

***Teaching and learning through drama:  
In search of a dialogic classroom  
in Hong Kong***

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# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
<i>CHAPTER ONE : Talking to Learn</i>	7
Nature of talk	7
Talk and learning	10
Call for a dialogic classroom	16
<i>CHAPTER TWO : Learning to Learn through Drama</i>	19
Learning to/through talk in Drama	
1. Drama gives legitimacy to talk	22
2. Drama gives contexts for talk	24
3. Drama's talk is holistic	25
4. Drama enriches quality of talk	25
5. Drama's talk as being others	27
6. Drama as inquiry	31
7. Drama's talk helps cognitive growth	35
The role of teacher in drama	37
Become an active learner	39
<i>CHAPTER THREE : Searching for a place for the Dialogic Classroom in Hong Kong</i>	
The new wave of Education Reform in Hong Kong	44
The position of drama in Hong Kong's schools	47
Drama under the Education Reform	49
<i>CONCLUSION</i>	59
<i>BIBLIOGRAPHY</i>	61

## **ABSTRACT**

The objective of this dissertation is, to raise awareness concerning the importance of “talking to learn”, which is neglected by teachers in Hong Kong. Reflecting on her past schooling experience, the author attempts to explore the fundamental relationship between talking and learning. Talking is the most effective mode that can be used to engage students in their learning process. The talking space provided for students by teachers affects the way students view their role in the classroom. In order to foster students learning to learn, the author argues that the traditional one-way teaching classroom should be replaced by a dialogic classroom where students’ voices are valued. Drama, in its dialogic nature, has a great potential to create this kind of classroom. Through the literature reviews and the author’s experience in this year, she demonstrates that drama as a powerful teaching and learning medium could be of help to students learning to be active learners. Based on her inquiry, she wants to give vigorous support to the introduction of drama, as an alternative pedagogy, in Hong Kong schools. She believes that drama is more than an extra-curricular activity; it can help to achieve the aims of the current Hong Kong Education Reform which emphasizes teaching students “learning how to learn”.

## *Introduction*

I have a dream! I dream that school is a place full of joy. Every student enjoys going to school. The classroom is a laboratory of knowledge as well as the world. Students are not the objects of the classroom who merely sit and are “fed” knowledge by the teacher. They are the subjects of education. Speaking in the classroom is not a taboo and is not restricted by the teacher. Students are not afraid of talking with teachers since they are their learning partners not the ones who direct and control their learning. Everyone has a chance to express their opinion and share their stories freely and is supported by the teachers and other classmates in the classroom. Students don’t need to act as copycats simply memorising all the contents of the textbooks which always have right or wrong answers. Instead, we are the “researchers” who examine the “facts” stated in the textbooks. Students are not asked to do the homework *for* teachers. They do homework because it is the record of their learning. They are provided with chances to build up confidence and skills which are useful and relevant for living in society. The knowledge they explore helps them to understand the world and also create a window for a possible world.

Unfortunately, it did not occur in my school life. When I recall my memories as a primary and secondary school student, I find that I was not allowed by teachers to speak during the lessons. Although the teachers asked us questions, we were not open to say any other answer than the standard one in the teachers’ minds. We were ashamed of being wrong since we believed it would give a bad impression to our teachers and other classmates. When some brave

classmates offered the alternative answers or asked questions, they would be thought of as “naughty” and disobedient students. Teachers thought they were successful when students sat quietly without making noise during the lessons since it meant students enjoyed their teaching. It was unnecessary to challenge the knowledge we learnt from the textbooks since we would pass the examinations if we could just memorize it. I remember when I prepared for the Hong Kong Certificate Examination (a public examination similar to GCSE in the U.K.), everyone was drilled in the standard marking schemes since it guaranteed passing the examination if you could state the points accurately. This was the way I was taught in primary and secondary school for thirteen years.

While I reflect on my own experience, I try not to generalize it as a universal case. I talked with my friends and the students I know in Hong Kong. I was not surprised to hear that they had a similar experience to mine. They felt bored when they were sitting in the classroom, like objects. Every new school year, they prayed, as I did also, that relatively lively and interesting storytellers (teachers) would come to teach them. Actually, we had no choice. We were well trained neither to express our opinion, nor to generate ideas different from the teachers’ since conformity would lead us to pass the examinations.

When I came to Exeter, studying abroad, I felt very uncomfortable and unfamiliar with the new learning environment. I was asked to express, argue with and explore the articles I read. I was provided with opportunities to speak. It seemed so strange to me because I was not used to this way of learning. It further proved that I was a “product” which was made in Hong Kong. I was

passive and seldom expressed my opinion. On the one hand, I feared saying something wrong; on the other hand, I had no opinion on the readings since I readily accepted what the authors said. I tried hard to adapt to the new learning style. Having a voice in the classroom seemed embarrassing and was difficult for me, but gradually I discovered that the more I spoke (although it was still immature), the more I understood myself through speaking out my own thoughts. I could see the valuable existence of everyone in class when we contributed ideas. I felt that I was respected as a member of the classroom and it increased my motivation to learn. Why was the experience so different? What made it different?

Recently, the Hong Kong government announced a holistic education reform. The overall direction of the reform is to offer all-round and balanced learning opportunities, and to lay the foundation for lifelong learning. In order to achieve these aims, the proposal stresses the importance of teaching students “learning how to learn”. Facing the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, our students cannot continue to play a passive role in education, waiting only for the feeding of knowledge. If we want to achieve these aims, we cannot stick to the conventional teaching method (i.e. one-way knowledge transmission). Students should not be trained to be silent in the classroom in order to show that they are “good” students. We need to change the classroom culture. Teachers should recognize the importance of the participation of students, and value the students’ voice in order to help them construct their own thoughts and explore their learning during the lessons. Throughout this year of studying in my course, I have come to believe strongly that drama-in-education is one of the most effective means to open this space where

students learn how to learn through the drama process.

Language is the corner stone of the drama process and the means through which the drama is realized. Whenever any kind of active role-play takes place, language is directly and necessarily involved. Drama can provide a powerful motivation to speech, and this speech does not occur in isolation but is embedded in contexts and situations where it has a crucial organizing form (O'Neill 1982: 18).

As a student, who recognizes the power of teaching and learning through drama, and who has gained experience from practices, observations and placements in this year, I have found that drama, as an alternative pedagogy, not only creates chances for student to speak more, but more importantly, provides a space for students to inquire and interrogate what they learn. This increases the quality of learning.

My intention in writing this dissertation is to raise people's awareness of the value of "talking to learn"; and I suggest that drama, as an alternative pedagogy, can create a dialogic classroom which echoes the aims of the Hong Kong Education Reform. Alongside this close relationship between language and learning, I will focus on the significance of spoken language. Education is for communication. Oral language is the most direct mode of teaching and learning in the classroom. A dialogic classroom values the student's voice and balances the teacher-student power relationship. It is an interactive and exploratory classroom for students learning how to learn. Students will learn the skills, through the dialogue between teachers and themselves, between classmates and themselves, to live in an ever-changing world.

Thus, in chapter one, I will try to explore the nature of talk in human life, its relationship with learning, as well as the reasons why I argue in favour of a dialogic classroom. The second chapter discusses the potential in teaching and

learning through drama for helping to create the kind of classroom I experienced during my course. In the last chapter, I would like to apply those explorations to the situation in Hong Kong. My goal is to find a suitable way to introduce drama as pedagogy in Hong Kong for creating a dialogic classroom.

The ability of learning to learn for me is not only a prerequisite for anyone to succeed. It is also a skill to empower ourselves to gain control of knowledge in order to make ourselves become more self-determined. In our ever-changing world, to a certain extent, people become smaller and our lives are uncontrollable and insecure. We cannot foresee everyday changes. Neither can we always chase the endless trends in society. In order to live better and have the power to face the challenges of the contemporary world, we have to gain the ability to speak out with our own distinctive voice.

I have to say, due to my lack of extended experience, I am not proposing something new in education. The arguments I offer here are based on literatures and my own experiences during this year. Although it may not make a unique contribution to the body of knowledge in my field, it is very important to me to organize my thoughts, express my view and share my dream. It gives me a chance to carry my learning forward. I would like to make sense of my learning during this year and contribute to my home city. I do believe that language is action-guiding: when I tell myself a story, it will lead me to take action for making my dream come true which I hope may help the next generation to learn in a more joyful way.

I do not know much about the education system and teaching style in other countries. But I think, if teachers really care about their students, then the call for a dialogic classroom would be universal and not only a need for Hong Kong. If we value the potential of teaching and learning through drama, we can also find a place for Drama-in-Education. I hope this dissertation can generate some ideas for how drama may help to establish an effective teaching and learning environment in schools. Let me attempt to explore this potential to create a dynamic and interactive classroom.

## *Chapter One*

### *Talking to Learn*

Education in its very nature is a form of communication. “Learning to communicate is the heart of education” (Barnes 1976: 20). Language, undoubtedly, is a prime agent in the communication process. School is a place which should provide opportunities to those learning to develop and use language, to understand themselves and others, to make sense of the world, and to reflect on their own lives. If schools fail to give this opportunity to students in their learning process or deems it unimportant, it is the negation of “educating for living” which is always seen as the objective of education.

Language is a fundamental means for learning. This includes both talking and writing. In the following, I will only focus on discussing the importance of classroom talk because it is the primary and direct mode of teaching and I think it is crucial to effective learning, and yet it is often neglected by teachers. Through exploring the human nature of “talking to learn” and the significance of learning to speak, I hope it can provide a rich ground for a dialogic classroom which I believe may help students to learn for life.

#### **Nature of talk**

We start to learn about the world from the voices of people surrounding us. As infants we learn to speak as part of learning to be a member of the family. Through day-to-day communication, we learn to connect meaning to the adults

around us. Starting from “listening to learn”, as the child grows older, talking begins to play an important role in their learning process. S/he uses speech to talk aloud to tell what s/he is doing when s/he plays with toys. Then s/he will learn to use speech to plan what s/he is going to do, or recall and re-experience what has already happened, re-interpreting this incidentally while doing so. (*ibid* 18) We originally learn speech for communication with others, then speech becomes part of our own thinking and imagining.

According to Vygotsky (1962), thought is born through word. He said, “word meaning is a phenomenon of thought only in so far as thought is embodied in speech, and of speech only in so far as speech is connected with thought and illumined by it” (120). A Word, that does not carry any meaning, is only an empty sound. This meaning may not be completed, but while we talk, it helps us to organize and shape our thoughts in order to make sense of them; at the same time, we communicate our thoughts with others to share our understandings. Talk is a tool for making meanings. Our thoughts are built according to experiences. During talk, experiences are reconstructed in order to share them. We select the words in our mind and put them into order so as to make sense of the experiences and find out the possible meaning when we speak out. As Sapir said (cited in Barnes 1976: 100),

Once the form of a language is established it can discover meanings for its speakers which are not simply traceable to the given quality of experience itself but must be explained to a large extent as the projection of potential meanings into the raw material of experience.

The meaning generated by speech makes thought processes readily available to introspection and revision. We give new meaning to our old experiences and interpretations by recoding and reshaping them in talk. This new meaning helps

us to accumulate experiences to meet new challenges. In the words of Barnes (1976), our growth is based on systems by which we 'organise' or interpret experience. (24) This produces change not only by generating new experiences but also by representing old experiences to ourselves anew and then 'recoding' them in different form. (*ibid*)

Speech is also a tool for expressing ourselves. When we talk with others, we bring our thoughts and feelings to them at the same time. We are not only making meaning of our thoughts but we are also telling others and ourselves who we are, what we feel and what kind of person we want to be. It is a means of communicating our version of the world to others showing that as a human being we want to be recognised. We speak in order to value our existence and connect ourselves to the world. To quote Courtney (1990), "Speech is also *the medium of our Being*. Being requires voice in order to be projected into the environment. Voice is the signifier of Being" (156).

Speech is a social act through which we communicate existing meanings with others and learn alternative meanings from them. Nobody can know everything. We talk to share ideas and our knowledge with others. Meanwhile, we receive information from them. During the communication process, we exchange information and negotiate the meanings. It links people together with a shared understanding. This understanding will become a new source for us to re-create a new meaning in thought.

### **Talk and learning**

Talk is central to our learning. School is a place for learning knowledge. Britton (1986) quotes Michael Polanyi's term, "knowledge is a process of knowing" (109) which needs to be engaged in by the learners. He says, " 'Engagement', then is a process of knowing, a process in which meaning is negotiated by constructing a version of the unfamiliar from the raw material of the familiar. In the kind of conversation we have been considering, the talk is itself an enactment of that process of engagement" (*ibid*). This engagement is a foundation for students to become active learners. The learners enjoy their learning since they are active participants who can negotiate the meanings of knowledge in the learning process. They are willing to take responsibility for learning since they have ownership of the knowledge which they can create, reshape and recode for their own use.

According to the nature of talking to learn, children need to express themselves in talk and the aim in school is to help them to become confident users of spoken language. Teachers should work alongside their students to manage language skills in order to equip them to be active learners. The space given to talk inside the classroom can affect the students' view of their role in learning. If students are encouraged actively to make sense of their experience on their own, they will internalise images of themselves as learners, and of their abilities to recognize and solve problems for themselves. However, if classroom talk is dominated by teachers, students will see themselves as only passive receivers and listeners who just wait for what their teachers want them to know. They will not think they have any significant relationship to the things they have to learn

because they are not invited to participate in the lesson by speaking with their own voices and exchanging what they already know with teachers and classmates. The traditional way of seeing education as a process of transmission of knowledge hinders the students' development as active learners. In this traditional attitude, the objectives of education are primarily to ensure students gain jobs and qualifications. Teachers see their role as knowledge transmitters and as people who always know best compared to the students. Students are expected to receive knowledge which is static and closed. Their task is to memorize the received knowledge and master standard skills for examinations; they are not expected to participate in the making of knowledge, or devise study methods for themselves. Bruner (1986) believes that, if education is seen as the transmission of knowledge, it will belittle the value of students:

One [Teacher] that looked at the process of education as a *transmission* of knowledge and values *by* those [teachers] who knew more *to* those [students] who knew less and knew it less expertly. And at another level, it also rested on some presuppositions about the young as underprovided not only epistemically but deontically as well—lacking in a sense of value propositions and a sense of the society. The young were not only underequipped with knowledge about the world, which needed to be imparted to them, but were also “lacking” in values. (123-124)

If the students find themselves lacking in values, how can they see themselves as active learners? I do not advocate that teachers should not present knowledge to students, but they should transmit in a more open and negotiable way without presuming that the knowledge taught is the only “truth”. When we recognise the importance of teaching students to be active learners, we should treat them as a participant in the teaching process. What students learn must be closely related to what they do, but “do” here includes the interpretation they put upon their actions and ideas. The talk that goes on in lessons is part of that interpretation, and thus is intimately involved in what is learnt.

As I mentioned before, we start to understand the world from the moment we are born. Before they go to school, every student has already created their own individual picture of the world according to their past history. They have their own knowledge for coping with everyday life outside school. In the opinion of Barnes (1976: 22), school for every child is a confrontation between what he “knows” already and what the school offers. It is misleading to see learning as the adding of new blocks of knowledge to an existing pile of blocks. Each student brings different experience to the class. We shall not be able to understand what they learn without considering that they make sense of new knowledge by projecting it upon what they know already. Students can only be engaged as learners when their own experiences outside school can be recognised. Space for talk in the classroom would allow for a connection between the students’ knowledge and the school’s knowledge. As Piaget and Bruner have said, knowledge is a series of systems for interpreting the world (cited in Barnes 1976: 22). Learning is the changing of this interpretative system during the interaction between the teachers’ meanings and those of the students in class. It is an active process in which learners construct new ideas or concepts based upon their current/past knowledge. This changing of interpretation will happen when we verbalize it. (*ibid* 23) Talk provides the means by which students are able to reflect upon the basis on which they are interpreting reality outside school and thereby changing and reshaping it in order to make a new meaning for growth.

Talk is a communication tool for the exchange of ideas. Since each student will bring different knowledge to the class due to their different life experiences,

talk can create opportunities for students to share their different experience and learn from their peers. I still remember a geography lesson when I studied in Form two. One of my classmates, whose father was a farmer, shared with the whole class her experience of planting rice, which I thought even our teacher had not experienced in her life. I learnt about the practice of planting rice not only from the theory taught by the teacher but also from the interesting story told by my classmate.

Talk is an effective way of helping to explore new ideas through interaction with others. When students talk about a problem or verbalize an immature thought, the speech enables them to monitor the thought and reshape it. It allows them to “think aloud” and this is quite important for the learning process. Barnes (1992) calls this groping towards meaning “exploratory talk” and I think it is a very suitable way to describe this learning process.

Exploratory talk is often hesitant and incomplete; it enables the speaker to try out ideas, to hear how they sound, to see what others make of them, to arrange information and ideas into different patterns...exploratory talk provides an important means of working on understanding. (126)

Through discussion and exploratory talk, opportunities are created for students joining together to make, do, negotiate and discover knowledge. As Britton (1986) says, “Talk would indeed be a cooperative effort yielding a communal harvest” (120). This cooperative learning process serves not only to teach children about others and how to live with them, but, as it knits groups of children together, it makes new kinds of communication and learning possible. This is the social world they must carry in their heads in order to live and act (Rosen 1973).

During the communication and joint exploration process, students learn and

make new ideas and interpretations from others and themselves. These ideas and interpretations cast new light on their existing interpretations. Learning has taken place since they assimilate and accommodate new information for generating changes in the interpretative system. They reshape and recode this information to build on what they already know in order to recreate a new version of knowledge which they can use in throughout rest of their life. As Bruner says, “through language we both receive a meaningful world from others, and at the same time *make meanings* by re-interpreting that world to our own ends” (cited in Barnes 1976: 101).

Education is for life and schools should train students as active members of the world in which they live. Helping students see their role as active learners not only helps their learning in school, but also improves the quality of their life after they leave school for the wider society of which they will be members. Since the contemporary world is full of new challenges, I do not think the traditional one-way teaching offers the best preparation for life. Nowadays, knowledge is not static and closed, but fluid and open. The facts stated in the textbooks are always open to challenge in this fast-changing world. The passive role of students as knowledge-recipients in school is not the most effective to help them face these challenges. Major aspects of the knowledge they learn today may not be useful in future. What is needed is training to develop the ability to *learn to learn* so as to become lifelong learners who can adapt to any new changes in their lives. This ability can be acquired if teachers engage their students to negotiate the meaning of what they teach. As Wells (1985) states:

If we want the children of today grow up with the confidence and competence to meet the demands for critical, adaptive and creative thinking that the years ahead will certainly make of the society to which we all belong, it is essential that we

should encourage these qualities from the very beginning. Let me conclude, therefore, by suggesting that... the most effective talking and learning will take place when adult and child engage together collaboratively in the *negotiation of meaning*. (25)

What is more, the increasing flood of information and rapid technological development give us multiple values and causes uncertainties. Every day, we are subject to a variety of values through mass media in a pluralistic society. If students are not equipped with the skill to participate actively in society, they will become followers, and consumers who cannot respond to the never-ending new challenges. As Bruner (1986) says, everyone in society is a cultural co-creator. But how can we be actively involved in this culture-creating process if our voice becomes smaller in the contemporary world? I agree with what Bruner (*ibid*) says, that it is one of the responsibilities of education. The language of education is the language of creating culture, not of knowledge consuming or knowledge acquisition alone. Culture is, he says, constantly in a process of being recreated as it is interpreted and renegotiated by members in society; it is a forum for negotiating and re-negotiating meaning. In his words,

Education is (or should be) one of the principal forums for performing this function—though it is often timid in doing so. It is the forum aspect of a culture that gives its participants a role in constantly making and remaking the culture—an *active* role as participants rather than as performing spectators who play out their canonical roles according to rule when the appropriate cues occur (*ibid* 123).

If education is to prepare the young for life as it is lived, it should also partake of the spirit of a forum, of negotiation, of the recreating of meaning. Encouraging talk in the students' learning process might help them become active participants in the culture. It can equip the next generation to join in our society as members, not followers, who help society and the world in moving forward. Bruner accentuates this importance of language in education, something to which I think every teacher should pay attention:

If he [student] fails to develop any sense of what I shall call reflective intervention in the knowledge he encounters, the young person will be operating continually from the outside in—knowledge will control and guide him. If he [student] succeeds in developing such a sense, he [student] will control and select knowledge as needed. If he [student] develops a sense of self that is premised on his ability to penetrate knowledge for his own uses, and if he [student] can share and negotiate the result of his penetrations, then he [student] becomes a member of the culture-creating community (132).

### **Call for a dialogic classroom**

The nature of “talking to learn” is fundamental for teaching students to learn how to learn. Although it is not a new notion for education, this philosophy is always neglected or forgotten by teachers. The current classroom is still lacking the space for students’ voices. Students will only see their role as active learners when they are invited actively to participate in the learning process. I think, this invitation to participate will happen best in a *dialogic classroom*. “Dialogue is a moment when humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make it and remake it” (Shor and Friere, cited in O’Neill 1989). The *dialogic classroom* is a place that encourages dialogue between not only teacher and students but also among students themselves.

Today there is a growing conviction that ‘most learning occurs not as a private, interior experience, but as an interactive one, socially shaped. Knowledge is less a personal acquisition than an inter-personal production: relational, collaborative and more specially a matter of exchange (cited in Neelands 1992: 11).

The interaction and collaboration among members in the classroom will lead to individual achievement. In contrast to the traditional classroom, there are two main features in a dialogic classroom:

a. Teacher-student relationship

Teaching and learning is a collaborative activity between teachers and students. Teachers are not the dominant storytellers in a dialogic classroom.

They are the facilitators, learning partners, resource persons and consultants

of their students. During the teaching process, teachers not only give information to their students but they also invite students to extend their world of wonder through the use of thought, reflection, elaboration and fantasy. They teach not just by informing them but also by negotiating the world of wonder and possibility. The speaking entitlement for each person in the classroom is relatively equivalent. Students are treated as participants who can freely express their opinion and share what they know with other members.

b. Perception of knowledge

Not only is school knowledge valued in the classroom but also the knowledge brought with the students from their life outside school. Good teachers recognize that the knowledge their students bring is the primary entry point to connect school knowledge to them and to lead them to further understanding. Moreover, knowledge is not unchangeable. The classroom is a laboratory where the materials chosen by teachers are amenable to imaginative transformation and are presented in a manner that invites negotiation and speculation. The student becomes a party to the negotiatory process in which facts are created and interpreted. He becomes at once an agent for making knowledge as well as a recipient of knowledge transmission. Teachers encourage exploratory talk not simply as a means for discussing the content of what is presented but also for considering the possible stances one may take toward it. Teachers and students join together sharing their experiences in the exploration process.

In the *dialogic classroom*, students are provided space to *learn to speak*

which equips them as independent learners for the rest of their lives. But how can teachers create a *quality* dialogic classroom? To establish dialogue which is truly creative and reflective in the classroom, we must consider the context and settings in which this dialogue is embodied. During the year of studying applied drama, I have come to believe that drama, as a powerful learning medium, has a great potential to create a quality dialogic classroom. According to Wagner (1988), “a long history of theory and claims supports the positive effect of drama on oral language and literacy development (Barnes 1986; Britton 1970; Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, and Rosen 1975; Creber 1965; Heathcote 1981; Moffett and Wagner 1983)”. Dialogue is at the heart of every dramatic encounter. The dramatic contexts can give students the means to take control of their own thinking and language.

Drama can facilitate a wide variety of language uses in contexts that require full participation within an affective/cognitive frame, promoting types of talk important in encouraging deep-level thought processes, such as expatiation, negotiation, clarification, explanation, persuasion and prediction (Booth 1994: 91).

This reinforces my belief that teaching and learning through drama may help to improve student talking and learning in a dialogic classroom. Based on this belief, in the next chapter, I will further elaborate how learning in a dramatic context can facilitate students' learning.

## *Chapter Two*

### *Learning to Learn through Drama*

Speech is a vivid medium to connect ourselves to others. It is a tool for making, learning and sharing meaning. It is also one of the fundamental enabling devices we all acquire in the course of our study and careers. We cannot work without efficiently using our language. As I discussed in last chapter, school is a place which provides opportunities for students to learn how to speak. Heathcote (1980) refers to M.A.K. Halliday who talks about the crucial function of language to successful learning:

In order to be taught successfully, it is necessary to know how to use language to learn; and also how to use language to participate 'as an individual' in the learning situation. (14)

Although many educators recognise the importance of students' voices in the classroom, much classroom talk is still based on static facts which are concrete and specific. The development of language relies on the use of language within meaningful contexts. The experiential approach of language learning has been acknowledged in literacy development for a long time. Neelands (1992: 16) quotes Margaret Donaldson to show how people learn language better if they talk in context rather than out of context:

It is when we are dealing with people and things in the context of fairly immediate goals and intentions and familiar patterns of events that we feel most at home. And when we are asked to reason about these things, even verbally and at some remove from them, we can often do it well.

In his book (1992), Neelands comments,

In most cases the focus for the development of talk has been through small-group exploratory and problem-solving talk, or talk in the presentation mode, or spectator/observer talk, recalling and recoding experiences through anecdotes. There has not often been an explicit attempt to develop a greater variety of talk experiences through *the creation of 'real life' talk contexts in which the student operates in action as a 'live' participant.* (17)

Compared with the prevalent mode of classroom teaching, drama, as an alternative pedagogy, in its very nature allows students to work in ‘real life’ conversational contexts. Connie and Harold Rosen (1975) write about language growth in a dramatic “being there” experience,

And as the drama deepened, the language reflected the growing significance of the experience as seen in a re-orientation within the confines of the dramatic action, a greater power to master the currents involved, an increase in the linguistic ability to direct, rather than be directed by, the experience.

As these children matured in their drama, the language became more obviously the product of a *developed* experience. In drama it is the significance of what is happening which moves a child to individual expression, and the moment of germination would seem to be that time when the basic experience of being there is changed into an experiencing mind. (212)

According to Vygotsky’s notion about the relationship between thought and language quoted in the last chapter, the conversational dialogue is the major means of developing thought and language. Heathcote (1980) asserts drama, as a powerful learning medium, has a potential to achieve this development:

It is within this potential, namely the power in dialogue to develop thought and language, that lie the crucial learning values of dramatic work. Conversation, interactional dialogues, stimulated by the need for individuals to collaborate in meaningful tasks and experiences, can encourage higher level thinking and language development (14).

At the end of chapter one, I was bold enough to call for a dialogic classroom in order to teach students how to be active learners with the ability to meet the challenges ahead of them. A dialogic classroom is a place where students can participate actively in the constructing the process of knowledge through a variety of talk experiences. Drama in its roots is a means of communication through language and action. Although not all dramatic work is necessarily directly connected with language (e.g. mime, movement), speech is still a vivid medium of expression in most classroom drama. Dialogue in drama is embedded in a variety of fictional, but “authentic”, contexts. Students are the protagonists of

drama. They are participants and also observers. They are performers and also spectators. Their talk interweaves into the moment of being in role, with employing feelings and imagination, as well as the moment out of role, being themselves, working with others. They not only learn how to use language in different contexts, more importantly, they can learn the connection between the contexts they encounter and their choices of utterance. Drama is a collective activity. Through the dialogic interaction, it changes their understanding. Drama's way of learning allows for the experience gained in the imaginary world to be transferred to real life. This transference happens both subjectively and objectively, personally and socially. Students share understanding and create meaning with each other and eventually take it for their own use after a series of negotiations with others and themselves. Students in drama are invited to question, explore and inquire into what they are learning. Words help them to highlight the awareness of significant learning moments, leading students from the unknown to the known. These are the crucial skills for an active learner. Inasmuch as the above are features of drama in education, I am confident to suggest that drama is the most effective pedagogy to create a dialogic classroom.

During my course, I experienced the power of drama inside the "garden of stories". In the following, I will elucidate how drama helps students' learning to, and through, talk as well as demonstrate my observations and participations in this year. Although I cite some examples from theatre-in-education programmes, I think it is legitimate to use these experiences since the fundamental learning theory is the same. By engaging students in a fictional world as a basis for learning, through developing metaphoric thinking and involving them in doing a

variety of tasks, drama leads them into an existential process of constructivist learning. Furthermore, techniques such as the “compound stimulus”, “hot-seating” and “still image” used in theatre-in-education and drama-in-education are similar although they are working in different structures and facilitated by different groups of people (artists and teachers). I contend, therefore, that the examples of theatre-in-education programmes are valid.

Since I argued earlier that the teacher-student relationship is a crucial factor in a dialogic classroom, in this chapter I will try to explore the role of teachers so as to explore further the required features of a dialogic classroom. My aim is to use all these discussions to extend our knowledge of how drama-in-education may help students learn how to learn, a process which will benefit the rest of their lives.

### **Learning to/through talk in Drama**

#### 1. Drama gives legitimacy to talk

“Narrative, conceived as a primary act of mind, has long been held to play a central role in making experience meaningful” (Holt, cited in Kear 2000). Narrative is a central function of the human mind giving us a framework for imposing order on what would otherwise be random events. It is the most familiar form of human social communication. There has probably never been a human society in which people did not tell stories. Humans are storytelling organisms who individually and socially lead storied lives. Narrative is the basis of many of the activities that teachers plan for their students to carry out in school. Teachers transmit knowledge to students by reading and telling stories to them everyday.

The stories teachers tell are mainly based on information from textbooks and the teachers' personal interpretation. The materials students receive are always non-negotiable. Students are not always allowed to tell stories. Although sometimes they are allowed discussion in the classroom, their talk is usually bounded by these fixed materials and "one-version interpretation". This kind of use of classroom narrative is ineffective. It distorts our natural use of narrative for learning. Wells (1986) has professed the potential of contextualizing all learning within stories, which teachers and students should share:

Constructing stories in the mind—or storying, as it has been called—is one of the most fundamental means of making meaning; as such it is an activity that pervades all aspects of learning. When storying becomes overt and is given expression in words, the resulting stories are one of the most effective ways of making one's own interpretation of events and ideas available to others. Through the exchange of stories, teachers and students can share their understandings of a topic and bring their mental models of the world into closer alignment. (194)

This closer alignment is an important relationship between teachers and students when they work in drama. Story is an indispensable element in drama which actively engages students' learning. It is the major learning focus. The plot is changeable. Students are invited and highly motivated to talk about the stories in order to explore their own versions and go beyond their original meanings. The story-sharing process is interactive. Teachers and students use dramatic role-playing to help them to imagine being someone else in an imagined experience, drama makes it possible for students to learn to talk within a potentially infinite story context. Language growth will be reinforced in doing drama; students are empowered to be effective and confident speakers. Drama gives students legitimacy to talk.

## 2. Drama gives contexts for talk

Drama is a unique learning medium which gives learners purposes to talk in two contexts, i.e. real context and fictional context. The real context relates to the real pattern of relationships and situations in which the students are involved. The fictional context is created through an imagined situation and with imagined characters. Students travel between these two contexts having many opportunities for language learning. On the one hand, working in the real context, students have to do the *real* tasks—discussing, planning, explaining, justifying, persuading, instructing, sharing and organizing out of role. They have to work co-operatively with other members and deal with different opinions and ideas suggested by them. On the other hand, students are interacting and behaving symbolically within a convention which temporarily supersedes the real context. In role, students talk inside the dramatic context that comes out of the experience of interacting in the context, and they talk with other role-players, and this is clearly relevant to relationships and needs in the real context of the classroom. The two contexts of these dialogues inform each other. Dramas created in the fictional context are not merely simulations of the real thing. They are formed and crafted representations of the real thing. Despite its immediacy and concreteness, drama sets out to make a thought-provoking representation of reality; it does not seek to duplicate or be a kind of ‘virtual reality’. As Neelands (1992) says,

The dual experiencing of the real world and the imagined world of the drama provides the opportunity for the teacher to select a dramatic context which serves both to highlight a particular use of talk and which also has the opportunity to respond to students’ other needs in the real world. A dramatic context which will yield important new learning about language and meanings. (33)

### 3. Drama's talk is holistic

Involvement in drama not only allows students to talk about story, but also allows them to enact the story. Dialogues are parallel to actions. Richard Courtney (1980: 35) believes that “total” dramatic expression is holistic, it contains a balance of both rational and emotional elements which lead to a good language development. Conventionally, speech generated merely relates to the rational context. It is inadequate to achieve quality language growth. The medium we use when we act in drama is the total Self: body, gesture, voice. According to Courtney, “Thought is total. It is intuitive and rational, affective and cognitive, unconscious and conscious. Expression represents thought. A medium cannot *be* the thought although it can *represent* it” (*ibid* 37). Expressions differ in degrees of representation. The initial expression is richer and less discriminating than more sophisticated media like speech. Speech, as an advanced expression, is more flexible and the initial expression can incorporate into it and enrich it. That means we can use different initial expressions to express the words. Acts in one medium provide feedback which will affect subsequent imaginings in whatever form they may take. “Initial expression in visual media will later affect expression in verbal form” (*ibid* 37). Courtney sums up his notion,

Good language teaching, therefore, is built upon prior learning. Learning to write follows upon both learning to see and speak. And learning to see and speak is built upon learning to act dramatically. [...] Spontaneous dramatic action is the very foundation of language learning. (38)

### 4. Drama enriches quality of talk

Drama takes into account the emotional experience in the learning process. It is different from most mainstream educational methods which merely emphasize the cognitive at the expense of the affective. In drama, language

growth is based on the engagement of students. Once students are hooked into story, they will gain a variety of talk experience through the creation of “real life” contexts. Managing mood is a key element of the negotiation of drama. The general mood in drama stimulates the feeling of students. The students’ feeling may well be channelled into a drama and it continually supports them to work in it. Students not only learn the feeling of the role they play, but, at the same time, they learn about their own individual feeling through the process. The experience in drama triggers the participants’ feeling. The feeling will feed back to thought. Language is inseparable to thought. The feeling enriches the meaning creating from drama. In the meantime, the quality of language will be improved through the expression in many different “authentic” contexts. The most powerful speech always delivers deeper feeling. We concentrate on talk that touches our feeling whereas it is easy to make us fall asleep when the speaker is emotionless. Feeling provokes people’s interest to engage in work. While we feel, we will start to think. The enriched thought will feed back into our language and improve its quality. Our group did a theatre-in-education project<sup>1</sup> in Exwick Middle School with a class of eleven-year old students. Throughout the project, we explored the life problems of a girl called Laura who ran away from home. Through drama, they had the chance to put themselves into the girl’s shoes and feel something of what she felt. Drama froze the significant moments in Laura’s life and let the students look closer at her current problems and tried to find some solutions or easing of the problems. Laura’s story penetrated into their heads. The deeper feeling changed their understanding and this projected itself into their language. This can be shown by their reflective

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<sup>1</sup> The project was held from October 2001 to February 2002, which was part of the MA course work.

and caring discourse in the post-project interview.

Student 1: “I learnt not to bully people who have problems and if I bully someone now I think about what I did.”

Student 2: “I learnt not to bully because they might be having trouble at home and it hurts people’s feelings.”

Student 3: “I learnt not to bully people because I have learnt what you would feel like.”

Student 4: “I also think I have learnt not to bully people because of the way they look.”

Student 5: “I learnt how I would feel if I was in Laura’s position and how to help people like Laura who I might know.”

This kind of self-reflective discourse is not easily heard in the traditional one-way transmission teaching since teachers state the principle of not bullying people without involving the students’ active participation. Students never have a chance to experience it and share it in their own words. Emotional experience will lead students to have further understanding and take it as a part of their knowledge. James Britton (1986) tells us about the relationship between our knowledge and feeling,

Our knowledge of the world is inextricably bound up with the way *we feel* about the world, about people and things and events and ourselves. Our ways of feeling, taken overall, show a persistent patterning which constitutes our value system. It is our values that make us the sort of people we are, and it is on this basis of shared values that we establish our most intimate network of relationships with other people. (105-106)

Drama’s way of learning emphasizes the importance of the affective component.

The emotional experience enriches students’ thoughts. Thoughts reflect on their language and this guides their actions.

##### 5. Drama’s talk as being others

Drama helps us not only to use language but also to experience our use of

language in different contexts. The imaginary world created in drama allows students to experience being someone else. They step out of their real life temporarily to try out others' lives without the normal consequences. Neelands (1992) remarks, "Drama offers the possibility of building and working in a variety of different roles, situations, places, each of which provides new and authentic language demands within a secure environment"(11). Using the terminology of Heathcote (Johnson and O'Neill 1980), she calls this secure environment as a "no penalty area":

That is, participants will be able to test out their ideas, try them over again, and generally examine them, without necessarily having to fulfil, in actual life situations, the promises they have tried out in the depicted one. (128)

The roles give students a veil to explore different languages in an "as-if" situation. It protects them to express their ideas and thoughts freely or "crazily" without having to worry about being wrong. Within the safe environment, students are more willing to try new ideas and shift to new ways of speaking which are different from their original speaking style. Booth (1994) describes this shifting process clearly,

In drama, the children are allowed to talk themselves into believing in the fiction, to hear their ideas bounced back, to reframe and refocus their own information and attitude, to reorganize the need for communicating what they believe to those who believe differently, to actually hear language at work. Their words sweep them into thought, and as they recognize the truth of what they are saying, that very language is transformed into new patterns. (104)

I played a woman who was the victim in a domestic violence case in one of my drama-in-education lessons<sup>2</sup> during my course. At the beginning, I tried to find an image of that kind of woman in my mind. When I was in role, I behaved shyly and acted as though I was ashamed of my weakness. I imagined "my" tormented life. Although I had put myself into her terrible situation, I felt safe because I clearly knew that I could return to my own life after finishing the scene.

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<sup>2</sup> The drama in education lesson was held on 17 October 2001.

During the improvisation process, my language was changed. I spoke with a small voice in order to show my lack of confidence. I imitated the speaking style of a middle-age woman with low self-esteem and employed the words she would have used, according to my experience. In the scene, I interacted with my partner who played a social worker. I remember she tried very hard to talk with me since she had lost my trust in the previous scene. She wanted to help me and to discover my needs. In the entire scene, she tried to find a proper way to talk to me without hurting me. To a certain extent, we negotiated with each other with spontaneous responses and I think these fostered our language development. I would not have had a chance to speak in such a way in my real life. In the process of dramatic improvisation, I learnt the deeper meaning of the context-utterance relationship. I had to think of the content and the way to express it and I had to respond to my partner in order to realize the fuller implications of the situation. I learnt how to use my language as well as about human relationships. As Heathcote (1980) asserts:

One of the most valuable uses of dramatic mode is the way it can provide context and purpose for talk, because talk arises out of the nature of situations. Each situation has its own frame, which can demand shifts of style in delivery, purpose of the language, whether public (highly selective) or private (exploratory), degree of precision, and selection of specialised vocabulary. All the variety and restrictions arise from meaningful productive *tension*, for the situations are human and must be struggled through. (22)

Taking a role can give you strength to speak. Working in drama, students learn to speak in a wide diversity of styles and this enriches their understanding of utterance and context. Nevertheless, not all roles have power to speak. Like real life situations, some people in society have little voice because of their status or personality. Using a role in drama has another function which is to empower students to speak. While students are given a role with high status or in a

powerful position, they will have more confidence to speak. One of the most typical examples is Dorothy Heathcote's mantle of the expert system. Students enter the roles of people who run an enterprise and through a series of incremental tasks learn skills and understanding which build their expertise.

They grow into their roles in a way that goes far beyond the functional as they experience the enlargement of both identity and capacity within the tasks they undertake and the challenges they encounter. (O'Neill in Heathcote and Bolton 1995: viii)

I attended a literacy project<sup>3</sup> in which the facilitators used the Mantle of the Expert system for a group of Year 7 students in July this year. During the process, the students were supported through teacher questioning and were given carefully prepared materials and contexts to carry out curriculum tasks from the perspective of planners within a fictional environment. In the drama, students were planners who had to design a school for blind people. Playing the role of experts, they interviewed the blind people, discussed the ideas and problems in groups and presented their budget and plans to the representative of the local council (teacher-in-role). The role made them feel they were important in the planning process. It gave them power to express all their thoughts. The following comments provided by the facilitators clearly show how students liked to be in role and how their teacher thought this drama brought out the students' strengths:

Student's voice:

"I surprised myself I came every day. At first I thought it would be boring and I don't usually hang around with these people and I didn't want to miss P.E. my favorite lesson but I'm glad I did it now. I thought *it was good how we could have a say in things* (my italics)—we had choices. I thought it was good and kind if we could do something like that for the

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<sup>3</sup> The project was intended for a group of 30 year 7 students who are below level 4 in English. It was held in Cradley High School in Birmingham from 15 to 20 July. The facilitators were Iona Towler-Evans and Claire Armstrong Mills.

blind children and the cemetery as if it was real.”

Teacher’s voice:

“The activities were both engaging and stretching for all the pupils and certainly brought out their strengths. Pupils, who had previously been reticent in contributing towards classroom discussions, within their normal mixed-ability groups, started to gain confidence and take leading roles.”

## 6. Drama as inquiry

Paulo Friere makes it clear that a true dialogue is an inquiry (cited in O’Neill 1989: 151), a refusal to accept the given which makes the process of dialogue and inquiry an emancipatory one. The dramatic process operates in a similar way.

Drama is more than a method of stimulating environments for talk, it also has its power as an immediate and accessible symbolic form which young people can use together to represent, try out, interrogate and express key areas of human experience. The medium for doing so is talk. (Neelands, 1992: 27)

Drama provides students with a space to step back from the situation in order to see it more clearly and to judge it. Within the fictional world, everything is possible. I saw a theatre-in-education programme<sup>4</sup> run by the Kaleidoscope Theatre Company in Exeter Junior School. Two artists told the story of Henry VIII which is included in the syllabus of the National History Curriculum. In between the scenes, they jumped in and out the roles in order to engage the students in discussion of the issues raised. There was one scene in which Henry VIII wanted to divorce his queen, Catherine, and marry Anne. He sought advice from the Privy Councillors. The students were in role as the councillors and talked with the King. The following are the extracts from the students’ responses:

Student 1: Your majesty, Catherine has been married to you for twenty years, you have to be loyal to her.

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<sup>4</sup> This was a one-off programme held on 12 December 2001 at Exeter Junior School.

Student 2: Your majesty, you cannot choose Anne since she is a wench.  
She always plays games and then losses all of your money.

Student 3: Your majesty, according to the Bible, you are not supposed to marry two women.

Student 4: Your majesty, you have to choose Anne since she is younger and will give you an heir to the throne.

Student 5: Your majesty, if you divorced Catherine, you would anger her family in Spain which could lead to a European war.

Student 6: Your majesty, you cannot divorce Catherine since she will feel mistreated.

Student 7: Your majesty, if Anne cannot produce a son, then you will need to stick with Mary [his only daughter from that marriage] anyway. You divorce and separate Mary from her mother just to get nothing from another girl.

Within the dramatic framework, students altered their status, engaged in inquiry and explored alternatives in a historical event. Although the students knew clearly that they could not change the fact that Henry VIII divorced Catherine eventually, they still actively participated in giving their opinion to the King. Drama in its nature has the power to freeze the historical time to “now and then” moment. It allowed students to converse with the King directly. I believe that the students had more motivation in the King-Councillors conversation than in a normal teacher-students discussion. The objective of dialogic interaction is not for changing the facts, but more importantly, for the students to reconsider the facts. This rethinking process allowed them to be more than just passive receivers of knowledge. They became active inquirers. Joining in the inquiry through dramatic activity, the students learnt to reflect on their own perception both inside and outside the dramatic context.

John Somers (2002) put the inquiry function of drama forward in support of a model of *drama making as research* in his opening address at the Researching Drama and Theatre in Education Conference. He mentioned that the process the participants go through in most drama making processes is similar to all the characteristics of a research process. His notion extends the reference of the inquiry nature in drama. In the inquiry process, students would employ exploratory talk to think aloud. Now, I would like to describe one activity<sup>5</sup> in my drama-in-education lesson briefly to demonstrate the “research process” by using Somers’s idea:

I. Decision about area of research

According to the two documents John gave us, in my group, we assumed the story was about a family problem.

(Form of talk: Group discussion out of role in a real context.)

II. What is already known?

The basic information came from the two documents:

a) *A letter from a solicitor to Ms Richards*

The solicitor wrote the letter on behalf of his client, Mr T Sullivan, to urge his ex-wife (Ms Richards) not to employ any technique to grant her ex-husband to access his daughter.

b) *A letter to Dad from his daughter, Trudy*

Trudy wrote to tell her dad that her mom had burned her gift from him. And she told him not to meet her again at school since she was afraid her mom would discover it.

(Form of talk: Group discussion out of role in a real context.)

III. Generation of a hypothesis

Although we did not find the clear relationship between the two documents, we assumed it was about the same group of people. We supposed that the Dad was Mr T Sullivan and Ms Richards was his ex-wife. In my group, we tried to interpret the information based on our understanding and came up with the following three hypotheses:

a) Mr Sullivan loved his daughter very much and was worried about

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<sup>5</sup> The drama in education lesson was held on 17 November 2001.

her safety;

- b) Ms Richards hated her ex-husband very much and might develop a mental illness after their divorce;
- c) Trudy loves both her mother and father and did not know what to do.

(Form of talk: Group discussion out of role in a real context.)

#### IV. Testing of the hypothesis in experimental conditions

Although we had the hypotheses, we still did not know what had happened and would happen in their lives. We discussed the places (restaurant, solicitor's office and Trudy's home) for the characters to meet each other and started to do improvisation.

(Forms of talk: Group discussion out of role in a real context and improvised talk in dramatic context.)

#### V. Collection of data

In the process of exploration through improvisation, we were storing and making sense of ideas generated by the work. During this process, we tried out different speaking styles and attitudes for each role. For example, when Trudy's parents met each other in a restaurant, we first had them talk in a calm atmosphere. Then we created a tense conversation between them.

(Form of talk: Improvised talk in dramatic context.)

#### VI. Analysis of data

When we finished the explorative phase, we selected the significant scenes for our rehearsal.

- a) Trudy's parents' conversation with each other in the restaurant.
- b) Mr Sullivan seeking advice from the solicitor at his office.
- c) Ms Richards trying to talk with her daughter at home.

(Form of talk: Group discussion out of role in a real context.)

#### VII. Writing of research report

This was our rehearsal process. After we selected the scenes we were going to present in the last phase, we tried to shape and polish the scenes and put them into order.

(Forms of talk: Group discussion out of role in a real context and improvised talk in dramatic context.)

#### VIII. Communication of that report to fellow researchers

When every group in the class finished their rehearsal for the drama, we shared our "findings" about the story with each other. After each presentation,

the whole group gave feedback and discussed the issues with the presenting group.

(Forms of talk: Public talk in role and discussion with whole group out of role after presentation.)

It was impossible not to be involved in the discussion during the above activity. However, drama is not just a talking activity. It is, by its very nature, an inquiry. In drama, students' talk is interrogative, negotiative, creative and imaginative. Students are required actively to learn through talk in a varied context within the inquiry framework.

#### 7. Drama's talk helps cognitive growth

Drama is not merely an activity which helps students learn to talk. The dialogue in drama is much more than the conversational exchange of ideas. It can lead students to cognitive growth and improve their intelligence. Richard Courtney (1990) in his book gives strong theoretical support to the relationship between drama and intelligence. He specially writes about *drama and dialogue* in one of his chapters. He stresses that dramatic actions have a dialogic orientation. That is, the structures and dynamics of human dialogue are a model for the way in which one player relates with other players and performs with them in dramatic events and contexts. He believes that the purpose of dialogue is cognitive. The protagonist tacitly intends to improve his intelligence. It is the result of "cognitive interaction".

Dramatic acts and speech generate two related dynamics: *responding* and *understanding*. Responding is a feeling dynamic in me, a cognitive reaction ("disturbance") generating sensation, awareness, and concentration. In responding to an external stimulus (for example, another's utterance or act), the protagonist meets with the subjective belief system of the listener, projected into the mutual action or dialogue. The listener's attention focuses on the protagonist, and some sort of accommodation between their two belief systems is called for. An internal stimulus (for example, an imaging) triggers feeling

entirely within the protagonist...(156-157)

Understanding arises from response. It cannot exist without response. [...] By striving to understand, the protagonist creates a series of complex interrelationships with the utterance or act of the second protagonist (157).

...understanding comes from response. We assimilate the total utterance of dramatic event, and project a response into a new conceptual system. Then we have improved the potential of our intelligence. (158)

Brain Edmiston (1994) examines Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of dialogue in his paper and judges them to be consonant with Courtney's notion. Bakhtin states that discourse is "language in its concrete living totality". Edmiston further explains,

Our discourse, our ideologies and dialogue are all interrelated. Others' discourse suggests their ideologies to us and our ideologies generate our discourse; new discourse and new understandings about ideologies are generated as we interact in dialogue. (26)

Our ideologies are not fixed; they can be changed during the dialogic interaction. A dialogic interaction is a struggle to create meaning which is central to the way we think, understand, read, interact, form beliefs, acquire ideologies, and thus, for Bakhtin, "author" meaning. Dialogic interaction can occur in drama. As we engage in dialogue we actively re-form and "author" our ideologies as we encounter and react to different positions, and form our new opinion on the topic of concern. Additionally, Edmiston proffers the concept of internalising dialogue. He insists that if we want students to change their understandings then internalised dialogues must occur.

Dialogue not only requires us to listen actively to others' ideas, but also to accept confusion in our own ideas, to amend or let go of previous patterns of thought, to acknowledge that other points of view are valid and thus engage in a productive struggle to create and embrace new ways of looking at the world. (27)

In dialogue we can become more aware of patterns in our thinking and our attitudes towards issues. We may also become aware of viewpoints and opinions which we may regard as somehow natural or obvious; we may become more

aware of the reality that those views, like all others, are actually constructed. Dialogue makes you understand both yourself and others more.

Drama is the most effective way to create a dialogic classroom. In its very essence, it gives you a reason, a context and a purpose for talk. The holistic expression and the emphasis on emotional experience can enrich the quality of talk. Playing a role not only gives students a chance to diversify their language ability but it also empowers them to speak. Drama is an activity of inquiry; it can engage students in an active learning process and improve their intelligence. After this exploration of the potential of drama to create a dialogic classroom, I would now like to discuss the roles of teachers in this kind of classroom.

### **The role of teacher in drama**

As I mentioned in the last chapter, the teacher-student relationship is one of the key factors of a successful dialogic classroom. According to Friere (cited in O'Neill 1989), dialogue is “the sealing together of the teacher and the students in the joint act of knowing and reknowing the object of study.” This “joint act” will only happen if teachers change from seeing themselves as knowledge transmitters to being willing to treat their students as participants and recognise their voices in the classroom. Wells (1986) states that the role of the adult is to help children learn to/through talk and I think that this can also apply to a healthy teacher-student relationship:

In learning through talk—as in learning to talk—children [students] are active constructors of their own knowledge. What they need is evidence, guidance, and support. Parents [Teachers] who treat their children [students] as equal partners in conversation, following their lead and negotiating meanings and purposes, are not only helping their children [students] to talk, they are also enabling them to discover how to learn *through* talk. (65)

If the main objective of education is to teach students to learn how to learn, then teachers have an obligation to create a dialogically equal environment to guide and support students in taking responsibility for the construction of their knowledge. Drama-in-education offers teachers the opportunity to negotiate and explore the content of their work with their students and this inevitably alters the traditional relationship between teacher and students. In order to make educational drama effective, teachers should be more flexible. O'Neill (1989) mentions in her paper:

If teachers want to engage in genuine dialogue with their students they must be prepared for responses which are unpredictable, challenging, and transformative. The task for the teacher is to set up concrete situations out of the 'forms of the curriculum' which invite the engaged, yet critical actions of the students. (151-152)

She believes that good teachers should have the same functions as an artist:

The teacher/artist requires flexibility, ingenuity, personal creativity, and the ability to exploit opportunities as they occur. To carry out the kind of teaching which is transformative and dialogic, the teacher as artist will also need curiosity, the ability to focus critical reflection, the strength to cope with uneasiness, uncertainty, and unpredictability, and considerable tolerance of ambiguity. (154)

While teachers can take risks to explore the possibilities of accepted knowledge, they can encourage students to do the same in order to widen those students' horizons. The power of drama's way of learning comes from allowing students to work in a fictional context. It requires teachers to put students in an "as if" mental-set so that they can engage in this special context. To gain the best effect from doing drama, teachers cannot just sit aside and let the students work on their own by giving them topics and tasks. Teachers working in drama play a variety of roles. Sometimes they work with students in their real role as teachers, to provide information, explain instructions and lead discussion; sometimes they will enter into the improvisation by playing different roles and interacting with the young people involved. In the words of Bolton (1986), "Teacher-status is then

ambiguous” (244). Teacher-in-role is a crucial technique in drama-in-education that cannot be experienced by any other means of teaching. Working in role provides a very different medium for teaching about talk. The teacher is able to introduce many new language possibilities through modelling and demonstrating register, tone and purpose through the interactions with their students in drama. Most importantly, when teachers in role become “other” than teachers, the normal dynamics and relationships of the classroom are suspended to let the students gain power in controlling their learning process. Dorothy Heathcote sees “this loosening of the teacher’s grip as a process of handing over power to the children [students]” (Bolton, 1986: 244). The teacher-in-role does not merely elicit responses from students, but can challenge, model, support, and exploit tensions in order to lead them beyond what they already know. Booth (1994) states a very detailed description of the functions of teachers in role:

I want to challenge superficial responses, press for the elaboration and extension of inadequate contributions, but without rejecting the speakers themselves. I want to seek further information from the class without burdening them with my own knowledge. I must find structures to interest and motivate the group, encouraging them to explore rather than demonstrate what they already know. I need to use various modes of teaching to pace the works so that feelings and thoughts are encouraged to develop, carefully observing which attitudes and perceptions should be focused upon, and which are detrimental. (77-78)

Drama-in-education is a student-centred teaching method. Teachers have to alter their traditional authoritative role in the classroom, share their power with students by inviting them to join in the act of knowing. A good use of drama and teaching-in-role can transform the classroom into a place where something happens, where there is authentic dialogue between teacher and students.

### **Become an active learner**

The topic of this chapter is “learning to learn through drama”. “Learning to

learn” is a necessary shall for students to become active learners. After the discussion above, I have confidence to put forward my argument in support of the idea that drama, as a powerful learning medium, may be beneficial for the acquisition of this skill.

According to Bruner’s constructivist theory, “learning is an active process in which learners construct new ideas or concepts based upon their current/past knowledge” (<http://tip.psychology.org/bruner.html>). An active learner should have the ability to select and transform information, construct hypotheses, and make decisions. Learning through drama can provide an active learning environment for this training. Drama provides different role situations compared to the traditional classroom setting.

Successful drama does not stem from silent obedience to a teacher’s authority and status... Drama requires forms of negotiation that allow for some bargaining between the teacher and the group, as to the nature and content of the work. (Neelands 1984: 27).

Students have a voice in the shaping of their learning and understanding within drama. They can also regulate their action and make their own choices. Drama has an open climate and this promotes a constructive learning capacity which I am going to elaborate on this in the following way:

#### I. The Construction of new ideas or concepts based upon students’ knowledge

To value students’ existing knowledge is very essential. As I mentioned in the last chapter, due to their background every student has already acquired different kinds and levels of knowledge before they go to school. Students’ motivation to learn will increase when they can see their own knowledge is valid. Dialogue, in the dramatic context, unavoidably takes students’ personal experiences into account. O’Neill (1989: 152) remarks, “Drama is one of the few areas of the curriculum which is built on these [students’] dreams and voices. It works on the premise that the material which

students themselves bring to the work is valid. Indeed drama could not operate without including this kind of material”.

## II. Learning to select and transform information

In the previous part, I discussed the inquiry nature of drama, in which students have to select and analyse “data” collected in the exploration process. In this process, they learn to negotiate meaning with others as well as to express their own opinion. In order to communicate and tell the others what they are thinking during the selection period, they have to think first about what they want. That is what I stated before about the internal dialogue. They learn about their will in order to select and transform information when they work in drama. These kinds of negotiation and questioning skills are very important qualities of active learners.

## III. Learning to construct hypotheses

Learning is something *coming to know* which you did not know before. Working in drama is like working in a laboratory. It freezes the time for students to focus on a significant moment. It gives them “freedom to experiment without the burden of future repercussions” (Heathcote in Johnson and O’Neill 1984: 104). Drama opens for endless solutions and possibilities. Students need to find a suitable way to work on the issues by constructing hypotheses before any exploration.

## IV. Learning to make decisions

After the selection and exploration, students have to make a decision on what they are going to present and share with others. Since there is no absolute right or wrong answer in drama, the decision-making process is free from the others’ intervention. Students have the strength to make their own choice and also learn to take responsibility for it.

In addition, I would like to highlight one of the fundamental features of drama’s way of learning that I think it is the most important for learning to be an active learner. That is the reflective process. The main aim of drama in

education is to bring about change in students' understanding. As Heathcote puts it, "If you cannot increase reflective power in people you might as well not teach, because reflection is the only thing that in the long run changes anybody" (cited in O'Neill 1989). In drama, students can be participants and spectators. They can comment on what they did and said in drama with their teachers together, both in role and out of role, during and after drama. Participants are encouraged to rethink and discuss the areas of concern with each other. Both individual and collective reflection will be involved. Awareness grows from this reflection. They learn how to think critically and how to self-assess what they are doing and learning. They reflect on the knowledge they have learnt and try to modify, check, re-organize, reshape and re-order it in order to reach a further and deeper understanding, to move forward and go beyond the things they learnt in the past.

Gill (1993) states in his book, *Learning to learn*,

In order to learn how to learn, students must be engaged by and interact with those who already know how and who exemplify this knowledge and its ongoing refinement on a day-to-day basis. (234)

Learning through drama can provide a holistic training be the achievement of these requirements. When students adopt the drama's way of learning as a habit, they will not only become active learners in school but also lifelong learners in society.

To lay a solid foundation for lifelong learning is one of main aims in the recent Hong Kong Education Reform Proposal. Teaching students how to learn is the core concern. In my opinion, the teacher-student relationship and the attitudes adopted in the teaching and learning process are the key factors for achieving this aim. In the light of the above discussion, I will shift my focus in

next chapter to the potential for introducing drama as alternative pedagogy for the creation of a dialogic classroom, which would fulfil the vision of enabling students to attain lifelong learning in Hong Kong.

## *Chapter Three*

### *Searching for a place for the dialogic classroom in Hong Kong*

#### **The new wave of education reform in Hong Kong**

It has become very common for people to use the term “duck-feeding” to describe the Education System in Hong Kong. “Duck-feeding” is properly used to refer to the method of preparing Peking Roast Duck. The duck is stuffed with different kinds of chopped and flavoured food before it is cooked. Students in Hong Kong are like the “duck” who is “stuffed” by textbooks. Academic success is strongly emphasised since it is considered a highly prerequisite for a good job and economic prosperity. To a certain extent, education in Hong Kong is for examinations. The focus of many teachers is the fulfilment of the targets set in the syllabus since this will result in students passing their examinations. Cheung and Lau in a study of the secondary school classroom environment in Hong Kong found that students felt that too much emphasis was placed on the completion of tasks set in the classroom and that their teachers maintained a strict control over the class (cited in Salili 1996: 90). Chan (2001) in his paper sets out the teacher-student relationship in a traditional Hong Kong classroom:

In a typical regular classroom in Hong Kong, the teacher very often becomes the center of all activities, and students' behaviours are directed toward the teacher. The assumption is that all knowledge especially the basics has been established in the past, and the teacher's job is to transmit that knowledge faithfully. The student's job in turn is to master the basic skills or basic literacy as early in schooling as possible, and to continue with the mastery of specific content in history, geography, mathematics, science, and other core disciplines. This orientation gives rise to uniform education that mandates the same curriculum for all students, taught in the same way with little variability, and with the same standard tests administered to all students in examinations to evaluate performance. While this description might be somewhat extreme, it helps reflect that our system highlights an education or learning that tends to cultivate rote, ritualistic, or conventionalised performances rather than performances in

which students can apply concepts or forms of thinking to novel situations in an unanticipated but appropriate way. (5)

Students who come from that kind of classroom may be “good” learners for examinations, but they rarely become active learners who can take control of their learning. As the world economy is in the midst of a radical transformation, and as the industrial economy is gradually being replaced by the knowledge-based economy, most jobs require a considerable amount of knowledge which needs constantly to be constantly updated. As job requirements change, people nowadays need to master knowledge in different domains. Everyone has to meet new challenges. “Adaptability, creativity and abilities for communication, self-learning and cooperation are now the prerequisites for anyone to succeed, while a person’s character, emotional qualities, horizons and learning are important factors in achieving excellence” (Education Commission 2000: 3). With this background, the Education Commission, starting in early 1998, began comprehensively to review the existing education system in Hong Kong. The aim for this holistic review is to formulate a blueprint for the development of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century according to the latest trends of development and society’s needs in the future.

In an ever-changing society, it is imperative that our education system keeps pace with the times and be responsive to the needs of learners. To design an education system for the future, we must envision future changes in the society in order to cater for the needs of learners in the new society and to define the role and functions of education in the new environment. (*ibid* 27)

The reform proposal recognises the enduring problem in the Hong Kong education system and puts forward a progressive educational idea to create a new learning environment for students:

All in all, despite the huge resources put into education and the heavy workload endured by teachers, learning effectiveness of students remains not very promising; learning is still examination-driven and scant attention is paid to “learning to learn”. School life is usually monotonous, students are not given comprehensive learning experiences and have little room to think, explore and create. The pathways for

lifelong learning are not as smooth as they should be. To make up for these weaknesses, we need to uproot outdated ideology and develop a new education system that is student-focused. (*ibid* 29)

After nearly three years' consultation in Hong Kong society, they came up with the following overall aims of education for the 21st Century:

To enable every person to attain all-round development in the domains of ethics, intellect, physique, social skills and aesthetics according to his/her own attributes so that he/she is capable of life-long learning, critical and exploratory thinking, innovating and adapting to change; filled with self-confidence and a team spirit; willing to put forward continuing effort for the prosperity, progress, freedom and democracy of their society, and contribute to the future well-being of the nation and the world at large. (*ibid* 30)

To achieve lifelong learning and all-round development in students, the Curriculum Development Council (2000), after reviewing the Hong Kong school curriculum, proposed, in a consultation document entitled *Learning to Learn*, that corresponding curriculum reform should be focused on helping students to become autonomous learners, “to build up their capabilities to learn independently, [...] to become self-reflective on how they learn, and to be able to use different ways of learning (p.3) ” (Chan, 2000). Nevertheless, in a recent interview,<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Stella Chiu, who was a secondary school teacher as well as a lecturer in Hong Kong Sir Robert Black College of Education for over twenty-two years and who is now a school development officer of the Quality School Project in Hong Kong, said she believes that the prevalent way of teaching in Hong Kong is still far behind this notion. According to her, most of the teachers in Hong Kong are still using the one-way transmission teaching method in the classroom. They learnt this way of teaching from their teachers when they were students and they think that the way they are using is the best way to impart knowledge to students. The teachers are very inflexible. In order to reach the teaching target, they do not allow their students to say anything or ask questions about any topic if

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<sup>1</sup> It was a phone interview held on 20<sup>th</sup> August.

it is not exactly related to their textbooks. They ask students questions just to test the students' memory of what they have been taught. Sometimes students are given a chance for discussion in class but it is not in an exploratory way and it is limited to the content of their textbooks. They still see themselves as knowledge transmitters. Mrs. Chiu points out that this traditional teaching approach really hinders the effectiveness of education reform. Lam (2001) also has similar concerns and notes that, "the immediate and important thing to do regarding education reform should be the change of our concept about education" (44). According to Pang and Yeung (2001), if we want to shift the paradigm of "imparting knowledge" to that of "fostering students to learn how to learn", we should carry out reforms in three areas of schooling: "(i) a new curriculum design, (ii) new roles of teachers and students in the process of teaching and learning, and (iii) a cultural change in teaching and learning" (101). Based on my belief supported by the discussion in the pervious chapters, drama, as a powerful learning medium, does give us a means to facilitate these reforms.

### **The position of drama in Hong Kong's schools**

Drama is an increasingly common extra-curricular activity in Hong Kong's primary and secondary schools. More and more schools are setting up their own drama clubs. Student performances and professional theatre company tours are the two most prevalent school drama activities. Let's take the Hong Kong School Drama Festival as an example. Only sixty teams joined the first school drama competition in 1991; by 1998, over 200 teams participated in this annual event

(<http://www.ed.gov.hk/ednewhp/student/sa/chinese/HTMLdrama/handbook/ch1.pdf>).

Although this kind of activity is familiar to teachers and students in school, its development is still limited, as Cheung<sup>2</sup> (2000) says:

The easier way to find a place for arts in school is to introduce it as an extra-curricular activity. Although the school drama festival, speech festival, music festival and theatre companies' school touring are popular in school, the development of arts activities in school is still limited. It is an optional extra-curricular activity which is "outside" the formal curriculum. Even if school is willing to organize this kind of activity, only a certain number of students can take part in it.

(<http://ihome.cuhk.edu.hk/~b200104/adc/sevenpoints.htm>) (my translation)

Teachers see that drama is an activity which helps students to build up confidence, enhance communication skills, and improve creativity. Although there are some pioneer schools who are trying to put drama into the formal school timetable, the main reasons for introducing drama are the same as in the quotation. Of course, they are some functions of doing drama. However, in my opinion, this narrow sense will devalue the position of drama in school. The function of drama is far more than that. Drama in school is not only an extra-curricular activity but also a powerful teaching and learning medium through which students can be trained to be active learners. As I discussed in the last chapter, through drama talk, students learn to inquire, they learn how to take responsibility for their learning, they improve their intelligence, and their cognitive growth is facilitated. It is one of the most effective ways for students to learn how to learn. The arts subjects in Hong Kong schools, like the visual arts and music, are treated as a marginal subject though they are in the curriculum. But drama, as an activity outside the curriculum, is traditionally treated as unimportant by Hong Kong's schools. This is the reason why I am writing this dissertation, to support and strengthen the position of drama in Hong Kong schools.

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<sup>2</sup> Dr. Ping-kuen Cheung is the chairman of the Drama Committee and a member of the Arts Education Committee in the Hong Kong Arts Development Council.

## **Drama under the Education Reform**

Hong Kong education reform has created a climate for *change* in our education system. The general public as well as the people working in educational fields, have a strong sense of the need to bring something new to “refresh” the system. The curriculum reform proposal lists arts education as one of the eight key learning areas. It not only reassesses the value of the arts in the curriculum but also seems to make more room for drama. Although drama is still not placed in the formal curriculum, it is highly recommended as an arts activity in school. According to my analysis of the document on the key learning area (KLA) of Arts Education (2000), there are two positive signs that drama may have an opportunity to be included in school as more than as extra-curricular activity:

- (1) To introduce *drama* (my italic) and/or other art forms into the curriculum. Schools may devise a 5-year strategy so as to provide opportunities for more exposure to arts experiences for students in the formal and/or informal curriculum (6).
- (2) In appendix 2, “Learning Objectives leading to the four learning targets”, drama is one of three arts forms (visual arts, music and drama) stated in the content.

Developing Creativity and Imagination, developing Skills and Processes, cultivating critical responses and understanding the arts in context are four learning targets in this KLA. Other than emphasizing these aesthetic experiences, the document also mentions that the arts can contribute to various aspects of developing an all-round person. It states (19-20):

- ◆ The arts enable students to develop their intellectual abilities;
- ◆ The arts develop students’ various generic skills;
- ◆ The arts provide students with the pleasure and satisfaction to maintain a life-long pursuit of self-improvement;
- ◆ The arts provide students with opportunities to explore, express and communicate their ideas and feelings;
- ◆ The arts offer students a direct way to reinforce and question existing values and convey of thinking through their experiences;
- ◆ The arts develop students’ understanding of the cultural diversity in their

- community and of the world they live in; and
- ♦ The arts deepen students' understanding of their personal and national identities.

It recognises that, “Successfully relating the arts with the elements of other key learning areas (KLAs) helps students to have better understanding and deeper insight in other curriculum areas” (20). I think this reflects big progress for seeing other functions of the arts.

Currently there are lots of seed projects and pilot schemes for drama supported by the Education Department, Curriculum Development Council, Arts Development Council and other educational organisations or government bodies. The projects and schemes are about both introducing drama in school as an individual subject and as a teaching and learning medium to teach other subjects. For example,

1. Projects about drama as a subject:
  - a. Drama Education Try-Out Curriculum
2. Projects about drama as a teaching and learning medium:
  - a. Arts-in-Education Programme
  - b. Developing Drama-in-Education
  - c. Teaching Empowering Project: drama as teaching strategies
  - d. The Programme of “Merging of Drama into the Syllabus”
3. Both:
  - a. A Pilot Project on Drama in Education for Primary Four Students
  - b. Learning through Live Drama—drama-in-teaching scheme

This may be a good starting point for drama development in school. However, as Cheung (2002) points out, “these kinds of pilot projects appear as ‘individual one-off testing programmes’ or another kind of ‘extra-curricular activities’. Although it echoes the aim of the education reform, indeed, it still needs a further and deeper development (my translation)” (<http://ihome.cuhk.edu.hk/~b200104/adc/report.htm>). Lack of continuity makes it

difficult for drama to be rooted in school. It is only the responsibility of a few teachers or the business of the artists who work in these projects. Now I would like to use the following two cases to explain further my concern.

#### Case 1: The programme of “Merging of Drama into the Syllabus”<sup>3</sup>

Yuk-lan Chan is a teaching artist<sup>4</sup> in Sai Kung House Bishop Baker Secondary School. She taught four lessons for each Form one class separately in this school. She “borrowed” the lessons from the teachers of Chinese language, Art and Home economics. In order to relate what she did to the curriculum, she specially chose a topic (Chinese New Year) from the Chinese language textbook which students were learning in that period of the programme. She extended the topic to lead students to discuss traditional Chinese beliefs further, especially the concept of retribution<sup>5</sup>. She planned the lessons around the topic, by linking up the knowledge they should learn in each different subject. For example, in the lesson of Art, she started by telling a story about a traditional Chinese village. Then she asked each student to *draw* an object for a traditional ritual and use it to *design* a set for a village in groups. In the lesson of Chinese Language, she asked students to explore how a traditional old person might behave and which kinds of affairs they were concerned about inviting them to act as

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<sup>3</sup> This was one of the School Arts Animateur Scheme’s programs organized by the Hong Kong Leisure and Cultural Department (LCSD) in 2001. Each freelance artist cooperated with one of the participating school and negotiated with the teachers for the individual school proposal.

<sup>4</sup> The definition of teaching artist in Hong Kong means someone who has received professional training and teaches in schools usually as a project-basis.

<sup>5</sup> In traditional Chinese society, we deeply believe in the chain of cause and effect of human behaviors. We use this concept to teach young people not to do bad things; otherwise, they will be punished eventually. Nowadays, I think many old people still keep this concept as their belief.

an old person. During this process, the students needed to *talk* with classmates in pairs or in groups, *write* a monologue and *present* their explorations in class. According to my observation on the video given to me by Chan, although there were weaknesses due to limited space and the immature teaching techniques, the students were still involved in a lot of dialogic interactions in the light of the nature of drama. Due to the limited length of this dissertation and the objective of this case study, I am not going to discuss the effectiveness of the lessons. Rather, I would like to talk more about the teacher-artist relationship in this programme. On the video, I saw that the teacher sat to one side in the classroom. Sometimes, she observed what her students' were doing; sometimes, she was doing her own job which did not relate to the lesson. In an interview<sup>6</sup> with Chan, she told me that in the planning period, she tried to involve the relevant teachers. However, the teachers did not show any interest. For instance, Chan received no comment from the teachers after she sent them her initial lesson plan. Since she really wanted the teachers to know what she was doing their students; and she asked the teachers to stay in classroom during the lessons because she needed help in classroom control. Chan said, "this was a tactic, otherwise, they would have just stayed in the staff room." She mentioned that the teachers perceived that their role was merely as coordinators and administrators in this programme. They thought that "teaching drama" was not their business. Although Chan tried to connect what she did with the curriculum, there was a discrepancy of expectation between the teachers and her. There was no transition of

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<sup>6</sup> It was a phone interview held on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2002.

knowledge from artist to teachers.

### Case 2: A Pilot Project on Drama in Education for Primary Four Students<sup>7</sup>

Five primary schools joined in this project. The teaching artists from Alice Education Studio worked with the teachers from these schools with the aim of exploring the potential for learning through and about drama in the Hong Kong primary school context. The project was divided into four stages. The first stage was the teacher-training workshop. Before working with the students, the teaching artists organised workshops for the teachers in each of the five schools. The aim of these workshops was to promote basic knowledge about drama in education even though only two teachers from each school were responsible for this project. After the first stage, each school chose one primary four class to participate in the project. The focus of the second stage was teaching the students about drama in order to enhance their understanding of how to express themselves through drama. In this stage, the students learnt about basic drama techniques like body and sensory awareness, spatial perception, sound and movement. The third stage was applying drama as pedagogy to teach subjects. The teaching artists discussed with the teachers and chose three topics in the curriculum relevant to the subjects of Art and Craft, General Studies and Chinese Language. The last stage was a seminar. The objectives of the seminar were to share the results and findings in the project and to discuss the potential for introducing drama in primary school.

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<sup>7</sup> This was a project organized by the Alice Education Studio and funded by the Hong Kong Quality Education Fund.

According to a survey done by the organiser, over ninety percent of students agreed that this project could stimulate their interest in learning. Through the drama lessons, students learnt to cooperate with and respect others, express their own opinions, build confidence, improve creativity and provoke thinking. Over ninety percent of the teachers who took part in this project recognised that drama as a teaching strategy can help students to increase learning motivation, train multi-faceted thinking skills, build team spirit and break the barrier between teachers and students. It seems to have been a very successful project. However, in an interview,<sup>8</sup> the vice-chairman of Alice Education Studio, Shui-yu Chan, told me that only teachers from three schools had the confidence to co-teach with them. Most of the participating teachers chose to be observers during the process, though they did appreciate the effectiveness of teaching through drama. Only one participating school promised to continue developing drama in its curriculum. The other four schools will just keep drama as a regular extra-curricular activity. Based on her analysis, she said that there were individual factor and school factors which hindered the development of drama in school. The individual factor was the lack of confidence among the teachers. Even though the participating teachers did value drama's educational functions, they did not believe they could use them because they did not think they could act. The school factors included a lack of support from headmasters and colleagues. She mentioned that most of the headmasters saw this as one of the various projects which could enhance the school's reputation. When it was

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<sup>8</sup> It was a phone interview held on 21<sup>st</sup> August 2002.

finished, they could have applied for another one but they did not commit themselves to the project's continuation. Moreover, although teachers in each school attended the teacher-training workshop in the beginning, only the teachers-in-charge of the project were involved in the later stages. Other colleagues did not show any interest what they did with the students. Chan claimed that, because of the one-off nature of this project, her company could not do anything to support the teachers due to shortage of resources.

Without doubt these drama projects had a positive influence on the development of drama in education in Hong Kong. They are a good starting point for demonstrating to teachers that the educational functions of drama as such that drama should be more than an extra-curricular activity in school. Nevertheless, they are still inadequate to strengthen the position of drama in school. Due to the short-term, project-basis nature of these projects, only a limited number of teachers and students benefited and enjoyed the new way of teaching and learning. The low level of commitment from the teachers makes it difficult to alter the traditional classroom culture. Furthermore, as teachers lack drama knowledge, the projects are inevitably facilitated by outside professional teaching artists. Initially, teaching artists working together with teachers can help them to develop their ability to use drama in teaching. However, some of these projects gave false impression to the teachers that the use of drama in teaching is not their business; and so teachers cannot see that their profession has any relationship to drama. I do agree that drama in school, as an individual subject, should be taught by specially trained drama teachers. But, what I am

trying to raise in this dissertation is concern to introduce drama as a teaching and learning medium to help students learn to learn. In order to train students to be active learners, the value of a dialogic classroom should be recognised by teachers. In a like manner, every teacher should value students' voices and drama is one of the effective ways to achieve these goals. Hence, in the beginning, teaching artists can work in parallel with teachers. In the long term, teaching artists ought not to be the only ones who know how to apply drama-in-education.

From a teacher's point of view, Ms Clara Ho<sup>9</sup>, who has been a secondary school teacher for twelve years, met the challenges and opportunities of introducing drama as an alternative pedagogy to Hong Kong teachers. According to her, teachers are not considering the use of drama in teaching because they lack the confidence and skills and are afraid of spending more time on preparation and losing classroom control. Although this is currently the case, she still perceives a positive future for the development of drama-in-education in Hong Kong. She believes that the educational climate is changing. A lot of the debate about education in society forces teachers to reflect on their practice. More and more teachers would like to find a way to refresh their teaching skills. Under the education reform, the main difficulty for applying drama in education, namely the tightly structured and organised curriculum, will be changed. She cited an example: "Starting from this year, the Education Department gives responsibility to teachers for the design of their own school-based curriculum. Teachers can trim and reconstruct the curriculum which may help them create more space for drama. Furthermore, two years later, the Hong Kong Certificate Examination will introduce a new syllabus for Chinese Language in which

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<sup>9</sup> It was a phone interview held on 24<sup>th</sup> August 2002.

students will take two additional papers on speaking and listening. Drama is the most effective pedagogy to facilitate this kind of training.” She stressed that drama-in-education has a great potential for application in Hong Kong schools if teachers can be supported and provided with adequate training to build up their confidence.

Mr. Yuk-man Pang is a pioneer teacher in primary schools who applies drama to teach Chinese Language. In his paper (2001), he tells how he had been dried out after using the traditional one-way transmission to teach for five years. At that time, he looked for a new and dynamic teaching method. Finally, he met “drama”. Because of the flexibility of the primary school curriculum, he re-designed his teaching content and now uses drama to help his students explore the texts and enhance their understanding of them. He encourages his students to act out the texts and find their own interpretations. He says that drama can make lessons more fun and joyful. The active engagement and the happy faces of his students are his rewards. In order to share his experiences and provide training opportunities for other primary teachers, he joined with the District Teacher Network to organise a project called “Teacher Empowering Project: Drama as teaching strategies”. Starting with a seminar to introduce this project, there was a series of workshops for primary school teachers facilitated by teaching artists. Following the workshops, five teachers committed to try out the ideas in their lessons. This project ended with a sharing session with other teachers. This is one of the typical types of teaching demonstration project for teachers in Hong Kong. Pang believes that these good drama practices could help teachers gain the confidence to use drama.

There is no doubt that the Education Reform creates a favourable environment for drama in education in Hong Kong. I agree that the current projects really can help to promote the use of drama by teachers and that bringing in teaching artists is an effective way at this stage to demonstrate the lessons. However, as I said before, I am concerned about the lack of continuity and prevalence of this development. If the ultimate aim of Education Reform is to enhance students' capacity for learning how to learn, then applying drama as a powerful teaching and learning medium is not just the business of teaching artists nor a few teachers. More teachers need this knowledge and in my opinion, if we want to promote drama in education effectively, we need a long-term course to provide systematic training for teachers in addition to individual experimental projects. The Art School of Hong Kong Arts Centre is going to introduce a three-year part-time MEd (Drama) programme awarded by Griffith University, Australia in early 2003. This will be the first formal drama-in-education training programme in Hong Kong. I appreciate this big progress but it is still limited because it is an optional overseas course for which teachers will not receive any subsidy from the government. Further, I would like to propose that the educational institutions and teacher-training colleges provide at least elective courses in drama-in-education for in-service and pre-service teachers. The dialogic classroom is for every student and to achieve the educational aim of promoting lifelong learning, we should change the narrow sense of education for examinations or for transmitting knowledge. Although, due to restrictions of time and length, my analysis does not address the practical issues of applying drama in school, I think, it has laid a good foundation for me to conduct further research.

## *Conclusion*

During the period of writing this dissertation, I have constantly reflected on my past schooling in Hong Kong. I was very keen to find out if there has been any change in classroom teaching, since I am only familiar with what took place in the eighties. Before I talked with the people in Hong Kong, I wholeheartedly hoped that students nowadays could enjoy learning in school. I was disappointed when I learnt that one-way transmission is still the prevalent teaching method in Hong Kong schools. Owing to my study in this year, I experienced drama as an alternative pedagogy which can enrich the dialogic interaction in classrooms. I strongly agree with the aim of the Hong Kong Education Reform, and to a certain extent, reform means change. I believe that the aims of the Reform will not be realised if traditional classroom teaching methods do not change. This strengthens my resolve to search for an effective way of facilitating change. My aim in this dissertation was to give strong support to drama, as a powerful learning medium and to strengthen its position in Hong Kong. It not only has potential as an arts subject in Arts Education (one of the key learning areas) but most importantly, it is one of the most effective modes for helping students learn to learn.

While I talked with Ms Clara Ho, she told me that she recently got the degree of Master of Education in Drama in Education at the University of Central England in Birmingham. She told me how she had changed as a result of this course. She said, "I am glad I made the decision to be a teacher. The notions of drama-in-education inspire me to think more about what is a true learning. It gives me power and confidence to change my old teaching style. I deeply

believe, the students' voices should be valued and respected. They can do much more than we think if we can trust their ability." I was moved by her enthusiasm. It strengthened my belief in the importance of introducing drama-in-education in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong students are used to facing examination pressure. In order to survive in society, they must chase through a never-ending examination system. Teachers and parents have no time to listen to the voices of students when they speak about what they want. Is this the real education for life? Recently, I read an article about the analysis of teaching and learning style in Chinese society. The author quoted a case which made me remember the rash of student suicides nine years ago. In his article, the author says:

There is little doubt that at least some of the recent suicides by Hong Kong students have been the result of the enormous stress that effort-attributing teachers and parents can create, as the following essay written shortly by a ten years old boy before he jumped from 19<sup>th</sup> floor bedroom, rather than tell his parents [and teachers] he could not do his maths homework: -

Nevertheless, there is hardship in studying as well. Every day, there are many homeworks. They are not only in large quantity, but also difficult to do...

Though after 12 o'clock in every night, I still have to revise my homeworks. I can't go to bed until one o'clock odd. At 6.50 hours, in [cancel in] the next morning, I have to get up. (I) am so hard.

I do wish no studying.

Lau Ka-chun, ten years.

(Reported in *South China Morning Post*, May 11, 1991)  
(cited in Biggs, 1996: 60)

This may be an extreme case, but I think if the will and voice of Ka-chun was heard, this tragedy would not have happened. In the beginning of this dissertation, I spoke of a dream. I think a dream without taking action is merely dream. When we are willing to take action, our dream can change the world.

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