

Relations of Power and Drama in Education: The Teacher and Foucault

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ABSTRACT: The advantages of interweaving drama into education appear numerous as opportunities exist for improved literacy, multiple interpretations, increased collaboration, and problem solving. However, drama may not be playing out the liberatory role for which it was intended. Inspired by Foucault, it is this paper's intent to unmask the discursive practices inherent in drama as they occur in education. Power relations are revealed. Subjects are exposed. Strategies are unraveled. Resistance to controlling ideology and methodology is encouraged.

RÉSUMÉ: Les avantages de greffer l'art dramatique à l'éducation semblent nombreux, permettant d'améliorer la littératie, favorisant les interprétations multiples, sollicitant la croissance de la collaboration et encourageant la résolution de problèmes. Toutefois, il semble que l'art dramatique devrait s'en tenir au rôle libérateur pour lequel il est destiné. S'inspirant de Foucault, le présent article vise à démasquer les pratiques discursives inhérentes au théâtre telles qu'elles s'actualisent en éducation. Ainsi, des relations de pouvoir sont mises à jour. Des sujets sont exposés. Des stratégies sont élucidées. Une résistance au contrôle de l'idéologie et de la méthodologie est encouragée.

It is a cold Monday morning. Children, dressed in school uniforms of navy and white, squirming with anticipation, sit alongside Ms. Moss.

*"Now, who would like to play Max today? Remember, you will have a **lot** of lines to read in front of the **whole** class,"* she warns. A few hands drop down. But not Laura's. She

is desperately waving her arm in an effort to catch her teacher's attention.

"Stephan, you did a wonderful job acting in our class play, why don't you practice this?" She smiles and hands a small boy a sheet of paper with a few lines written on it. Ms. Moss continues, *"Now remember, the rest of you have very important parts to play, too. You are all going to be the **wild** things!"* A small roar begins to build among the children. *"So I want everybody to practice by making scary faces right now! Good! Can we walk like monsters too?"*

Up the stairs and around a corner is Mr. Hollingsworth's room. More mature, his eighth grade students are gathered into groups, discussing chapters of *Lord of the Flies*.

"You be Piggy!"

*"No man, I wanna be Jack this time. **I** wanna be the one to hunt **you** like a pig."*

"No way I'm being Piggy," another voice pipes up.

"He's dead man, didn't you read?"

"Hey, you'd be perfect, then."

"This book is the bomb, you know?"

Mr. Hollingsworth hears this and smiles. Drama certainly seems to be livening things up in his classroom. What a great idea for a review, he thinks to himself, each group reenacting assigned chapters of the text for each other.

The last classroom at the end of the hall is Mrs. Boyle's. *"Now listen up everyone,"* she leads. *"I want us all to get aboard the Mayflower. Do you see this tape on the carpet? Well, we can't step out of it, or we will drown. Be sure to grab your diaries because it's going to be a rough ride, and you're going to have a lot to write about."*

The students, some dressed for traveling in cardboard Puritan garb, line up for boarding; others, already in the boat (or between the masking taped lines), are clothed in a rough seafaring style.

"Let's all take our places."

"Aye Aye, Captain," a young boy with a pirate patch and a mutinous glint salutes.

The advantages of interweaving drama into education appear numerous. A huge body of literature specifically links drama to *improved literacy*. Wagner (1988) offered readers a comprehensive and historical survey which provides both a theoretical basis and a research review linking drama to improvement in reading and writing. Several studies included have argued drama improves oral language (Pellegrini, 1980; Snyder-Greco, 1983; Stewig & Vail, 1985; Vitz, 1984); others have demonstrated its effect specifically on reading (Pellegrini, 1980; Galda, 1984; Isenberg & Jacob, 1983; Jacob, 1982); while even others have focused their select attention on drama's effect on writing (Pellegrini, 1980; Wagner, 1986).

Another supposed advantage of drama's presence in education is the opportunity for *multiple interpretations* of text, multiple points of view. Because of drama, students understand more, empathize more. Observation is increased. Bodies are immersed. Senses become heightened. Thus students have more ideas, more opinions. Imagine the interpretive possibilities; liberatory and constructivist teachers welcome such a diversity of perspectives. After all, numerous scholars and critics have pointed out how an understanding of multiple truths (Gardner, 1991; Rose, 1989; Witherall & Noddings, 1991) is stifled by the current educational structure possessing linear curricula, assigned textbooks, traditional assessment, and standardized tests. Unlike those classrooms, theirs would allow for many voices and many thoughts.

Incorporating drama should also *increase collaboration* in education. Just as the playwright, actor, director, set designer, and stage manager work together, so might students collaborate with one another and with their teacher. All would become co-learners, seeking together to know more.

Drama could provide multiple opportunities for *problem solving*. Augusto Boal (1974/1989) utilized drama with such a problem-solving format amid the military coups and harsh dictatorships of Brazil in the mid 1960s. His Forum Theatre gave spectators the opportunity to discover solutions to collective problems. Through drama students have the same power to interpret circumstances, to make choices, and to take action. They are not passive recipients of knowledge. They become active participants able to generate, negotiate, and enact their own understandings. With the help of drama, they are allowed and encouraged to enter the educational dialogue and to express their thoughts in a free and authentic voice. For the above reasons and the many more which go unmentioned, drama might be recognized as a political force. With its focus on active learning, meaning making, collaborative engagement, problem solving, and multiple interpretation, drama becomes political in that it allows students opportunities to rethink the world in progress and their place in it (Apple, 1990). Certainly this is a political activity as drama becomes a means through which bodies and minds are both liberated and celebrated. "Learners enter into the process of learning not by acquiring facts, but by constructing their reality in social exchange with others" (Wallerstein, 1987, p. 34). Drama becomes political in that it offers a balance of power in education.

Although I am certainly not the first to consider curriculum as performative or politically situated (Dyson, 1992; hooks, 1994; Phelan, 1993), I would like to more closely examine the status of drama in education today. While the theoretical framework for this analysis owes much to those working in literacy and drama education, it is my intent to explore how the work of Foucault might also shed some light on this curriculum experience. Drama will be closely examined from the standpoint of power relations. Before such relations can be revealed, however, a definition for power needs to be clarified.

Power is not something any of us truly possesses. Power is instead exercised or exerted over things. It manifests itself through actions, strategies, or tactics (Dreyfus & Rainbow, 1983). When Ms. Moss, for example, selects Stephan to lead the class in its performance, she is exerting power. With a single word, "Stephan," she is able to modify the class's actions. Some one will speak; others can only roar. This act brings into play relations between the individual, Stephan, and the group, his fellow classmates, destined to play scary monsters. Power is most often relayed by external instruments. Ms. Moss, in this case, is an external force. By using the pronoun "you" to refer to her students/monsters, she indicates that she, herself, has no intention of playing with them and is outside the internal niche of performers. This domain within which power is conferred on some and denied others, I will refer to as a discourse (Schaafsma, 1998). Guided by certain rules of inclusion/exclusion, invested with institutional support, and correlated with social, political, and administrative practices, it is a means of constraint. Why is Laura not allowed to read? Is her creativity not constrained? Foucault might see such and all discourses as "violences" done to people (as cited in Schaafsma, 1998).

For all its proponents' good intentions, drama is not playing out the liberatory, educational role for which it was intended. Inspired by Foucault, it is this paper's intent to unmask the discursive practices inherent in drama as they occur in education. Power relations will be revealed. Subjects will be exposed. Strategies will be unraveled. Resistance to controlling ideology and methodology will be encouraged. Emancipatory modes of facilitation will be offered. Prior ignorance of discursive conditions has led to the belief that the advantages of drama are played out in education and the present status of drama is the best one – that Ms. Moss, Mr. Hollingsworth, and Mrs. Boyle's actions are to be commended and emulated. Seeing through a Foucault lens, however, we just may discover that they are not.

Unmasking the Relations of Power and Drama

Just what exactly am I referring to when I speak of drama in education? Is it childhood drama, children's theatre, creative drama, youth theatre, developmental drama, improvisational

theatre, or could it be that school play we all remember? Is it process-oriented or product-oriented? Can performance activities such as storytelling and speaking be included too? Drama comes in many forms. For the purposes of this paper, I shall borrow a dual classification system from Wolf, Edminston, and Enciso (1997). They classify drama into two kinds, drama at the center of the text, and drama at the edges of the text.

Drama at the Center of the Text – A Discourse

As aforementioned, drama is presumed to bring emancipatory content into education. For this to occur, however, it must be offered in a liberatory way. Dramatizing at the center of the text allows for little of this. Drama in this form places a written piece of literature or exposition center stage (i.e., *Where the Wild Things Are* or *Lord of the Flies*). All student activity is centered about the actual text. The primary virtue remains the work at all times (McCaslin, 1990). Recall the activities in Mr. Hollingsworth's room. His students are huddled around a novel in an effort to recall and relay the chapters in their literal form to the remainder of the class – a perfect example of dramatizing at the center of the text. Often called story drama or reader's theatre, lines are usually distributed or paraphrased during this process. Above all, students remain true to the text.

The role of the teacher typically remains external. Whereas he or she may enter the drama world of the students, teachers who practice drama at the center of the text rarely choose to do so, preferring to place themselves in a greater position of power. Note how Mr. Hollingsworth opts to circulate among his groups of busy, productive children, surveying their work instead of joining in the fun with them in an equal power relationship. Foucault would consider his mode of surveillance a means of hierarchical judgment and an unnecessary exercise of power. As Mr. Hollingsworth is applying rigid structure upon the dramatic actions of his students, he is exercising power.

Foucault has listed practices which have been utilized in controlling discourse (as cited in Fink-Eitel, 1988/1992). Included in these are two which are evident in dramatizing at the center of the text, or in Ms. Moss and Mr. Hollingsworth's classrooms. These involve *exclusion* and *prohibition*. Laura is excluded from

reading aloud. Groups are prohibited from interpreting a text subjectively. Such are the mechanisms of domination brought into the play of power relations. Other oppressive actions, although identified by Freire (1970/1983) in relation to literacy education, might also include *divide-and-rule* and *manipulation*. These, too, can be noted in both teachers' actions. Students are separated and isolated in a conscious effort to preserve the oppressor state. Students are also manipulated by both teachers into conforming to their own classroom objectives. In all cases, power is exerted over bodies. Students are unknowingly subjected to a will of power.

Educators who dramatize at the center of the text are enacting power strategies in their classrooms. They are exercising governance in ways which inhibit the freedom of their students, the freedom they need to exercise critical intelligence. The supposed advantages of drama – improved literacy, multiple interpretations, increased collaboration, and problem solving – become minimized as teachers enact constraints. Drama when enacted without constraint provides a means to liberate the self from the self. But when the self is controlled by the text, fewer ideas or experiences can be shared or explored. It is Vygotsky (1986) who connected language with thought and feeling. So as language is controlled through external means, so is thinking and feeling. Instead of exploring alternative ways of thinking and feeling about the world, students in Ms. Moss and Mr. Hollingsworth's classes are limited to that which the text offers.

Of course it is also necessary to explore the participation of the oppressed in their own domination, for they do play a role here too. Why have students not spoken up before in dramatic situations? Why do they willingly submit to dramatizing only at the center of the text? Perhaps "because of their identification with the oppressor [in this case, their teacher], they have no consciousness of themselves as persons or as members of an oppressed class" (Freire, 1970/1983, p. 30). Compared to their other teachers' even more traditional educational practices, these students might actually believe themselves truly emancipated. Perhaps they willingly submit because they are fearful of freedom, for with freedom comes autonomy and responsibility (Freire, 1970/1983). Just as dramatizing at the center of the text

is an easier practice for teachers, it is also an easier one for students. No one has to think for himself or herself. Lines need only be read. Actions need only be followed. All easily adapt to this structure of domination.

Dramatizing at the Edges of the Text – A Discourse

Unlike dramatizing at the center of the text, dramatizing at the edges of the text requires no text, though a story may be used much like a narrative prop. I use the term “prop” since it is an optional addition, not requirement, for drama. Most often words act as springboards from which teachers and students raise questions and enact possible situations. Texts may provide unifying threads which tether students to multiple, dramatic, curriculum possibilities. Do you recall how Mrs. Boyle’s students are enacting the journey aboard the Mayflower? Although excerpts from William Bradford’s *Of Plymouth Plantation* provide the basis for the pilgrimage, students are embarking on a new journey of their own making.

Drama-at-the-edge may be enacted in a variety of forms. It has been classified as “drama in education” and “educational drama” (Bolton, 1979; Heathcote, 1984), “story drama” (Booth, 1985, 1994, 1995), “narrative theatre” (Edmiston, Encisco, & King, 1987), and “process drama” (O’Neill, 1991; O’Toole, 1992). It may manifest itself in a variety of educational experiences.

Dramatic play is best defined as the spontaneous, imaginative play of young children. Do you recall sharing secrets with an imaginary friend? Have you ever crossed your wrists in an effort to catch bullets when playing Wonder Woman? Transformations are common during this form of drama. Children may transform their selves, their classmates, their teacher, their actions, or even objects (Fein, 1981; Garvey & Kramer, 1989). The ordinary becomes the extraordinary as identities are recreated.

Improvisational drama is slightly more structured than is its counterpart, dramatic play. Typically, improvs are led by one person who provides the source of stimulation for the imagination, whereas children’s play rarely includes such direction (Pinciotti, 1993). Two forms of improvisation are most common in education – story drama and theme-oriented drama (Wagner, 1990). In both cases, similar to Mrs. Boyle’s practice,

teachers use narrative as a springboard in an effort to explore aspects of the story, especially its underlying meanings, in greater depth.

Creative drama is a structured form of dramatic learning guided by a leader, similar to improvisational drama, but more complex in subject matter. An elaboration and extension of dramatic play, creative drama emphasizes the imagination and experience (real or not real) of students in great detail while simultaneously working to foster an understanding and respect for the process and products of the art form of theatre (Pinciotti, 1993). Instead of a narrative providing stimulus for improvisation, a student's own reality and/or fantasy can lead classmates on their exploration. Greater awareness of and attention to dramatic structures and theatre conventions is expected.

While these forms of dramatizing at the edge of the text, with their freedom to vary from a story, are more emancipatory in content than is dramatizing at the center of the text, they, too, depend upon liberatory enactment by the educator. Might Mrs. Boyle's transactions with her students be considered in the same light as Ms. Moss and Mr. Hollingsworth's? Or does she appear more liberatory in her enactment? What power strategies lie beneath her good intentions? Is she, too, exercising power in such a way as to limit the creative and critical thinking of those she professes to care about?

Whereas teachers who embrace drama-at-the-center tend to remain in external positions of governance, teachers who embrace drama-at-the-edge more often choose to enter the drama world. Like Mrs. Boyle, they board the Mayflower along with their students. Only then, another choice must be made. The educator constructs a position of power relative to his or her students — that of higher than, equal to, or lower than (Morgan & Saxton, 1987). Morgan and Saxton (1988) identified nine general teacher roles which vary in their level of power possessed. There is the authority, the second in command, one of the gang, the helpless, the authority opposed to group, the devil's advocate, the absentee, the authority outside action, and the fringe role. Sadly, those teachers who choose to come aboard most often do so as "Captain." The authority.

Not only do educators exercise their power initially through the role chosen, but they also continue to exert their power throughout the drama through this selected role. Imagine how Mrs. Boyle, as captain, is able to control the bodies and subject them to her will. Researchers rarely find fault with this practice; in fact, they often see teacher intervention as essential to the full development of the child (Pinciotti, 1993). Perhaps we should also consider the fact that we might be obstructing and interfering with students' critical thinking – with their ability to improve their literacy, explore multiple interpretations, collaborate successfully together, and embark on problem-solving – through too much continued governance.

Educators may be fearful of the loss of power which can come with drama-at-the-edge. In an "equal to" or "lower than" position of power, teachers are seldom the ones possessing the knowledge. As "one of the gang," they must be humble, flexible, cooperative, and receptive. They might only offer possibilities, not direction or judgment (like Mrs. Boyle) which must be accepted. In essence, they must accept that liberatory and constructivist role – the one which advocates active learning, meaning making, collaborative engagement, problem solving, and multiple interpretations – that politically charged role they presumed they were playing in the first place.

Dramatizing at the edges of the text is intended to lean less on the language of others and more on the language of those entering the drama. It is intended as a means to empower and celebrate new voices and new ideas as control is shifted from teachers and texts to students and teachers who create meanings together as they interpret, dramatize, and dialogue. Students should have the opportunity to explore alternate ways of thinking and feeling about the world while being exposed to its limitless possibilities. Lives are validated, experiences recognized, speech valued, and knowledge approved. Although Heathcote (1984) has argued for adult intervention she has also stated, "when it comes to the interpretation of ideas it is the child's viewpoint which is important ... he [sic] is offering a viewpoint and in return the teacher may offer another one" (p. 85). I question though how this so-called educational dialogue can occur if educators are talking too much and above them.

Power struggles are evident in drama-at-the-edge during dialogues between teachers and students, and even between students and students. Most likely, this is due to the lack of equity in relationships. Drama depends on a reciprocal flow of communication. Unfortunately, as I have noted, power is unevenly distributed in many educational structures and in many a dramatic relationship. Thus a true, communicative dialogue with equal giving and taking is almost impossible to attain. Elsasser and John-Steiner (1987) have explained Freire's analysis of a similar situation: "True communication demands equality between speakers, and this often requires an alteration in current social relationships" (p. 47).

In my continued effort to unmask this discourse of domination, I cannot fail to once again mention the role of the oppressed in their own subjugation. Not only are educators guilty of manipulating themselves into roles of power, but so, too, are children when acting with one another. Why is Laura so desperate to play Max instead of a wild thing? She wants to be the one in front of the class controlling the actions of the group. How many of us would be satisfied if reduced to roaring and walking? The need for power and control is not exclusive to adults. Children often perpetuate this strategy of power by delegating others to subordinate roles. "You be Piggy," a child in Mr. Hollingsworth's class insists. Students contribute to the uneven distribution of power as they coerce others to submit: "Hey, you'd be perfect [to play Piggy] then." Students become subjects when they are subjected to someone else by control and dependence (Schaafsma, 1998).

Students who willingly submit to the confessional practices encouraged by drama-at-the-edge may also become subjugated. Although the opportunity for individual sharing is severely limited by the inequality of power relations, some students might rebel and attempt to share personal experiences and act out fantasies. A young boy with a pirate patch and a mutinous glint might resist the orders of his captain and attempt to steer the

Mayflower in his own direction. If he interrupts Mrs. Boyle's storyline and chooses to draw from his own experiences and fantasies, however, his body and thoughts are bared before and subjected to the others. He provides his teacher and classmates with an opportunity for exploitation and control.

Foucault (1982) in his discussion of pastoral power has written of a "form of power which cannot be exercised without knowing the inside of people's minds, without exploring their souls, without making them reveal their innermost secrets. It implies a knowledge of the conscience and an ability to direct it" (p. 214). If the resistant and revolutionary pirate shares his secrets, he is now at the mercy of others since they possess the knowledge of his conscience. The opportunity for equal dialogue is lost, as others now possess the knowledge of his feelings and passions. They are now in possession of another tactic through which power may be exerted. Students can be subjugated by both teachers and classmates, if they so choose, through such mechanisms of exploitation.

A Matter of Teacher Responsibility?

As a teacher who habitually interweaves drama into education, I find these hidden power relations to be more than a tad disturbing. I am unsettled by the ironies and contradictions existing within both the discourse of drama-at-the-center and drama-at-the-edge. While each form has the potential to meet the advantages drama offers, educators too often exert power and students too rarely resist discourse.

Initially, I made the claim that education was political and that drama – as a component of education – is also political. As a result of this claim and a newfound awareness of the power strategies in play, it may be time to question the politics being enacted in education. For what are we in favor? For what are we against? Is our role not to question inequality and oppression in all its forms? As Freire (1970/1983) has argued:

Education either functions as an instrument used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes "the practice of freedom," the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with

reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (p. 15)

This powered analysis of drama in education might challenge the existing social forces that keep both teachers and students passive in the classroom. There does exist within humans a capacity for resistance to domination and the capacity for self-creation, or re-creation, as the case may be (Schaafsma, 1998). What becomes necessary then is a strategy of opposition which can be used to counter the effects of power. Power struggles can manifest themselves in three forms – as struggles against forms of domination, forms of exploitation, and that which ties the individual to the self (Dreyfus & Rainbow, 1983). Whereas drama could, as Boal has proven, provide a means of strengthening a struggle against institutions of power and/or the groups possessing it, in education, it most often becomes just another mechanism of domination. Newfound awareness of the exploitation, however, can arm in a strategy of opposition.

In order to struggle against the power-infused social system which pervades all aspects of education and the forms of exploitation students are subjected to as part of that system, a battle might begin with the self – by struggling against that which ties the individual to the self. For it is the self who is in dialogue with and struggle against the technologies of power. The self, however, is located within the power-knowledge regimes, and it is those regimes, for too long, which have been interpreting the self(ves). New awareness of power, however, provides an opportunity to resist the interpretation and knowledge of others. Ms. Moss, Mr. Hollingsworth, and Mrs. Boyle might stop believing what others tell them. They are not practicing emancipatory education. Their actions are not empowering.

A need exists for critical and liberatory dialogue with the self(ves). Critical reflection on the presence of discourse and the exercise of power is wanted. Only through dialogue can teachers and students gain the "will to truth." We might re-examine the self constantly. We might recognize and take responsibility for oppressive roles in the current enactment of drama in education. Perhaps then, a new relationship might emerge, that of teacher-student with student-teachers (Freire, 1970/1983). Perhaps then all the benefits of drama – improved literacy, multiple

interpretations, increased collaboration, and problem solving – might truly be enjoyed.

Newly aware, responsibility follows. For action should follow dialogue. In my own classroom, this has meant practicing what I like to playfully term, drama-on-the-loose. Unobstructed by teacher governance, unregulated by textual truth, unimpeded by constraining discourse, this dramatic form (or lack thereof) attempts to introduce emancipatory content and liberatory practice into education. In collaborative settings, students are encouraged to interpret situations and problem solve with one another. It is one teacher's attempt to challenge the social forces and do battle against the oppressor consciousness embodied in the social institutions of power. The choice is ours. We may continue to wield power or offer alternatives.

It is less chilly on Tuesday morning. Children, dressed in school uniforms of navy and white, squirming with anticipation, sit alongside Ms. Moss.

"Today I thought we could all imagine ourselves as monsters. I would like each of us to think about what kind of monster we want to be. What do you look like? What do you act like? What do you want to say? And how will you say it?"

Eager chatting begins to build among the boys and girls. Laura and Stephan are equally excited and begin to gesture wildly with one another. *"Let's write our own story about monsters today,"* the teacher suggests as she joins in the fun and reaches across for the construction paper.

Up the stairs and around a corner, Mr. Hollingsworth is talking. *"I thought today we could decide what happens to some of the characters in 'Lord of the Flies.' Why don't you divide yourselves up into groups? Pretend it's the future. What has happened to the boys on the island? Where are they now? What are they doing? What are they thinking about? And why? You decide their futures. I hope you will act out your group vision for us tomorrow. If you would like me to, I can be a member of any group."*

In the last classroom at the end of the hall, Mrs. Boyle smiles. She is now the pirate wearing a patch and a mutinous glint.

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