefore to be new ways of evaluating dramatic activity as educational, developmental and learning activity in schools and other sites of education. The making of dramatic texts in classrooms and other institutional sites, has to be seen as more than re-creation and recreation, expressive or therapeutic. In its deeper nature, 'drama for understanding' has to acquire harder, critical edges to its dimensions. The making of drama, improvised and scripted, for 'live' performance and in the making of films, needs to be seen more as a critical act in and of itself. This is to ask questions of how drama draws from life and other dramas, or the ideas and systems of ideas inform and infuse the drama, how it is like or unlike the drama circulating in front of audiences and so forth. And to be critically informed, there is a place for

theories of various kinds to cope with explanations of social and cultural formations alongside theories of drama and theories of learning.

### **Distance and reflexivity: the role of theory and its relation to practice**

In order to explain and understand experience it is necessary to go beyond its limits; it is necessary to forget about it for a minute and move away from it (Vygotsky, 1997)

What then of the role of theory in relation to the practice of drama in schools? It has three specific roles, from three separate sources, to play in a supporting a rationale for the teaching and learning of drama in school. Theory might provide—

- a coherent rationale locating drama education and learning in drama in schooling
- parameters of description, explanation and understanding that set this rationale in wider sociocultural settings as well as the more located setting of schooling
- pedagogical tools for teachers and students engaged in drama.

Raymond Williams locates and defines drama's position and relation to wider social and cultural life. Viewed from a critical perspective, one that gives emphasis to historical, social and ideological dimensions, the contemplation of culture can serve as a primary resource for 'permanent' and 'popular education' (Williams, 1968). A second aspect of culture identified by Williams is as a 'signifying system' and this leads towards consideration of the semiotics of drama and learning in culture. Work in the nascent field of multimodal semiotics is of value here (Hodge and Kress, 1993, Jewitt and Kress, 2003, Kress G. and Leeuwen T., 2001). This approach allows analysis of meaning making across the domains of the everyday social, the dramatic and the electronically mediated. In its emphasis on the ideological nature of sign and sign production, it is compatible with Williams's critical cultural approach, but extends it by taking account of social difference and ways that differential social interests motivate the production of signs and the making of meaning. Underlying this approach is a social theory of language (Vološinov et al., 1986, Bakhtin, 1986) which generates persistent questions such as 'Who is doing the speaking?' 'Whose interests are being represented?' 'Who

are the audience and how might they respond?' In the era of multi-mediated communication, multimodal semiotics moves the interest beyond word to examine signs, texts and meanings made from different semiotic materials and modes. The third, pivotal role is played by a social, cultural and historical approach to learning, one that emphasises social and cultural values (including and admitting an account of the making of signs and meanings), action and patterns of activity. Such an approach can be drawn directly from the work of Vygotsky and recent interpretations and elaborations of his work.

### **In response to violence and war: children make drama in school**

Stepping back, making distance from events and experience is necessary, according to Vygotsky, in order to explain them, not as isolated incidents and experiences, but in order to locate them within 'a broader social psychological system'. In order to make sense of present realities I am taken back fourteen years to a particular lesson I taught when I last worked on a day-to-day basis as a teacher in inner-London secondary schools (Franks, 1995).<sup>ii</sup> This was a boys' school with an intake whose cultural backgrounds were widely diverse—some were second generation from migrant families, but many were first generation immigrants themselves.

At different times with each class, I taught a lesson that was designed for children to make a short news feature—we called it 'Doing the News'. They made news programmes which were videotaped and played back to them in the space of an hour. Particular roles—studio news announcer, on-the-spot reporters, expert commentators or *vox pop* (voices from the street), for example—would be listed and allocated. Time would be divided between devising (for 'writing' and rehearsal), production, viewing and discussion. Spaces in the room would be marked out for devising and performing. The camera was set in position and the performance area divided into a studio on one side, designated by 'news desk' and, on the other side, an area for interviews and 'on-the-spot' reports. When recording, the camera could then be panned between the two locations and any 'editing' was made 'in camera'. Many classes enjoyed the lesson, not least because its set format allowed them to work with a certain amount of autonomy—even sometimes challenging

classes would set to the task with urgency and application as they knew time was strictly limited and they very much enjoyed seeing themselves on video. Invariably it was a fascinating lesson to teach—the knowledge and control that students had of the news format, their spontaneous ability to adopt, or to struggle towards appropriate modes of speaking and reporting, the postures and positions taken up by presenters and so forth, was remarkable. The choices of content, as well as modes of presentation, was also interesting to observe, offering insights into their perception of the world, its events and the portrayal of events in the media.

One morning in January 1991 and the ‘first Gulf War’ had just broken out – with satellite links and ‘embedded’ reportage, arguably the first instantaneously televised war. A class of 14-year-olds asked me whether they could ‘do the news about the Gulf War’ and, when I agreed, the whole class set about the task with energy. Only minimal instructions were necessary for this group and I prepared the camera and watched with interest to see what angle on events the boys would take. I shall concentrate for a while on the work of a group of five boys—Osgur, Ali, Jem, Nazim and Olu who came from Kurdish, Turkish, Turkish-Cypriot and Nigerian backgrounds. When it came time to record their news item, Jem sat at the news desk and, with his hands clasped in front of him, looking into camera with a ‘professionally reassuring’ smile on his face and in a smooth ‘BBC voice’, he bid the ‘audience’ a good evening to their special report. He continued to say that they had just had news that the ‘allies’ had just launched their first air attack on Baghdad and that ‘we’ could go over to a reporter, Olu, on the streets of the city.

Panning right, the camera framed Olu smiling, wearing mirror sunglasses and carrying a large felt marker pen to signify ‘microphone’. In a ‘mid-Atlantic’ Americanized accent he welcomed viewers to ‘sunny Baghdad’ and in the background, off-camera, Jem made improvised and voiced sound effects of bombs falling and exploding. Olu announced that he could now speak to ‘an ordinary family on the streets of Baghdad’. Next to him Nazim stood with a grey school pullover draped over his head to resemble a hijab, or headscarf and, arranged in descending order of height, Nazim had his arm around

Osgur's shoulder and his hand rested on Ali's head who, in representing the smallest child, was on his knees—this was a representation of a family in war. Olu asked Nazim, playing the role of 'mother', what she thought about the bombing. Nazim responded,

'Why are they doing this to us? Why are they doing this to my family? We are innocent people.'

The contrast between Olu's energetic and somewhat humorous presentation and Nazim's quiet and sombre simplicity was striking. Olu 'signed off' from the streets of Baghdad and 'handed back to the studio' where Jem said that this was the end of the newsflash and bid goodnight to the 'viewers'. The whole presentation had lasted about two minutes.

In an argument about the place of active drama on the school curriculum, there are two major interrelated theoretical concerns that can be gathered around a discussion of this small example of drama in a classroom. First is in consideration of how wider historical, social and cultural contexts bear relation to dramatic activity and doing drama in school—looking from the cultural context toward individual and groups of learners. Second is a view from another direction which is concerned with the relation of patterns of learning to systems of instruction in the institutional context of schooling—that is, looking from the learner outward toward immediate contexts of learning and teaching.

### **Drama located in culture and history**

The concept of the dramatized society is given instance and substance in this brief example of drama made by school students. Here the 'dramatized and televised society' is more than a concept, in this and other instances it serves as a common stock of resources for children of diverse backgrounds. For these students, different modes were available for them to position themselves in relation to events, to reflect on them, to deal with their affective and intellectual responses and to make moves toward understanding. First they are viewers, inwardly responding as spectators of the events of war as they are shown on the screen. They will have had conversations and discussions with family and peers. In the drama lesson, they were offered

another mode of responding to, thinking about and negotiating the meaning of events. The dramatized society provides the social, historical and cultural conditions for drama as a subject on the school curriculum. It also provides the resources for doing drama at school, of choosing a topic, motivated out of their own interests and playing it through. Drama as a school subject is an institutionalised response to the dramatized society, an acknowledgement of the power and value of drama in contemporary culture.

Useful as it is, the concept of the dramatized society needs some qualification in current circumstances to deal with issues of social, cultural and ideological difference. Diversity and mutability are characteristic as much of dramatic forms and modes as it is of the society and culture represented in drama. Most of the group are from Muslim families and some of them will have had relatives still living close to the 'theatre of war'. In an inner London classroom with its diversity of students, there is a strong sense for them of a society made up of difference, of a society in flux, with its pressures, power plays and dangers. All of this is bound to impinge on them and their perception of the immediate and more distant world. The news, however dramatic, is presented in a calm and ordered manner. As audience, even though they are active makers of meaning, they are often positioned in the role of passive spectatorship. As makers of drama they literally become more active makers of meaning.

Writing about theatre, Williams maintains that drama on the stage is 'a way of speaking and listening, a specific rhythm of particular consciousness; in the end a form of unfinished, transient, anxious relationship, which is there on the stage or in the text but which is also, pervasively, a structure of feeling in a precise contemporary world, in a period of history which has that familiar and complex transience' (Williams, 1983 p. 21). The students, drawing from the flickering stream of images of a televised war, are permitted to examine their responses to it through dramatization. After making drama and having it videotaped, they become their own audience. It is perhaps because, in an age of apparently shifting realities, drama can give embodied and situated instance and substance that it has been raised to its prominence in

contemporary culture. Active, participatory drama in school becomes a way of physically situating people in particular moments and specific times, locating them and working through feelings of anxiety brought about by the realities of a social world in the midst of complex and accelerating change.

### **Diversity and representation: the semiotic modes of drama and learning**

Moving into closer focus on the dramatized society (or, arguably, on any aspect of culture) it can be seen in more precise and analytical terms as (in Williams's terms) a set of 'signifying systems' (Williams, 1981, p. 13), or, in terms of the current argument, as a set of semiotic resources available for making meaning and sense. Social semiotician Kress is interested in ways different subjects on the school curriculum 'demand and produce differential engagement with the world'—for him, these different modes of engagement 'lead to distinct forms of cognition'. From a multimodal social semiotic perspective, meaning is made from the variety, combination and multiple articulation of different modes of sign making—e.g. speech, written words, gestures, still and moving images, textures and surfaces—each of which has its particular potentials, or 'affordances', and limitations for the making of particular meanings. Different modes are used in the design and construction of a variety of textual forms. Producing different types of sign and text demand different kinds of engagement with the world and different modes of learning—

In a social semiotic multimodal approach, there is a sharp focus on the semiotic modes that are in play, and on the forms of learning which they facilitate. Acting with eye, brain and hand as in the art class is a different kind of learning to acting with one's whole (social and physical) body in spatial relations to other social and physical bodies, as in the drama class (Kress G., 2001, p. 406).

There is not space here to make a detailed semiotic analysis of the text the children produced, but it is worth reiterating that particular cultural manifestations, such as this news broadcast, demonstrate a particular engagement with the world. They 'materialize a way of experiencing, bring a particular cast of mind out into the world of objects' where they become objects open to consideration (Geertz, 1993, p. 99). The example of the boys' dramatized 'report from Baghdad' materializes the abstract notion of the dramatized society, revealing a 'cast of mind' formed in a world in which real events are captured, framed and formed for us in televised news reportage.

### **Curriculum and subject: designs and patterns of learning in drama education**

Looking at ways in which subjects such as drama, within a wider pattern of curriculum design, require specific kinds of engagement with the world which, in turn, lead to particular modes of thinking, turns the focus of attention towards learners and patterns of learning. Informed by Vygotskian perspectives, there is space to concentrate briefly on three broad themes relating to description, analysis and understanding of drama and learning:

- the significance of the historical situation in learning drama
- the dynamics and modes of learning drama
- the role of producing 'texts' in the process of learning drama.

These, in turn, relate to the theme of the dramatized society, the location of the self in the context of a diverse, fast-moving and anxious society, the design and purpose of curriculum and subject in the wider contemporary social and cultural context.

First, there is the prominence of the historical situation to take into account in an understanding of learning—a history of events and of their particular institutional and ideological contexts. In the given example, there was on the one hand the outbreak of war and, on the other, the prominence of the modes and forms of televised and dramatized news reporting, which shaped and framed events in particular ways. In the context of schooling, there is a history to the constitution of multicultural and multilingual classrooms. From another angle, there is a background story of the development of the curriculum that led to the provision of drama as a lesson on the curriculum. In this particular context, children were offered the possibility of being more than distant spectators and to enact their own text in comment on events in the world. They had to some extent become what theatre practitioner Augusto Boal describes as 'spect-actors' (Boal, 1979). In his exploration of the psychology of actors' creative work, writing in critique of 'naturalistic', 'psycho-physical' approaches, Vygotsky emphasised the value of 'historically directed investigation' in studying the psychology of the actor. The prominent idea here is that 'the psychology of the actor expresses the social ideology of his epoch

and that it also changes in the process of the historical development of man just as external forms the theatre and its style and content change' (Vygotsky, 1997, p. 240).

In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century conditions for the production had changed beyond that which might have been envisaged at the time that Vygotsky was writing. In the drama they made, through the drama they made, these students were exploring and expressing something of the ideological dimensions of a conflict. They were exploring war in a place that was geographically remote from school, but socially and culturally close in terms of their lived experience as part of Muslim families, who were English and not-English, whose extended families still lived on the borders of the war zone. In order to approach an understanding of the psychology of their learning is it sufficient to view a drama in which they chose to place a 'mother' on the 'streets of Baghdad' in the centre of their piece as an expression of a universal psychology? For the learners themselves, for teachers and for researchers into learning, to engage with events and their representation as expressions of the ideology of the times is to lift learning from its confines as an individual and individuated accomplishment to the realm of social action.

### **Motivation and modes of learning: acting, feeling and thinking**

The relation of learning drama to the intellectual and affective development of mind is a second theme worth exploring. At the centre of interest is the production of meaning and its relation to action. For the children enacting their scene, how does this activity give evidence of learning and development? In the dynamic processes of learning, what is the relation between action, thought and feeling? Various aspects of Vygotsky's work are particularly relevant in this respect. First is the ways in which the relation between meaning and action appear in the micro-history of individual development. In 'The Role of Play in Development', Vygotsky charts the progress of children's imaginative play from early development, in which the concrete situation determines the child's actions and action dominates meaning, to the later developments of play in which 'we see a movement towards the conscious realization of its purpose'—in later stages of development meaning comes to

dominate action (Vygotsky and Cole, 1978). Smaller children may be motivated to play out scenes of war as an immediate response to disturbing images broadcast into their lives. But these teenagers were doing more than responding reflexively to circumstances—the action was planned, choices were made in terms of overall structure, main figures, roles allocated, words spoken, gestures enacted and so forth. Here, within the forms and conventions of drama and the drama lesson, there was a conscious realization of purpose. Questions of motivation and meaning and, within this, the relation of intellect and emotion to dramatic action need to be considered. At the end of *Thinking and Speech*, Vygotsky writes—

[Thought] is not born of other thoughts. Thought has its origins in the motivating sphere of consciousness, a sphere that includes our needs, our interests and impulses, and our affect and emotion. The affective volitional tendency stands behind thought (Vygotsky et al., 1987).

In illustration of this point, he turns to the work of theatre director Stanislavsky on text and sub-text, to show how a technique of theatre reveals that to give full sense to the enunciation of her script, the actor has first, from her own experience, to make contact with and then understand emotions that lie behind and impel the utterance. In a later piece, he returns again to this problem and notes that the representation of emotion in actors is not achieved by direct, conscious means—

This path is much more tortuous and ... more like coaxing than direct arousal of the required feeling. Only indirectly, creating a complex system of ideas, concepts, and images of which emotions is a part, can we arouse the required feelings and, in this way, give a unique, psychological colouring to the entire given system as a whole and its external expression (Vygotsky, 1997).

The structure and content of the boys' drama, the juxtapositions of newsroom and 'live-to-air' broadcast and bouncy ebullience of the 'reporter's' utterance against the solemn simplicity of the 'mother's' short speech, for example give some indications of the ways in which they are playing to give a fuller sense of the meaning of their short play. What motivated the boys in wanting to do this lesson and to construct this scene was not to look at those dropping the bombs or those who ordered and executed the bombardment of Baghdad. What they wanted to examine and represent was the effects on the ordinary people of Iraq. Olu's parody of the ebullient reporter, through contrast and

juxtaposition, did much to frame the pathos and seriousness of what the 'family on the streets of Baghdad' had to say.

### **Producing dramatic texts: making references in many voices**

Looking at social cultural and historical explanations of the emergence of art, particularly theatre and literature, is a preoccupation in Vygotsky's work throughout. In his earlier work, he writes that 'Art is the social technique of emotion, a tool of society which brings the most intimate and personal aspects of our being into the circle of social life' (Vygotsky and Ivanov, 1971). This concern with the formal connections between play, emotion and the production of artefacts is another aspect of his work that is relevant. It leads to some consideration of the boys' drama as being learning in and through the production of artefacts. The question here is about how the production of this dramatic text as an artefact of cultural production fits into a view of learning. A view is required that takes account of the diversity of learners, diverse motivations and different points of interest. The potential that students' production of dramatized texts holds for revealing and exploring the heterogeneity of social thought and practice needs to be involved in such an account of learning. Carpay and Van Oers tackle this in a recent paper in which they argue for an educational practice that incorporates the creation of texts that consciously refer to other texts in the world (intertextuality) and which admit the various voices of many (polyphony). For them, there is a double function in such an approach to education, first a communicational function, an entering into discourse with patterns of wider discourses and, second, an academic function in that there is the possibility of setting texts students produce against other texts produced and circulating in the world and, from critical perspectives, to analyse issues of voice and representation. In this way, an emphasis on 'externalisation', that is the making of texts in the context of schooling, is likely to reveal the heterogeneity of individual and social human thought (Carpay and Van Oers, 1999). It is an approach partly based on Bakhtinian as well as Vygotskian principles which connects well with multimodal social semiotic approaches to signs, texts and meanings.

In this scene, the boys were able to incorporate the voices of others (news presenter, reporter, mother from Baghdad) but the audience maintained a sense of the actors who were doing the speaking. The field of media education and media studies provides a curricular space for the study of electronically mediated texts, but it tends not to examine points of connection and distance between the two simultaneously played roles of the social actor and the dramatic actor. Drama education allows not just reflection on meaning but participation in the construction of animated texts. In drama lessons, however, there is a tendency to place more emphasis on making drama—there is less on critical reflection and very little emphasis on electronically mediated forms of drama. It is important for drama educators to take more account of televised and digitally mediated forms of drama because, for most children, it is these forms of drama that are most powerful and they are likely to have little contact with more traditional theatrical drama. There is room here to draw comparison between more traditional forms of theatrical drama and newer forms of mass mediated forms of drama, accounting for the ways in which they feed from and into each other. In this respect, historical and multimodal social semiotic analysis can be seen as tools not only for researchers or teachers to analyse learning, but can and should be handed over to the learners for them to reflect on and learn from their own learning activity.

One of the striking things about this lesson was the manner in which children took control of the means and process of instruction. The conventions of the lesson had been established and made explicit in previous practice and the boys made use of this template for their own purposes. Teachers and researchers can learn something from this, for as well as directing pedagogic programmes—part of our responsibility is to make pedagogic structures and processes more explicit, to grant a certain amount of autonomy to learners so that we, the teachers and researchers, are able to learn from them. The drama lesson provides a curricular space for children to develop the capacity to manipulate the dramatic medium and form, one that is close to their lives, to express their responses, perhaps to locate their anxieties, but mostly to be able to stand back and think in different ways about a social world that is complex, dynamic and potentially threatening. The conditions of transience,

terrible plays of power, the complexities of social life tend to generate anxieties, contributing to a sense of the dispersal and fragmentation of identities in the contemporary world. Perhaps the substance and instance of drama in educational settings, with the engagement of mind, body, of thought and feeling made manifest in action, offer at the very least a space for reflection and moves towards understanding.

Just over a week after the first round of bombings in London, my attention was caught on reading a newspaper article about public speaking by David Hare (a British playwright, an avowedly political writer) who has recently made plays from the transcripts of trials and public enquiries—he wrote ‘Yes, *life is theatre*’ (my emphasis, *The Guardian Review* 19 July 2005). In the light of recent events and the ways in which they have been mediated to the world, I have been set thinking more about the problems of the relation and boundaries between the dramatic and the everyday, the private and the public. The idea of the ‘dramatized society’, put forward by Williams over 30 years ago has renewed salience and this surely has implications for education, the schooling of children and raises peculiarly vivid questions about the place of drama on the curriculum. The stuff of drama is the action of socially organized people, acts with dimensions marked out on the plane of physical action but with diverse motivations and effects that have intellectual, affective and ideological dimensions. When, in current and contemporary social and cultural contexts, children are encouraged to participate in drama, to make and to view drama, how can it help them to make meaning and to make sense of the world? In the culturally and linguistically diverse settings of inner-city schools, this is a particularly vivid and acute problem, but one that pertains to educational contexts that are less obviously heterogeneous.

Cultural, social and individual difference persists in what might appear to be a ‘mono-cultural’ setting. In making curriculum, planning lessons, teaching and engaging critical reflection on teaching and learning, how do teachers and educational researchers or teachers as educational researchers, construct theoretical and practical pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning drama that account for and engage with current social and cultural realities?

The relevance of drama education is stronger than ever before, not merely as a means of exploring the history and current conventions and contents of live theatre, but more as a way of locating the self and its development in relation to immediate and more remote others. This is particularly important in an age when the dramatic mode of making meaning is culturally pervasive and the force and dynamic towards dramatization of the everyday is powerful.

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i The first version of this paper was presented at a symposium 'El currículum olvidado. Los contenidos culturales de ficción en la construcción del imaginario de las nuevas generaciones [The lost curriculum. The materials of a culture of fiction in the construction of the imagination of new generations]' as part of IV Jornadas de Desarrollo Humanos y Educación [4<sup>th</sup> Conference on Human and Educational Development], Fundación Infancia y Aprendizaje [Foundation for Children and Learning] y Universidad de Alcalá at Universidad de Alcalá, 9-12 September 2005.

ii This example was first used in a chapter 'Report from Baghdad: a hunt for MORINs in a culturally diverse classroom' in *Creating a Theatre in Your Classroom*