

Reading & Writing

QUARTERLY

Overcoming Learning Difficulties

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Reading and Writing Quarterly: Overcoming Learning Difficulties publishes articles representing divergent points of view. This is done in the belief that progress emerges from the sharing and analysis of dissimilar perspectives. As with any journal devoted to advancing knowledge and practice, the articles published do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the editorship or the editorial board.

READING THROUGH THE LINES: AN EXPLORATION OF DRAMA AS A RESPONSE TO LITERATURE

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After the Anglo-American Seminar on the Teaching of English at Dartmouth College in 1966, the American representatives at the conference emphatically supported a resolution to adopt the British practice of allowing drama a greater role in the language arts curriculum, citing its potential for promoting human growth. Yet whereas other aspects of language arts instruction, such as writing and response to literature, have strengthened their roles in the curriculum through their increased emphasis on personal development as an instructional goal, drama has remained on the periphery of language arts instruction and English education scholarship. Current theories of semiotics suggest that in using nonwritten text media, learners engage in important communicative, developmental, and reflective processes. In an exploratory study, we used stimulated recall to elicit a retrospective account from 4 students of their dramatization of a short story. All of the students were enrolled in an alternative school for recovering substance abusers and shared the at-risk characteristics of students in such programs. The students' account indicated that in composing their dramatic text, they (a) responded empathically to the literary characters, (b) situated their dramatic text in an intertext, (c) represented action symbolically, and (d) resolved conflicts with varying degrees of cooperation. Their production of their dramatic text served a dialectic function; that is, their thinking about the story both shaped and was shaped by the act of producing their play. This research provides support for the potential of drama in mediating students' transactions with literature.

The Anglo-American Conference at Dartmouth College in 1966 produced a great deal of excitement among American educators over the potential of dramatic interpretations for enriching students' understanding of both themselves and literature. In his history of American language arts instruction, Applebee (1974) reported that the British representatives to the conference successfully argued that acting out literary scenes "implies a sophisticated level of response and understanding without requiring an explicit (or cognitive) formulation of response" (p. 230). Dramatic response to literature is, wrote Applebee, "the antithesis of the analytic, content-oriented teaching of English" prevalent in American schools, illustrating instead "the British pedagogy of growth" (p. 231).

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Muller (1967), a conference participant, reported that among the most quickly agreed-upon resolutions of the conference was "that drama . . . be made an integral part of the English curriculum from beginning to end" due to its "rich potentialities" as a "primal activity, rooted in the ritual and play going far back in man's history, and in the dramatic play of children" (p. 129). A study of British schools by conference participants Squire and Applebee (1969) revealed that the dimensions of drama in British English classes stood "in stunning contrast" to the practices of American teachers (p. 197). British classes, they found, devoted 20–25% of class time to dramatic activity, with participation in drama potentially adding "to the pupil's poise and assurance, to his command of oral language, and perhaps to his sensitivity to other people" (p. 205). They quoted one teacher as saying, "The aim of drama and speech is related to the extension of the experience of the individual child, to the part the child will play within his particular social group and to the need for the development of the ability for creative thinking in the human personality" (p. 199). Even school plays, the researchers found, were "performed less for an audience than for the satisfaction that young people can achieve through their own participation" (p. 201). The researchers concluded that drama can achieve widespread beneficial effects on students only when it is incorporated throughout the curriculum and not when it is covered only in elective classes, extracurricular activities, and occasional analytic study.

Another Dartmouth participant, Barnes (1968), argued that drama is among the key elements in infusing democracy in education. He characterized drama

in a very inclusive way, to refer to the variousness within society and the individual as well as to the activities which by expressing this variousness can help students develop that fullness of insight upon which true choice is based. What these have in common is the idea of a human unity—whether individual or social—which is tensely heterogeneous. More than a series of activities to be followed in the classroom, we have implied an attitude toward the whole of education. (p. 6)

The British emphasis on education's potential for promoting personal growth became a central tenet of the Dartmouth conference's recommendations for reforming American language arts instruction and soon began to affect the practice of teaching. The National Writing Project, launched soon afterward, based writing instruction on the potential of personal writing for helping students come to terms with themselves. Rosenblatt's (1984) theory that readers make sense of literature through personal transactions with the text was revived in reader-response theory (Farrell & Squire, 1990). Teachers approached reading and writing, always among the staples of the language arts curriculum, with fresh methods of instruction in light of the new perspective on the potential roles of language arts for promoting human development.

Yet drama has remained on the margins of the American language arts

curriculum in spite of the passionate and persuasive publications that emerged from the Dartmouth conference. An ERIC search of publications through 1992 listed 846 entries under the code words "drama" and "language arts." Of those entries, remarkably few concerned the role of drama in secondary language arts classes. Most of the listings concerned theater as a separate discipline or extracurricular activity or focused on the role of acting in the development of children in preschool or early elementary school, and most appeared in theater journals or general education journals. Of the few articles that have appeared in journals devoted to language arts and literacy, most have appeared in elementary school journals, and occasionally in practitioner-oriented secondary school journals.

Recent perspectives on semiotic theory (e.g., Nystrand et al., 1993; Smagorinsky, 1995) suggest that activities such as drama should play a greater role in the secondary language arts curriculum and in literacy research. Witte (1992), for instance, argued that "a broader, more culturally accurate notion of writing and text" (p. 238) is necessary to understand the role of writing in communication. An exclusive emphasis on language as the source of all writing and text "consistently ignores everything nonverbal both in text and thought" (Witte, p. 261). Rather, he argued, educators must reconceptualize writing and reading "in terms of a constructivist semiotic that can operate on or with different symbol systems and that can accommodate the sorts of multisymbol collaborations through which many texts in this culture are produced" (Witte, p. 289).

Seen as a text, a dramatic interpretation of literature can serve conventional educational ends, such as those ascribed to writing (e.g., Applebee, 1984), and also involve symbol use not available through exclusively speech-based forms of mediation. Drama, argued Barnes (1968), involves the talking that is often valuable in helping students come to terms with an experience and includes three additional components:

Movement and gesture play a larger part in the expression of meaning; a group working together upon an improvisation needs more deliberately and consciously to collaborate; the narrative framework allows for repetition and provides a unity that enables the action more easily to take on symbolic status—to have meaning beyond the immediate situation in which it occurs. (p. 8)

Through the creation of dramatic images, students can act out "in symbolic—and often unrealistic—form their fears, hatreds, and desires [to help] them assimilate those too disturbing to be acknowledged literally" (p. 9).

Furthermore, the type of talk students engage in through drama is quite different from that typically found in schools (Felton et al., 1984). Most classroom talk is "informational," focusing on the concrete and chronological. Dramatic talk, on the other hand is "interactional" (focusing on people rather than things) and "expressive" (concerned with the feeling and thinking involved in the dramatic production). These shifts in classroom discourse create new roles for teachers and students (Byron, 1986) that validate students' experiences

and give them authority in the classroom. Wolf and Enciso (1994; Wolf, 1993, 1994) contended that when students participated in drama, they created new possibilities for expression:

The variety of speech genres available broaden to include debate, personal narratives, and directives on the part of the children and not just the teacher. But beyond this verbal expansion is the spread of meaning making into alternative symbolic systems—art, gesture, drama, and music—as participants interpret text simultaneously through multiple channels. This expansion has the potential to sweep more children into its broad embrace—children whose learning styles and cultural backgrounds or initial state in learning English as a second language may know much more than they can effectively verbalize in response to teacher-directed questions. (pp. 352–353)

In addition to these general potentials, drama can enhance literary study by helping to close the distance students often feel from literature (Pavis, 1982). Rogers and O'Neill (1993) argued,

Students are invited to enter, experience, and explore the imagined world. Their responses will no longer be entirely mediated by the teacher questioning but will be modified, extended, and enlarged by the group reaction to the fictional world of the text. Michael Benton (1979) has characterized the reader as not just an interpreter but also a performer, “who builds a mental stage and fills it with the people, scenes and events that the text offers him.” When drama is one of the strategies offered in the classroom, readers are invited to transform the classroom into this “mental stage.” They may appropriate the actual space of the classroom and transform it, as the playwright does the stage, into a new dramatic world, an alternate reality, but one that is constrained and circumscribed by the features of the literary text. (p. 74)

Drama can thus potentially enable readers to have what Rosenblatt (1978) called an “aesthetic” reading of literature in which “*the reader’s attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text*” (pp. 24–25). An essential part of an aesthetic reading is the reader’s “evocation” of the literary work, involving a “concurrent stream of feelings, attitudes, and ideas . . . aroused by the very work being summoned up under the guidance of the text” (p. 48). The evocation, explained Rosenblatt, is what we interpret, rather than the signs offered by the text itself: “Interpretation involves primarily an effort to describe in some way the nature of the lived-through evocation of the work” (Rosenblatt, p. 70).

The present research examined drama as a physical evocation of a literary work. The following were the central questions posed by this research: To what extent are dramatic evocations and interpretations capable of serving a semi-

otic function in mediating students’ transactions with literature? To what extent can the production of a dramatic text enable students to explore a response to literature so as to improve their understanding of both the text and themselves? To gain preliminary answers to these questions, we conducted an exploratory study to examine students’ responses to a short story. This report focuses on 4 students’ identification of the processes they engaged in as they worked with one another to interpret a story and dramatize their understanding of the relationship among the four central characters in it.

CONTEXT OF THE INVESTIGATION

The Facility

The research took place in a residential drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility that provided both therapy for recovery and public school educational classes. Because of federal and state laws related to confidentiality, we may not describe or suggest any information that would reveal the specific identities of individual students; the names used in this report are pseudonyms. The students had committed themselves (sometimes reluctantly) to long-term therapeutic, community-based treatment for 6–18 months. The students enrolled in the facility had characteristics that would mark them as being at risk for failure in school. Seventy percent of the students were behind grade level, and many had histories of truancy, school failure, and trouble with the law. The students reported on in this article were representative of the general range of at-risk factors that affected students throughout the treatment facility.

The setting for the research was an important factor in the students’ recognition of dramatic texts as legitimate social and intellectual expressions. The students lived at the facility, which was located in an isolated, rural community. The students could not leave the facility without supervision. They had no locks on their doors and were in continual therapy together, which contributed to a climate of trust and dialogue. Students were responsible for all aspects of daily maintenance. At the facility, the staff believed that to achieve recovery students needed to have a great deal of trust in one another and to support each other emotionally. Students could be admitted to full-time status in the treatment center only by a vote of the other residents.

The Students

In this article, we focus on 4 students—Wes, Bart, Donnie, and Suzie—who developed a dramatic interpretation of “The Use of Force,” a short story by William Carlos Williams. The narrator of the story is a doctor, who gives an account of a house call he makes during a diphtheria epidemic. The doctor must extract a throat culture from a young girl who has displayed symptoms of the illness. The girl battles him savagely and hysterically to prevent him from examining her throat, and her parents try to help the doctor by holding her down and shaming her into complying. During the course of the struggle, the doctor develops contempt for the parents and passion toward the girl.

Against his rational judgment, the doctor becomes lost in "a blind fury" to attack and subdue the girl. In "a final unreasoning assault," he overpowers her and discovers her "secret" of "tonsils covered with membrane." The story ends with a final act of fury in which the girl attacks the doctor "while tears of defeat blinded her eyes."

The following account of the focal students describes some of their at-risk characteristics, but we are limited in the specificity with which we can describe their prior histories of substance abuse. Generally speaking, among students in the facility, drug and alcohol addiction was a consequence and cause of personal turmoil, contributing to truancy, legal difficulties, personal instability, and a host of other problems that made academic learning problematic. As mentioned earlier, the 4 students featured in this study were typical of the student body as a whole in the range of at-risk characteristics affecting them.

Wes and Bart were 18, Donnie was 17, and Suzie was 15. Wes was African American, and Bart, Donnie, and Suzie were White. The remaining information about the 4 students is presented in the aggregate, in conformity with the confidentiality agreements that prohibit the reporting of specific information about students' personal histories.

Academic Progress

One of the 4 students was at the appropriate grade level in academic standing. Of the 3 others, 1 was four grades behind, 1 was three grades behind, and 1 was one grade behind. Each student had performed poorly in mainstream public school classes prior to entering the facility. In English classes, their aggregate public school grades for their last semester of enrollment had been F, F, C, and F; in mathematics, their grades had been F, F, D, and D/F; in science, their grades had been C, F, D, and B/A; and in history, their grades had been C, B, D, and D. Their grades improved somewhat at the alternative school after their participation in the recovery program. Records for all students in all subjects at the alternative school were not available. Available grades in English were C, D, and A; those in mathematics were A, A, and B; those in science were A, D, and A; and those in history were D and B.

Test Scores

Standardized test scores from the students' prior schooling were available. However, not all of the students took the same set of tests, and thus the number of students for whom scores were available differed for the various tests.

The students scored in the following percentiles on standardized tests:

Mathematics: 61, 27, 88, and 35
 Total language: 40, 92, and 43
 Written: 53
 Social studies: 36
 Science: 37

General Characteristics

The preceding data reveal consistently poor performance in school, but they do not point to a lack of learning potential. There were clear discrepancies between the students' potential, as indicated by test scores, and their performance, as indicated by grades. Undoubtedly, the treatment center provided a refuge from many of the environmental factors that contributed to the students' drug dependencies and thus better enabled them to focus on academics. In addition, as the next section reveals, the alternative school provided an environment in which the students' academic learning was often directly linked to issues raised in therapy.

Instructional Context

Teacher's Characteristics

The teacher observed in the present study had taught in public secondary schools for a total of 15 years, a span interrupted by a 7-year hiatus to manage a family-owned piano and organ business that he continued to manage when he resumed teaching. He was a published poet and had been writing poetry for 30 years. His mother had been a painter and ceramic artist, his sister had trained as a concert pianist, and his brother had been a professional dancer and choreographer.

The teacher's graduate education had brought him into contact with the work of Howard Gardner (1983), whose theory of multiple intelligences stresses the potential for expression through spatial, musical, bodily/kinesesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligences in addition to the mathematical/logical and linguistic intelligences typically assessed in schools. Gardner's theory had helped the teacher account for his own experiences with creativity and helped provide a rationale for the use of artistic texts as a response to literature.

Communication Genres

The facility included only two teachers, both of whom taught a variety of subjects, enabling their instruction to cross disciplines easily. The teacher observed in the present research was obligated to cover certain amounts of material in each subject area, but he had unusual flexibility in the ways in which he could do it. By the end of the second month of the year, the students were familiar with an environment that validated a variety of ways of knowing and interacting. For instance, some activities focused on the development of trust, such as when students were asked to pair off and engage in conversation with their eyes closed. By opening their eyes they would secure their confidence by grounding their perceptions in the concrete, routine presence of the classroom; yet glimpsing their physical surroundings would also mark their uncertainty about the blind trust of the relationship with their conversational partner. After participating in the activity, the class engaged in a discussion that made explicit their awareness of their means of establishing trust, and in subsequent iterations of the activity students were less inclined to open their

eyes. The emphasis on trust was a departure from conventional curricular emphases and provided reinforcement for the therapeutic portion of the students' recovery. In addition, the teacher tried to make an explicit link between this activity and students' writing, revealing to students the way writing lacks the physical confirmation of communication provided by conversation and the need to establish common ground with readers. Even within the conventional academic program, students were encouraged to transcend the customary fragmentation of subject areas. The teacher's familiarity with the arts encouraged him to view the processes of interpretation and expression as multimedia events.

With subject-area boundaries softened and a variety of means of expression appreciated, the teacher could use unconventional *communication genres*, a term we use to refer to a broader version of what Bakhtin (1986) called "speech genres." Speech genres describe an appropriate grammar and terminology and also "specify regular sequencing of types of action, of the functional constituents of an overall activity [such as] the question-answer-evaluation dialogue of classrooms" (Lemke, 1988, p. 82). Bakhtin (1986) argued that "certain features of language take on the specific flavor of a given genre: they knit together with specific points of view, specific approaches, forms of thinking, nuances and accents characteristic of the given genre" (p. 289). Wertsch (1991) maintained that "socialization involves mastering the rules for using particular speech genres in particular sociocultural settings" (p. 130). In the context of the present discussion, the concept applies to the distinctive characteristics of communication in particular environments, regardless of the medium. Thus the term *communication genre* would more appropriately describe the conventions that govern appropriate expression when students communicate through a variety of media. In the class we observed, students had access to a variety of communication genres as they constructed meaning in and across the various disciplines. For example, students used speech in a variety of ways, including conventional academic discussions of abstract concepts; the highly emotional, exploratory, introspective, and uncensored language of therapy for drug recovery; the specific terminology and syntax of their rock and roll culture; and genres that structured other types of discourse. Beyond speech, they were enabled to use a variety of symbol systems in their class work and therapy. As part of the treatment program, for instance, each student produced a personal interpretation of the treatment center's coat of arms that represented his or her story of addiction and recovery, structured by the six steps of the treatment process. Students were also given their choice of interpretive and expressive media in responding to literature, one of which—drama—is the focus of this report.

Prior Instruction

Before data collection, students had a series of experiences with artistic response to literature similar to that studied through the stimulated-recall interviews (described in the following section). They were asked to create, either working alone or collaborating with peers, a product of their choice to represent their understanding of or response to two texts: "Sir Gawain and the

Green Knight," which the teacher read orally to the class, and "The Guest" by Albert Camus, which the students read individually.

The teacher did not give explicit instruction in artistic response, but rather allowed students to choose the textual medium they would use. In response to the first story, most students produced a written product. Some students, however, produced songs in response to the story and were allowed to perform them before the class accompanied by "air guitars." Perhaps encouraged by the class's response to these artistic renderings of the story, more students produced nonwritten texts after their reading of the second story. For instance, one student interpreted "The Guest" by representing a character's decision-making process through a Tinkertoy sculpture with operable gears that allowed it to function as an analytical balance scale, with a block on one side representing the choice of prison and nothing—that is, air—on the other side, representing freedom. Another student interpreted the story by producing a musical composition that included a number of arpeggios to represent the story's spiraling intensity and climax. Suzie, one of the focal students reported on in this article, produced an abstract set of images she called "The Mind of the Prisoner," with the images color coded to specific emotions: Black represented anger; yellow, loneliness; green, guilt; red, confusion; orange, pain; and blue, happiness.

Between the readings of the two stories, the class analyzed a slide projection of two paintings. After the discussions of the paintings, the students were given the option of composing an essay, writing a poem, drawing a response, or otherwise representing their understanding of the paintings. The teacher's goal in this sequence of instruction was that the students be able to read, visualize, and respond to texts independent of teacher direction, though quite possibly through collaboration with other students.

METHOD

Data Collection

To study students' thought processes during classroom discussions and lectures, we used "stimulated recall," a method originally developed by Bloom (1954). Bloom filmed students during discussions and lectures and immediately used the film as a stimulus to elicit students' retrospective accounts of their thought processes during the class period. He developed the method to identify thought processes and levels of attention without interrupting the classes or processes.

Most researchers who have used stimulated recall have attempted to identify a precise running record of "mental processes occurring during the event" (Rose, 1984, p. 23). In the present study, our purpose was not to track the linear unfolding of cognitive processes, but rather to explore the range of processes recalled by the students. Thus we used the stimulus of the videotape to elicit an open-ended interview from the students, instead of using verification measures to identify a sequence of processes as used by Bloom (1954) and Rose (1984). In other words, at times the students talked about incidents other than

those portrayed on the television screen or initiated topics they believed were relevant to their process of producing their group enactment of the story. For instance, at one point Donnie revealed confidential information about his past to explain when he had entered the treatment facility; he did this when he was discussing the length of his friendship with the other members of the group as a way of accounting for the quality of the group dynamics. (See DiPardo, 1994, for a discussion of stimulated-recall interviews that do not aim for precise process tracking.)

Researchers should be considered part of their data, rather than neutral participants in the conduct of interviews. Neutral behavior in interviews is at best an illusion (Rosenthal, 1966; Smagorinsky, 1994, in press). In the present study, the interviewer scaffolded the students' recollection of process and thus was a participant in the account. Instead of being viewed as a contaminant of the data, this participation may be viewed as contributing to the dialogic nature of meaning construction (Smagorinsky, in press; Smagorinsky & Coppock, 1994a, 1994b, in press; Swanson-Owens & Newell, 1994). *Dialogism* is Bakhtin's (1981) term for the way in which thought is inherently social: "Everything means, is understood, as part of a greater whole—there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others" (Holquist, 1981, p. 428). To Bakhtin, all thought is rooted in prior thought; monologic thought is impossible. The multivoiced quality of the interview, therefore, provides a dialogic transaction that prompts the participant's reflection in areas that are within grasp yet might not otherwise be reached.

Procedures for this Study

Videotaping Procedures

The data were collected on 2 consecutive days at the end of the second month of a typical school year. On the first day, the classroom was set up in its normal arrangement, which seated students at a loose collection of small tables, each accommodating four or five chairs, plus additional chairs and a couch. In two adjacent corners of the room, video cameras were angled at 45° so that every point in the room was filmed by either or both cameras.

Students were given individual photocopies of Williams's "The Use of Force." The teacher wrote instructions on the chalkboard for the students to read the story and then, either alone or in a group of their choice of any size up to five, fashion some product or text in response to the story. The room had been stocked with a variety of media through which the students could express themselves: paper and pens for writing, Tinkertoys, paints and other art supplies, a versatile keyboard synthesizer, a simpler keyboard instrument, and a computer loaded with a graphics program. Some students went to their rooms and got guitars, cassette music tapes, masks, and other resources to supplement what had been provided for them.

The students were given an hour to read the story, decide how and with whom they would respond to the story, and produce their interpretive texts (e.g., their dramatic, artistic, or other representations of their understanding

of the story). The video cameras filmed the entire hour, including the reading of the story.

Stimulated-Recall Interview

The 4 focal students sat with the researcher in front of a large television screen to view the videotape of their reading and dramatic response. As the videotape played, a portable audiocassette tape recorder recorded the interview between the researcher and students. The researcher's questions were not preplanned, but rather were stimulated by the activity on the videotape. The researcher's role, therefore, was to use the videotape to pose open-ended questions that elicited retrospection about the thought processes behind particular behaviors. Examples of the questions and prompts of the interviewer appear throughout the transcripts reported in the following section.

RESULTS

We focus on 4 students who collaborated on the production of a play that dramatized their understanding of the relationships among the four characters in the story. In their dramatization, the students engaged in five general processes: (a) They responded empathically to the characters, (b) they situated the dramatic text they were composing in an intertext, (c) they represented their interpretation symbolically, and (d) they resolved conflicts with varying degrees of cooperation; in going through these processes, the students (e) produced a text that had a *dialectic function*, that is, both shaped and was shaped by their thinking. In the following sections, we illustrate each of these processes with excerpts from the interview transcript.

Empathic Responses to the Characters

The students drew on prior personal knowledge to inform their interpretation of the story. In selecting the roles they would play, they tried to determine the best match between student and character:

Donnie: We were also discussing who was going to be who. We figured her would be good for the girl, Wes for the doctor because he has got glasses to fly off his head, and me and Bart were just sort of deciding, [pause] it was actually between me and Bart to be his mother and dad.

Q: What did you decide?

Donnie: For me to be the dad, and you to be the mother.

Q: Why did you decide that?

Bart: Well, because, personal issues that go along with that.

Q: Uh-huh. Things you don't want to talk about?

Bart: Yeah.

Bart's decision to play the mother seems to have had a personally meaningful basis, much more so apparently than Wes's decision to play the doctor

simply because he wore glasses, as the doctor did (although other parts of the transcript suggest that Wes might have gravitated to the role of the doctor because of his commanding personality). Similarly, Suzie felt a personal connection to the character of the girl beyond Donnie's account of her taking the role simply because she shared the character's gender. One point of contention in the group's discussion of how to interpret the story concerned the age of the girl. Different students had pictured her differently, based on their understanding of how children of different ages behave:

Donnie: How old do you all picture? I picture about 8 years old.

Wes: I picture about like 11 or 12.

Bart: I didn't really think about the age.

Q: How about you, Suzie?

Suzie: I pictured her my age.

Q: How old are you?

Suzie: 15.

Donnie: I didn't think a 15-year-old would be sitting on her daddy's lap.

Bart: Yeah, she was sitting on his lap.

Wes: That's why I'm thinking of an 8-year-old.

Bart: Now I didn't think a girl that old would be so defiant.

Wes: Yeah.

Suzie: I was that resistant.

Q: You were resistant when?

Suzie: When I went out to the dentist yesterday.

Suzie's reference to her defiance at the dentist's office suggests that her recent experience of having resisted a doctor's attempt to look into her mouth might have affected her decision to choose the role of the girl and might have influenced the way in which she interpreted and portrayed the character.

The interview revealed that one factor in the group's creation of their interpretive text was the individual students' empathic responses to the characters. In some cases, their personal experiences simply gave them insight into how a character ought to be played, as in the boys' feeling that a teenager would not sit on her father's lap; in other cases, personal experiences helped the actors infuse their roles with personal meaning, as in Suzie's drawing on her trip to the dentist on the previous day to portray the character's resistance.

Situation of the Dramatic Text in an Intertext

Intertextuality refers to the way in which thought is inherently rooted in prior thought. The text that a person creates with a thought is appropriated from a previously encountered text, which in turn was developed out of a prior network of other texts. Thought therefore has a social basis, with each thought derivative of previous thought and serving as the basis for subsequent thought.

The 4 students who created a dramatic text to represent their understanding of Williams's literary text drew on a network of imagaic texts appropriated from popular culture (film and television) to create their interpretation. To get

a sense of how to represent the characters, the students attempted to situate the story and their production historically. In doing so, the students discussed incidents from the story and how they fit in different time periods:

Donnie: Me and Suzie started talking about when this probably took place. I said, well, doctors don't make house calls no more that I know of. I mean, I am sure there is a doctor that will.

Suzie: I thought it was like, in the late 1800s or something.

Donnie: Like *Little House on the Prairie*.

Where they situated the story historically had an effect on how the characters would be portrayed. Among the considerations was whether to have Suzie wear a costume for her portrayal of the girl. A large part of the dispute centered on when and where they thought the story had taken place, and how they thought people had dressed during that period:

Bart: Donnie said, because she wanted to put on colonial dress or something like that, *Little House on the Prairie*. And I was saying, no, man, this ain't *Little House on the Prairie*.

Q: Why did you want to [wear the dress], Suzie?

Suzie: Because, like, I was talking to Donnie and asking him if it was in the old-timer days, and he was going, like, "yeah it was."

Whether the story had taken place in "old-timer days" or not was an important question in the group's interpretation of the story. Drawing on their knowledge of historical periods (at least as they understood history through the images of it provided by popular culture), the group debated how the characters would dress and what their roles and responsibilities would be (i.e., whether doctors would make house calls). In discussing the setting of the story and how it would affect their production, the group negotiated understandings of both the text they were interpreting and the text they were producing.

The students also made connections between "The Use of Force" and cinematic texts with which they were familiar. The girl's increasing rage and resistance reminded some members of the group of the film *The Exorcist*:

Wes: I tried to play the doctor. The story reminded me of *The Exorcist*, with the girl and the devil. . . . The way she was resisting him and not opening her mouth and stuff. The guy in *Exorcist*, I don't know, it has been so long since I have seen him.

Bart: They were trying to help her.

Wes: Yeah, they were trying to help her, and she was like spitting the green goop out and then when they said [in the story] the blood was coming out her mouth, that made me think even more about [*The Exorcist*].

Donnie: *The Exorcist* was about Satan. What is that called when Satan supposedly takes over her body?

Bart: Possessed.

Donnie: Possessed. And this little girl—

Bart: Yeah, that little girl was possessed.

Donnie: She was just real crazy.

Q: Did you think that the girl in the story was possessed?

Bart: I didn't.

Q: No? Wes?

Wes: Not really possessed, it just reminded me of just a little girl, because the girl in *The Exorcist* was cute and all of a sudden she turns out to be real evil and stuff, and that is what this says, it says she was real attractive when she was little, and then she turns out to be where she didn't want to do anything and bit the stick off, you know, and the blood was coming out of her mouth, and then she still resisted. That just made me think, she has got a problem. She got real violent.

Q: So how did the mask fit in with that thing with *The Exorcist*?

Wes: Because at first the girl was all calm and stuff, and on the outside she looked real calm. Just from reading that story, you know, you could pick up on her attitude, how it changed once he tried to get something extracted and her cooperation from her. And then when she got all bothered, and stuff, that mask was crazy.

The students' understanding of the story's structure grew out of their familiarity with a script (Schank & Abelson, 1977) from popular culture. As Wes's and Bart's comments illustrate, they did not apply the script so rigidly that they distorted the meaning of the story they were interpreting, but rather used the story structure to inform both the development of the character and the manner in which they would portray her in their own production.

A second film that the students drew on was *Misery*, because of the way in which the lead in the film, a woman, became angry. The students considered adding a soundtrack to their production based on the music that paced the scenes of anger in *Misery*:

Q: Why did you think of music now?

Wes: Because, like, when you're angry and you know how you're struggling, and the music is going—

Donnie: She watched a movie about anger.

Suzie: *Misery*.

Wes: Exactly. *Misery* just possessed women, they was angry.

Bart: Whenever he talked about music, I was thinking of *Misery*.

Wes: Yeah, I knew I wanted some music that had something to do with struggle, and then something big about to happen.

In interpreting "The Use of Force," then, the students drew on their understanding of stories that they found to be similar, either in plot or in feeling. Their incorporation of elements of those films into their own production suggests that they made intertextual links among previously read texts, the text they were interpreting, and the text they were producing, with the production of their own text influencing their understanding of the text they were dramatizing. Although the three texts represented the three different media of

film, print, and live theater, the thematic links among them were important in both the students' understanding of "The Use of Force" and their conception of their own interpretive text.

Symbolic Representation of the Interpretation

In representing the action of the story, the students relied on various props to symbolize aspects of the characters. At times, the symbols were fairly straightforward, as in their decision to use ketchup to represent the blood from the girl's mouth. At other times, the symbols were more complex, as in their decision to use Wes's bathrobe for the doctor's lab coat:

Wes: Like, the lab coat. The lab coat stands for doctor, right, but he is not going to have a lab coat on, first of all. And he could be wearing a trench coat, but you could take a trench coat as anything so I picked my blue and white night robe that can be a trench coat or a white lab coat, because it has white in stripes.

A second major prop was a mask that the group wanted Suzie to wear to symbolize her anger. At the beginning of the play, she would appear without the mask. When the doctor started to fight her, she would slip it on to represent her change in demeanor. The mask, felt some, would represent an emotion that Suzie had difficulty portraying dramatically:

Wes: We have this mask that we were going to put on Suzie. Because she is the girl.

Q: She was the girl?

Bart: Yeah. When she gets mad, just put it on there without [anyone's] really noticing. Like when they are fighting.

Wes: [On the videotape] I am telling how good it would be, you know, like at first I am going to be yanking and trying to get her to take it. She is going to be normal first, and then she pushes me back. After that she is going to have the mask on.

Q: Uh-huh. Why didn't the rest of you like the mask?

Bart: I thought it was cruel.

Donnie: Because it is a real evil like Halloween mask, and we are doing a play about this evil girl. We thought she had the evil look already. I mean, aaaah, you know.

Q: Just like act it out instead of the mask?

Donnie: Yeah. But you know, they do plays where those guys run around in tights and stuff. They will come out with masks to express their feelings.

Wes: I know another reason why. She said she wasn't going to scream or act. I said, that is why I said, when we get the mask, that will do something for her.

Suzie's reticence in emoting during the production caused the group to suggest other ways of representing her feelings. Their decision to depict her

emotions through a mask suggests that they were aware of the emotional aspects of the story and of ways to depict emotions in the absence of physical and emotional expression in acting.

Conflict Resolution

In arriving at their decisions, the group needed to resolve conflicts. Because of factors such as age, seniority, and perhaps gender, the problem-solving process was often imbalanced. One factor that affected the group's ability to solve problems cooperatively was that Wes and Bart were the oldest students not just in the group, but in the whole facility; although they were enrolled as ninth graders because of prior academic problems, they were both in their late teens. They had also been enrolled in the treatment center longer than any other student in the facility. They had therefore been through a great deal of treatment and therapy together and had developed an extremely close friendship. Wes and Bart played dominating roles when the group had trouble resolving a conflict or when they needed someone to perform a menial task, such as getting a prop from a dormitory room. When Bart dismissed Suzie's ideas regarding the appropriateness of her dress, she was asked how she felt about that:

Suzie: I felt like my opinion didn't count. It was like, "No, man, we ain't going to have that."

Q: Did you say anything after he said "no" about the dress, or did you just let it drop?

Suzie: I just let it drop.

Suzie seemed disempowered at critical points of decision making, possibly because of her youth, her lack of seniority in the treatment program, her gender, or a combination of these reasons. Wes and Bart treated Donnie in much the same way, sending him on errands to get their props:

Bart: We sent Donnie, because me and Wes was doing most of the figuring out and so we sent Donnie to go get the tongue depressor and he knew about where they were.

Donnie: Yeah, they are getting ready to send me off again [on the videotape]. I feel like a go-for, you know, having me go get everything.

Yet their treatment of Suzie was more severe than their treatment of Donnie, at times bordering on cruelty. When she said that she could not act mad, they tried to anger her through taunts and even physical harassment:

Bart: She said that she couldn't act mad like that. And I said, we will make you mad during the film because we are going to be doing this. And then she started getting mad because we were shaking her and stuff.

Q: So you were really getting mad?

Suzie: Yeah.

Bart: Yeah, because that is what we are going to do is really make her mad. So she won't have to act.

Not all of Wes's and Bart's coercion was so heavy-handed. Wes seemed to have an intuitive sense for dissipating tension through the use of humor. When the group was having trouble deciding whether to use Suzie's dress, Wes, a dark-skinned African American, broke the tension by putting a white plastic spoon over each eye, held in place by his glasses, and bobbing his head back and forth, causing Suzie to say he looked "like Stevie Wonder or something":

Bart: That's where you put those spoons on your eyes.

Q: You just did that? Why did you do that?

Wes: I don't know.

Q: You don't know why?

[laughter]

Bart: When I looked at him, he started trying to make us laugh.

Suzie: You all were laughing.

With the tension broken, the group proceeded with their discussion. Later, when Bart and Wes were trying to talk Suzie into wearing the mask, Wes again broke the tension through humor:

Donnie: Yeah, [Wes] also decides, man, we've got to get someone else to do this.

Q: Instead of Suzie?

Donnie: She wouldn't put the mask on because it was too cold.

Bart: And then [Wes] put it on his face and said it ain't too cold, so he got mad and put it in his cardigan and said, OK, we will discuss this while the mask warms up. He started cracking up.

Q: Now did you do that just to be funny, Wes, or did you do that to try to ease the tension?

Wes: I did that to be funny and sarcastic. I said, OK, we will just warm the mask up. Because I had made the comment, earlier, I was like this [to Suzie] "You wouldn't scream," and then she didn't want the cold mask. And she didn't want the ketchup on her face. I was like—golly you know.

Q: After you did that with your sweater, did everybody relax?

Wes: More or less, yeah. She decided to go ahead and do it after the mask was warm.

Wes: Finally, she put it on.

Q: Did you put the mask on afterwards? Why did you do it then?

Suzie: No, because man, they were sitting there laughing at me. I even, when he had the sweater, I was getting frustrated. I was saying, give it to me.

After her initial frustration, Suzie reported that she "was too busy laughing because of that mask. I was sticking my tongue through the mouth part." Wes's humor, then, appeared to have been effective in moving the group through their disputes and helping them to resolve differences. The resolutions were

not without problems, however; the interview suggested that Wes and Bart got their way far more often than did Suzie and Donnie.

The interactions within the group suggested that collaborative learning is not always the harmonious interaction it is often portrayed to be. Suzie, being both young and female, often got ganged up on and either overpowered into silence or frustrated into cooperating. Donnie, as a younger and less assertive group member, was often treated as a go-for. The group dynamics, although apparently productive in helping the group produce their play, seemed to reinforce the power roles within the group and limit the contributions of the younger members.

In spite of the frequent dissonance, the group members nonetheless worked constructively throughout much of their production. Other portions of the interview revealed that the students, in their discussion of how to dramatize the story, listened to one another's critiques of possible interpretations and instantiations. The discussions of who should play each role, whether or not the dress was appropriate, and other key issues suggested that the students, although at times contentious, discussed the dramatization seriously and productively.

Dialectic Function of the Text

The production of the text appeared to serve two complementary functions. On one hand, the dramatic text represented the students' thinking about the story as they interpreted it through their experiences and knowledge. The discussion of the appropriateness of Suzie's dress, for instance, illustrated the manner in which the text they were creating represented their thoughts about the text they were interpreting.

At the same time, the creation of the dramatic text helped shape the students' thoughts about the story. When discussing the dress, the students considered how it fit in with the way in which they viewed the tone of the production:

Bart: I don't know. That dress, it would make it look like she was a little . . . it just wouldn't . . . fit the whole atmosphere of the play.

Wes: I didn't think it would either, because she said it was real pretty, and I didn't think that would get—

Donnie: See, the reason we thought about this is because in the story it says a little, fully dressed girl.

Suzie: Not if you see the dress; then you would understand. It is like, it is real baggy, and it has flowers on it and stuff.

Wes: I thought it would have one of them like penitentiary or work dresses or like a sweater or cardigan.

Q: You think that would be a good dress to wear?

Wes: That is what I pictured in my mind, something drab, not something fancy.

Their production of the text helped the students think clearly about the characters and what they represented in the story. Similarly, in discussing how *The Exorcist* had influenced their interpretation of the story, Wes realized

that he viewed the girl as "possessed," which enabled him to envision her in a particular way and interpret the story appropriately.

Bart, too, developed his thinking about the story by situating it in prior classroom activities. He said that during the production of the play, he had been thinking about

the extended definition of what abuse is, because they were talking about if you are a child abuser. Is it really abuse if someone cuts their hand and you give them a shot? That is hurting them, but it is to help them out later. I was thinking about that. How ambiguous abuse can be. What abuse means.

Through his participation in the play, Bart continued his prior deliberation on the definition of abuse. Ironically, he believed he was helping Suzie to perform her part by treating her in what some might regard as an abusive manner, that is, shaking her and taunting her.

Bart also opened his mind to more imaginative interpretations of the story through his engagement in group decision making. Originally he "wanted everything to stay as close to the story line as possible" and did not want to include the mask in their production. However, he said that eventually he "thought about it. I was just being closed-minded." Through the process of producing the play, Bart began to see interpretive possibilities that he had previously not realized.

The role of dialogue in their collaboration helped the students mediate their understanding of the story. On one hand, their thoughts shaped the text they were creating, and on the other hand, their thoughts were shaped by the discussion about how to compose the text. For this group, the production of their dramatic text involved a process of dialectic mediation (Vygotsky, 1978, 1934/1987). Some composition theorists (e.g., Applebee, 1984) have attributed great powers to writing as a vehicle for exploring a topic, referring to the "writing to learn" movement as an important part of education. The experiences of the students in this group suggest that other types of texts have similar potential for helping students grow in their understanding of their school subjects.

DISCUSSION

Our analysis of the interview transcripts was exploratory in nature. The primary value of the interview data is in its illustration of the potential for drama as a vehicle for developing and communicating a response to literature. In dramatizing their response to the story, the students collaboratively worked through possible interpretations of the story and ways to represent those interpretations. Although the resolution of conflicts was not always cooperative and the distribution of power was often uneven, the students nonetheless used their interaction to arrive at an interpretation and representation of the story's meaning, and in the process refined their own thinking about the story.

Martin (1992) has argued that drama has the potential to produce "miracles," to involve students in activities

in which connectedness to others is a fact of life. It is the place where students work so hard and so enthusiastically that disciplinary problems rarely arise and motivation takes care of itself, where they take initiative, carry enormous responsibilities, solve problems, think critically—in sum, do regularly all those things our elders say our nation's youth should be learning. (p. 94)

The imbalance in authority among the group members in the present study suggests that Martin's view, as well as the view of the participants in the Anglo-American Conference at Dartmouth College, is idealistic in its assessment of the role of drama in learning, glossing over the problematic nature of teaching and learning through any means of mediation. Drama, like writing and other tools, has potential for enabling the construction of meaning, and that potential is realized differently for different individuals and different combinations of learners.

In producing their dramatic text, the students in this study drew on many of the resources that are attributed to the production of the written texts that dominate language arts communication (Applebee, 1984). In working out their portrayals, the students drew on an array of prior personal, historical, and intertextual knowledge, much as writers do when composing (Spivey, 1990). Flower et al. (1990), Greene (1993), and Spivey (1990) have examined the processes involved in "reading to write," that is, when students demonstrate learning by writing in response to what they have read. The present research involved a parallel structure, with "reading to act" replacing "reading to write." Although some processes vary because of the different resources available in different media (e.g., students might use physical symbols such as masks when acting), the semiotic potential for meaning construction is common to both.

The present research suggests that a greater role for drama as an interpretive medium in language arts instruction deserves consideration. As illustrated in the experiences of these 4 students, a dramatic enactment enables students to act through their own relationships and experiences, in both their efforts to collaborate and their representation of meaning in the action of the portrayal. Like any other learning tool, drama will provide a more consonant means of mediation for some students than others. It therefore is not a panacea for learning and development, as envisioned by Martin (1992), but rather a tool that provides a learning potential and, because of the vicissitudes of social interaction, a tool that, when used collaboratively, can bring out all facets of personal relations among learners.

One question that the present research did not answer is, Does the quality of the production matter, particularly in terms of evaluation? We did not attempt to assess the quality of the play the students produced, but rather attempted to investigate the processes involved in its production. Undoubtedly, one reason that teachers avoid providing opportunities for dramatic re-

sponse (or other forms of creative and artistic response) to literature is that they feel the assessment of such texts is too subjective and therefore to be avoided. With the argument of British educators in mind, we would argue that the quality of the product is less important than the experience of the process. The interviews with the students in the present study suggest that the process of producing the play helped the students come to a greater understanding of the story and helped them act through personal experiences in their portrayal of the characters. To educators who value the personal growth available through such activities, the quality of the product is less important than the benefits of participation in the process. The product versus process dispute is central to many debates about schooling: Should the purpose of educational experiences be to sort students according to the categories of the grading scale? Or should the emphasis of education be more on helping students grow than on sorting students according to the perceived quality of the products they produce? In the alternative school that was the setting for the previous study, the emphasis was on recovery from and treatment of substance abuse, and thus the therapeutic value of the experience was more important than the value of the finished product. Were this activity to be tried in mainstream schools, the issue of evaluation would become more problematic as teachers attempted to balance the value of growth with the need for assessment within the demands of the institution.

Nonetheless, the present research suggests that acting out a response to literature can provide an excellent vehicle of expression for students. The text of the play helped mediate the students' thought and activity, serving a semiotic function in their response to and representation of the short story. Through their empathic connections with the characters they played, most of the students could potentially have acted out problematic relationships in their own lives. By connecting the text they were interpreting to texts they had previously viewed, the students were able to create a new text that brought together their response to the literature and their understanding of parallel story structures and moods. These potentials seemed especially important and especially possible in the alternative school setting, where the students were already involved in therapeutic activities and were accustomed to unconventional instruction. As educators, we must ask ourselves whether alternative schools and special students should be the only ones with access to such a potentially rich form of response to literature.

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