

Netla – Vef tímarit um uppeldi og menntun



Sérít 2014

Diversity in Education: Teachers and Learners

Menntavísindasvið Háskóla Íslands

Ritrynd grein birt 31. desember 2014

►► Yfirlit greina

[Netla – Online Journal on Pedagogy and Education]
[Special Issue 2014 – Diversity in Education: Teachers and Learners]
[University of Iceland – School of Education]
[Peer reviewed article – December 31st 2014]

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Narratives of change

Creating a community of inquiry using drama

► About the authors ► Key words

This paper presents the Sustainable Glasgow 2014¹ Project ‘Narratives of Social Change: Supporting Sustainable Action through Creative Multiliteracies’, which brought together a team of teachers, educators and researchers working in the city of Glasgow to work collaboratively as a professional community of inquiry (PCI) to examine themes connected to migration and diversity. The paper focuses on the use of text-based drama engagement as a means of uncovering and establishing the key themes of inquiry to be explored collectively by communities of learners. The project was based on the potential of children’s literature to generate themes for critical exploration connected to global migration. By building such collaborative communities of inquiry between schools and universities, we suggest it may be possible to create more sustainable ways forward in terms of meeting the needs of Scotland’s diverse learners and teachers, and in producing new narratives that reflect the growing diversity of our classrooms. Used in this way, dramatic engagement could offer practitioners a crucial point of access into meaningful forms of social action.

Að skapa fjölyngt umhverfi í kennslustofunni fyrir eintyngd og fjölyngd börn í Skotlandi

► Um höfunda ► Efnisorð

Greinin byggir á verkefninu The Sustainable Glasgow 2014-verkefninu Narratives of Social Change: Supporting Sustainable Action through Multiliteracies. Verkefnið leiddi saman teymi fagaðila starfandi í Glasgow. Teymið (PCI) sem samanstóð af kennurum, fólki úr uppeldis og –menntunargeiranum og rannsakendum á sviðinu kannaði þemu í tengslum við búferlaf lutninga og fjölbreytni. Í greininni er horft á hvernig leikræn tjáning var notuð sem viðmið við að leita

¹ Sustainable Glasgow 2014 is a Knowledge Exchange fund run by the University of Glasgow and the City of Glasgow, which aims to develop sustainable projects in a wide variety of fields across the city.

eftir og staðfesta lykilþemu sem markmiðið var að taka til skoðunar af náms-
samfélögunum. Verkefnið var byggt á þeirri hugmynd að nota barnabókmenntir
til að þróa þemu fyrir frekari rýni við að skoða málefni sem tengjast hnattræn-
um búferlaflutningi. Með því að byggja upp samvirkt rannsóknarumhverfi
grunn- og háskóla og skrá frásagnir sem endurspeglar vaxandi margbreytileika í
skólafundum, teljum höfundar að hægt verði að skapa fleiri sjálfbærar leiðir
sem bregðast við þörfum fjölbreyttra nemenda- og kennarahópa í Skotlandi.
Með því að nota leikræna tjáningu og áhrifamikinn texta á þennan hátt, gæti
verið kominn leið fyrir þátttakendur að merkingarbærri félagslegri þátttöku.

The need for such a project

The rationale for the project was grounded in current demographic trends and the subsequent policy responses of the Scottish Government, which have undergone significant changes over the past ten years. The most recent statistics on migration to Scotland for 2010/11 showed that it stood around 40,000 (net migration is 23,000) with around half this number settling in Glasgow and Edinburgh (Scottish Government (SG), 2012). These changes in population have been felt across the public sector, especially in housing, health and education. In urban Local Authorities such as Glasgow, approximately 15% of young people use English as an Additional Language (EAL). In contrast the teaching population of Scotland can be characterised by its homogenous nature (SG, 2009; Smyth, Corrigan, McAdam, & Mohamed, 2011). This mismatch highlights the need for research that supports teachers who are required to work within a policy context that 'challenges schools and communities to develop children and young people as responsible citizens who show respect for others; who understand different beliefs and cultures; and who are developing informed, ethical views of complex issues' (Education Scotland, n.d., p. 3). The Promoting Diversity and Equality: Developing Responsible Citizens for 21st Century Scotland policy also emphasises the need for children to know that discrimination is unacceptable and that action is necessary to challenge it.

A recent Liberal Democrat Freedom of Information (FOI) request to Scottish Local Authorities (BBC, 2013) reported that there were more than 1,000 racist incidents in Scottish schools, based on data returned from three quarters of Scotland's local authorities. If this evidence of racism is considered alongside the current discourse of organisations like the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), which positions migration as a problem rather than a historical norm, then it clearly highlights the need for a project that problematises the complex concept of citizenship and supports teachers to not only position themselves against discrimination but to facilitate children to take action against it.

A number of studies from the US have shown that using children's literature alongside critical literacy strategies has enabled children to challenge views on disability (Smith-D'Arezzo, 2003), class withdrawal programmes (Souto-Manning, 2009) and poverty (Short, 2011). The Sustainable Glasgow project is firmly based on the idea that children's literature can offer educators the possibility to invite children to recognise, confront and possibly transform injustice and inequality through social action (Arizpe, Farrell, & McAdam, 2013) and collectively create new narratives that challenge and deconstruct the idea of the world as a place of separate spaces and acknowledge that it has become 'a space of flows' (Castells, 1996, p. 378).

The potential of children's literature

The potential of children's literature can be explained through Sims Bishop's (1997) metaphor of literature as a mirror, window and door. As a mirror, diverse children's literature can allow children to see representations of themselves and thus develop/

explore expressions of their own identity. Children can use the literature to make inter-textual connections with other texts and the texts of their own lived experience, enabling them to connect the present to the past (Gough, 1998). As a window, children's literature can also allow the reader to see alternative and possible worlds (Kornfeld & Prothro, 2005). Children can begin to compare what they see out of the window with what they see in the mirror, contrasting their own value systems with those portrayed in the literature (Meek, 1988) as a means of developing and questioning their own belief systems. Sleeter and Grant (2002) argue that this ability to see beyond themselves is the beginning of practicing democracy and provides pathways towards an expanded understanding of citizenship. As a doorway, children's literature can help readers to cross thresholds in their thinking by enabling them to confront and engage with binaries such as truth and falsehoods, trust and betrayal (Meek, 1988, p. 29). Once across the threshold, social action may be possible (Short 2011) allowing readers to become active citizens in the world (Nieto, 2009, p. xi).

Teachers need to know how to select and use children's literature so that its potential can be harnessed by schools to develop citizens for the 21st century, but in order for this to happen, teachers require support to critically examine and, according to Bourdieu, change their current "perceptions, appreciations and practices" (as cited in Gennrich & Janks, 2013, p. 457). This brings us to the main aim of this paper, which is to examine how we created a professional community of inquiry and used dramatic engagement to respond to a selected children's literature text on the theme of migration. The dramatic engagement provided the professional community of inquiry with a means of uncovering and establishing key themes that could be explored within the classrooms of the community, but with an emphasis on social action.

Supporting the educators: building a professional community of inquiry

Our reasons for wishing to build a Professional Community of Inquiry were rooted in Graham Donaldson's *Teaching Scotland's Future* report which clearly indicates that professional development should be "powerful, local, collegiate, relevant and sustained" (Donaldson, 2011, p. 9–10) and that a focus should be placed on establishing communities of practice having access to external support that can provide stimulus and challenge. Previous work from Cox (2004) in the U.S. with Faculty Learning Communities has emphasised the purpose of the community as a space/place for considering issues in depth and over an extended period of time. Cox also discussed the need for group members to spend time together in order to reach a point of cohesion in their thinking. Weber and Raphael (2013) have also picked up on the need for cohesion and have defined five key principles for effective professional development, with the first principle being the need for a common vision and goals. They have argued against one-stop workshops in favour of systematic, ongoing professional learning, which can allow teachers to engage in practice-based inquiry over an extended period of time. Freire's (1996) more philosophical stance has been expressed practically through his advice on using 'culture circles' as iterative spaces for individuals to rethink their assumptions into actions that mean change. Within these 'culture circles' the facilitators immerse themselves in the life and practices of the community (Freire, 1996) and hold regular meetings to document the 'generative themes'. The themes that emerge can then be used to generate educational content that continues to problematise the themes and open them up for further dialogue. We felt that establishing these patterns of iterative problematisation lay at the heart of what we wanted to achieve and that responding to children's literature through dramatic engagement could allow for the examination of key themes related to injustice, inequality and diversity.

To initiate the community, we worked in collaboration with the EAL Service and the International Office to invite a diverse group of teachers from Glasgow City Council to join the project. After sharing our aims and expectations, we invited them to begin the journey by attending a series of workshops based on the Sims Bishop metaphor of mirrors, windows and doors. The first workshop was called 'Orientation and Artefacts of Diversity' and built on Miller's (2008) work in cultural studies, which describes how objects can act as anchors in people's lives, how people tell stories about objects in their homes, and more importantly, how these objects are expressions of people's identity. As a group, we all brought in artefacts from our homes and used them to share our stories; through this storytelling we began to know each other and recognise the cultural diversity of the group in terms of age, sex, nationality and teaching experience. This was an important way for us to begin the process of building trust, creating a common vision and reaching a collective understanding that diversity takes many forms. We also examined the ways in which the movement of artefacts across borders often features heavily in children's literature about migration and diversity.

The value of collaborative dramatic engagement

The focus of this paper is the second workshop, which we called 'Texts as Mirrors, Windows and Doors: Extending the Metaphor using Drama'. This workshop provided participants with a space to experience emotions related to themselves and 'Others' while exploring themes of migration, culture and identity. The theoretical justification for the use of drama in the workshop stems from the work of Boal (2008), the Brazilian director and founder of Theatre of the Oppressed, who views theatre as being interactive and participatory and compares the experience of a theatre performance to the acquisition of a new language. The notion of linking performance to the acquisition of a new language can be illuminated when we consider Perry and Medina's (2011) understanding of the body as a text, but also as the tool that can allow the creation of a new text. Taking this semiotic view of the body means the body can be viewed as a place of learning (Boal, 2008; Perry & Medina, 2011), giving rise to the view that using the body in drama engagements can have the potential to produce new discourses (Medina, 2004).

In our second workshop, collaborative dramatic engagement (Medina, 2004) was created in response to a pretext (O'Neill, 1985), which in this case, was the wordless graphic novel *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan. In the narrative, the main protagonist arrives in a strange city with nothing more than a suitcase and has to find shelter, food and a future for his family while negotiating his way through and around the barriers caused by vast cultural and linguistic differences. Tan (2012, p. 22) created the visual text by juxtaposing 'the familiar or normal with the exotic or weird', producing a text that draws us all into a world that looks familiar yet strange. The central character survives his journey and thrives thanks to acts of kindness by understanding empathetic strangers that are met through a series of sub-plots. The text presents the possibility for any reader to make meaning of the narrative as a series of intertextual mirroring opportunities related to events and actions in their own lives as well as window-like opportunities to empathize with the characters encountered.

The book has the potential to generate many themes connected to migration and could have formed the basis of a workshop in its own right, yet we wished to move beyond a verbal response to the text and make use of the view that an embodied response could recreate and recontextualise knowledge (Medina & Perry, 2014). By applying semiotic terms to embodiment, the dramatic response to the pretext can be viewed as a discourse of the body, and as such would hold the possibility of allowing creative responses with the potential to challenge the norms, practices and symbols normally inscribed in the body. The process of dramatic engagement allows the text to be looked at from multiple per-

spectives (Sumara, 2002) and as the participants work together to perform a socially constructed interpretation of the pretext, they bring their social and cultural experience to the shared experience, creating the generative themes through their actions and representations. Using the body in drama engagements allows for the creation of new texts that can be critically examined, leading to enhanced understandings of previously examined themes and the creation of an impetus for social action.

Boal (2008) noted this when he wrote of the way in which spectators become spect-actors who both observe and intervene in the dramatic action by offering solutions and plans to take the narrative events forward. This Boalian approach has clear parallels with this project's aims to promote both critical reflection and social action. Our hope was that participating in this workshop would prepare the professional community of inquirers to select texts that examined the generated themes in more detail, which would in turn promote social action in their classrooms.

The dramatic engagement

Before the workshop started, participants were given some information about Boalian theatre, including why we were using it. The teachers were told that, upon entering the drama studio as a group, they would enter the drama world of a newly arrived teaching/academic colleague named Tan, who could not speak any English. The actor, who was dressed to look like the main protagonist in *The Arrival*, was accompanied by a native English speaker - his 'translator' - but she soon admitted that her knowledge of his language was only partial. Carrying a suitcase full of artefacts, the visitor used them to provide information about himself and his area of academic expertise. He encouraged the teachers to share items from their own bags and pockets - including headphones, watches and mobile phone cases - which they explained using mime and gesture. After leading us all in a game - with rules that had to be worked out as the action evolved - Tan drew a complex series of diagrams on a whiteboard in order to explain his academic work. Such was the teachers' level of interaction and engagement during this part of the session that many took to the whiteboard themselves to explain their understandings of his work, using intonation, mime and mark-making to convey their interpretations back to him. At the end of the session, Tan asked the teachers for some practical advice connected to living and working in Glasgow, which again they provided with great interest and enthusiasm.

After the session, we returned to the original meeting room for a discussion of the workshop. The Actor and the Director - now out of character - joined us to explain how and why they had intentionally made it a 'difficult' experience for the teachers, with a particular focus on how their use of a random, nonsensical language throughout the dramatic engagement effectively put the participants in the position of a newly arrived non-English speaker because it prevented them from finding a 'way in' to the language via common words or phrases. After reflecting on the sense of frustration this had caused some of the participants, especially those with knowledge of other languages and/or EAL experience, together we began to explore how the session had raised other issues that resonated with the teachers' personal experiences of working with newly arrived children in Glasgow's classrooms.

Methodology, data collection and analysis

Our decision to use drama reflects an interest in narrative inquiry methodology, which views "research as a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). Narrative inquirers privilege storytelling and take the ontological view that storytelling is a means of making sense out of experience and generating knowledge

(Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Elliott, 2005). The workshop allowed space for the participants to respond, tell stories and generate themes for discussion. As narrative inquirers, we were interested in specific points of 'affect' generated within the drama engagement as well as the subsequent dialogue and reflection connected to these affective points. These affective moments occur when 'the body comes into contact with other forces' (Medina & Perry, 2004, p. 120) generating emotional reactions and feelings that could lead to "self transcendence" (O'Neill, 1984, p. 159). We viewed these as critical points where the participants entered a dual consciousness and, in doing so, discovered responses within themselves that were unexpected and that challenged or illuminated dominant discourses. Our analysis centered on these critical events, we treated the drama engagement as a multimodal text and looked for interpersonal events between participants that generated strong emotions (laughter, anger, frustration). We watched the video playback of the events, transcribed the dialogue from the critical events and matched these to the points in the transcripts of the post-dramatic engagement reflection to see if the affective moments become process sites for change or the re-writing of hegemonic narratives (Medina & Perry, 2014).

Reactions to the workshop

For the purposes of this paper we have identified two events that occurred within the workshop space that seem to demonstrate how the drama engagement and reflective discussion aided the teachers in examining issues that impact on new arrival children, creating a greater desire within the community of inquiry of the need to take social action and challenge negative actions and discourses surrounding migration.

Event one: Developing intercultural competence

One situation that provoked a significant response was when the character of Tan was seen to reject a participant's offer of support by laughing at a suggestion she had made in an apparently disparaging way. During the drama session, when the teachers were trying to identify the objects and concepts that Tan described, Marina, a secondary specialist, guessed that he might be referring to an ice-cream machine. As Charlotte, another participant noted afterwards, Marina looked crestfallen when Tan laughed unkindly at her comments; she also observed that these negative feelings were visible in Marina's defensive body language. By discussing the negativity created by this situation, the participants were able to make empathic links from Marina's experience to that of a newly arrived child 'trying to find [its] way' in a bewildering new language and culture. By appearing to reject Marina's attempt to connect with his language, Tan's actions caused some of the teachers to reflect on the experiences of the EAL learners in their classrooms and beyond. Noting that all of the participants were teachers with an 'inherent desire to communicate', Jackie said the workshop had made her feel 'quite anxious, because I know that for every couple of people like us...there are handfuls of folk who don't have that patience, don't have that desire to communicate.' Concluding on a practical note, the teachers then considered how the experiences of EAL pupils might be improved if such participatory forms of drama could be used as awareness building tool with a wide range of school staff, so that they too might 'take a step back and feel the frustration.'

Being able to pinpoint and discuss this 'moment of affect' led the group to a clear articulation of the need to be mindful of the cultural funds of knowledge that children bring with them, ensuring that their responses are valued and accepted (Igoa, 1995). The dramatic engagement foregrounded the need to view language learning not just as linguistic mastery, but as the development of intercultural competence (Byram, 1987) with teachers allowing children to function at the borders between languages, negotiating cultural understandings and misunderstandings (Kramsch, 1998) in a positive light.

Event two: Othering

The second event was very brief and occurred near the end of the workshop, as Tan drew pictures of food and asked the group where he could buy it. By this point, Charlie, the director and 'translator', displayed her frustration and her own lack of knowledge about Tan's language by declaring 'I am really sorry about this'. In the post-workshop discussion, Lucia discussed how this fleeting comment by the Director had caused her to experience a range of emotions and thoughts. She explained: 'I was thinking, he is getting all this funding and he has come here and he has not even learned any of the language.' At this point, the actor playing Tan responded to Lucia that she could have 'learned some of my language'. The group responded with laughter, not so much at the actual content, but as a way of expressing relief that Lucia had given voice to such honest thoughts. Flora chimed in, using a voice that was not her own to make it clear that she was parodying an earlier reference to negative comments on migration by a taxi driver: 'He comes over here, he does not even know how to say welcome, you can see where it all starts.'

Lucia was clear that if such a situation was to occur in a school setting between staff and children who had newly arrived, she would normally be very protective of the children, yet here she was surprised to find herself thinking that Tan could have at least learned a couple of words of English. Although she surmised that her reaction could stem from his status as a professional adult, Lucia carefully explained how her reaction could lead to a 'them and us situation...and that in a school situation (this) is the type of thing we try to conscientiously battle against.' Her comments allude to the importance of time to reflect: 'when you are constantly buzzing and not given time to reflect, that is when a lot of negativity starts, it becomes normalised.' Lucia concluded that teachers need to be given time within a busy schedule to reflect on their teaching and learning, to allow them to develop an awareness and recognition of situations where 'othering' occurs. Cousin (2006) suggests that 'otherness' is a threshold concept and crossing the threshold leads to transformation of self because it involves not only an ontological shift but also a conceptual one. The dramatic engagement provided a space for the production of new and hidden discourses (Medina, 2004) and in this affective moment allowed members of the community to engage in 'othering'. In the subsequent 'reflection on action' (Schön, 1984) individuals were able to acknowledge and confront their own identity and actions (McIntyre, 1997) thereby crossing the threshold, or Sims Bishop's door, and develop a collective consciousness of how wider societal discourses position individuals. This became the collective impetus for expressing a need to take social action towards a socially just society.

As these brief examples begin to illustrate, the teachers drew on issues raised by the session to initiate a cycle of emotional response: starting with an acknowledgement of their feelings, the participants attempted to make links to stories from their own lives and concluded by reflecting on what this could mean for the development of their own praxis and classroom practice. We would argue that the Boalian theatre techniques echo the metaphor of the mirror, window and doors, and can create the necessary conditions for emotional responses that may support teachers' crucial first steps towards transforming and re-creating classroom contexts in the interests of social justice (Freire, 1996).

Taking social action

The final part of the paper reports briefly on the ways in which the community built on these powerful and transformative experiences to select children's literature that would allow for a critical examination of the themes emerging from the workshop. The third and final workshop 'Developing Social Action: Planning our Inquiry Journeys' provided a

space for the teachers to plan their classroom inquiries; using children's literature as catalysts for social action and create a set of positive narratives for Glasgow's future.

Members of the community decided to use Tan's *The Arrival*, Weisner's *Mr Wuffles* and Choi's *The Name Jar* to generate themes for inquiry and subsequent action. These carefully crafted texts can be used by teachers to create a 'translocal space for cultural production' (Medina, 2010, p. 40), especially when coupled with collaborative pedagogies that favour social constructivist approaches to reading (McAdam & Arizpe, 2011). The texts invite children to respond intertextually, locating themselves in the mirror and seeing others through the window, thus supporting their journeys into safe spaces where they can further develop critical cultural awareness (Arizpe et al., 2014). Since the paper has already discussed *The Arrival*, this final part will consider two other picturebooks used by participants in their early years' classrooms.

Mr Wuffles

A class of primary 1 learners have been using the award-winning *Mr Wuffles*, by David Wiesner, as a springboard into a project that focuses on how different languages are spoken and represented in their whole school environment. Wiesner's near wordless picturebook describes how a stranded group of tiny aliens team up with a persecuted bunch of ants and ladybirds to escape the claws of Mr Wuffles, a bored domestic cat. Despite the language and cultural barriers between them, the aliens and insects become friends and pull off a daring plan to outwit the cat.

Wiesner's visual text draws attention to the existence of different languages and the importance of non-verbal forms of communication. The pupils have been decoding the aliens' language and plan to use it to communicate with other pupils in the school. In a sense, this project draws directly upon some of the ideas developed in the theatre workshop in that it explores how language can act as a barrier, while simultaneously suggesting ways that such barriers can be overcome. The teacher hopes to use the project to encourage greater whole-school recognition of pupils' linguistic diversity; a focus that will also serve to strengthen home-school links.

The Name Jar

Three primary teachers working with early years children selected *The Name Jar* by Yangsook Choi, published by Dragonfly Books, as part of their Cultural Diversity theme. The picturebook tells the story of Unhei (Yoon-hye), a young Korean girl who moves to the USA and starts a new school. She is worried that the children in her class will not be able to pronounce her name and therefore decides to choose a new name. She asks the class to suggest names and puts them in a jar so that she can pick one for herself. By the end of the story, she declares 'I'm ready to introduce myself' as she shares her Korean name, as well as its meaning (grace) with her class.

This custom of selecting a new name is widely practiced by the families of some new arrival children in Glasgow schools. The three teachers selecting this text are conscious of the practice and have recounted the challenges it can present for the children in the classroom, who often do not respond to the new Westernised names presented to them by their mothers. The teachers prefer not to take a stance on the practice of re-naming children, but want to re-claim the classroom as a multilingual space, so that the concept of words and names in different languages can represent the identities of the children in the class and school (Cummins & Early, 2011).

Conclusion

As authors reflecting on the process of running a professional community of inquiry, we noticed that while expressing a desire to take action to address issues connected to diversity and injustice is a crucial first step, taking social action requires careful thought, patience and time. We would suggest that the dramatic engagement workshop provided a supportive, but transformative space which allowed for a connection between the heart and mind (Perry & Medina, 2011, p. 62) and a clear articulation of themes that could be explored within children's literature-led classroom inquiry projects, while acknowledging that each inquiry developed should meet the authentic needs (Short, 2011) of the children involved. Building collaborative communities of inquiry between schools and universities could offer a sustainable way forward in terms of meeting the needs of Scotland's diverse learners and teachers, producing new narratives that reflect the diversity of our classrooms.

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Key words

collaborative inquiry – children's literature – intercultural competence – social action – drama engagement

Um höfunda

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Efnisorð

samvinnuleitarnám – barnabókmenntir – fjölmenningslæsi – félagslegt framtak – leikræn tjáning til þátttöku í samfélagi



Julie E. McAdam og Jennifer Farrar. (2014).
Narratives of change: Creating a community of inquiry using drama.
Netla – Vef tímarit um uppeldi og menntun: Sérítt 2014 – Diversity in Education: Teachers and Learners.
Menntavísindasvið Háskóla Íslands. Sótt af http://netla.hi.is/serrit/2014/diversity_in_education/006.pdf

[Julie E. McAdam and Jennifer Farrar. (2014).
Narratives of change: Creating a community of inquiry using drama.
Netla – Online Journal on Pedagogy and Education: Special Issue 2014 – Diversity in Education: Teachers and Learners.
University of Iceland – School of Education. Retrieved from http://netla.hi.is/serrit/2014/diversity_in_education/006.pdf]