Children and drama:
Knowing differently

Peter Wright
University of New England, Australia

and

Bjorn Rasmussen
Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Norway

Introduction
The identification and documentation of different ways of knowing is a ‘hot’ topic in educational research. What is at issue is whether there are stable identifiable learning or cognitive styles, and how factors such as gender, development, personality, life-worlds and social culture impact on these abilities. It seems clear to us is that there is indeed a variety of learning media and ways of knowing, and that knowing through the arts, and ‘dramatic knowing’ in particular, has much to offer to the education of our young people. Dramatic knowing is the cultural production of meaning-embedded forms and insights through the use of the human body, symbols, metaphors and the fictional world developed through drama.

What this knowing through the arts does is to reveal what might have been considered previously as ‘unconventional’ or even ‘unintelligent’ ways of knowing. These ways of knowing are based on the ‘situatedness’ of our young people, and include, but certainly are not limited to, such influences as the family, peers, popular culture and indigenous tradition, heritage and
knowledge. Drama as a way of knowing encourages and celebrates lived and imagined experience, emotions, intuition and creativity in their various forms of representation, and recognises and makes sense of those experiences. In this chapter, then, we briefly consider how the processual elements of drama are essential ways of knowing for young people, and describe from our pedagogical experience how an education in drama may develop this powerful way of knowing. We approach this task from four perspectives.

First, we describe different ‘ways of knowing’, and briefly introduce artistic and dramatic ways of knowing, as both accessible and potent – we then describe these ways of knowing in the context of young people as cultural producers. Next, we provide an overview of the role of drama in education, and how the dramatic process facilitates many ways of knowing. Specifically, we consider those elements of drama that are revealing as ways of knowing themselves – highlighting drama as ‘aesthetic knowing’. Third, we consider how the theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner 1983) allows us to think differently about how young people know and negotiate their world. In the light of this reconsideration we then describe drama as linguistic intelligence, embodied knowing and personal intelligence. Fourth, these points are then briefly illuminated through our Australian and Norwegian pedagogical experiences, where young people handled and connected sensuous impressions, emotions, cognitive reflection and bodily movement through the action methods of drama (in) education. These experiences also reflect how drama education contributes to a model of educational partnership and peer teaching. In particular, we claim that dramatic pedagogy is able to provide a site where young people have an authentic voice in the work that they do; parenthetically, a site with great potential for research on young people’s imaginative life and cultural behaviour.

What we argue is that drama as a way of knowing is multimodal and inter-connected. Importantly, drama can be seen to have many elements – including, but not limited to, language and movement which both exist in an aesthetic framework. Furthermore, drama as aesthetic knowing draws on young people’s aesthetic knowledge in their own lives. This knowledge is accessible to young people through popular culture and fine arts, as well as

---

1 ‘Process’ in drama is defined by O’Toole (1992, p. 2) as ‘negotiating and renegotiating the elements of the dramatic form, in terms of the context and purposes of the participants’.
through the aesthetic of everyday life (Drotner 1991; Gullestad 1996). When schooling is able to engage young people through drama as a way of knowing, education becomes more meaningful for those who experience it.

**Ways of knowing**

Traditionally, ways of knowing in our schools have been limited, and have been influenced by a Cartesian–Newtonian worldview and Eurocentric notions of cognition and culture. What this has meant is that all students who are ‘different’ have effectively been excluded from ‘success’ in the education system, and paradoxically those lucky enough to fall under the educational umbrella of white, and middle class, have also missed out. This is because these young people’s self-understanding in relation to others is never fully developed. Importantly, this lack of understanding can be seen as having socially pathological implications and as ultimately destructive. Also, privileging one Eurocentric way of knowing has meant that cultural or traditional ways of knowing have remained as untapped resources.

This narrow world-view has been the basis for much of cognitive science, and has an ethos that is culture-free, mechanistic, objective and quantitative (Steinberg, Kincheloe & Hinchey 1999). Human experience, by critical contrast, is primordially culture-bound, organic, subjective and qualitative (Pickering 1999).

Also influential in re-considering different ways of knowing has been Gardner’s (1983) theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI). This influence is reflected in the popularity of teachers’ reference volumes such as Lazear’s (1991) *Seven ways of knowing: Teaching for multiple intelligences — A handbook for expanding intelligence*. This book is based on the idea of expanding intelligence in the classroom through focusing on a set of techniques that employ each form of MI as a distinctive and significant way of knowing. Artistic ways of knowing, however, are more than just a set of techniques, and the strength of the arts is in their interdisciplinary and inter-connected nature. Villaverde described it this way: ‘The arts requires techniques, emotions, thoughts, a way of seeing, conceptualizing, dialoguing, and acting, all interrelating and never isolated from one another’ (1999, p. 156).
Support for dramatic knowing can be found in a plethora of recent literature (Best 1992; Landy 1993; O’Toole 1992; Witkin 1974). Villaverde (1999, p. 248) for example, in commenting on the rapid changes occurring in society, claims that, ‘Students need more experience in understanding and struggling with modes of being and acting in the world, exploring other ways of knowing’. The imperative behind his remarks is a plea to better help our young people understand how life, and its multidimensional connectedness, resides at the centre of the curriculum. We believe that theatre and dramatic playing, with a focus on life and human events, is also a mode of being and acting in the world and, hence, can also lie at the centre of the curriculum.

In addition, we contend that drama education, with its emphasis on the student as an artistic ‘maker’ and ‘remaker’ (in terms of a hermeneutical spiral), has much to contribute in bridging the gap between young people, popular culture and the school. This is because young people, through drama, draw on their own youth culture. In this sense, young people become active knowers, rather than passive receivers of knowledge (Bohm & Edwards 1991).

The role of drama education
It is clearly understood by arts educators that we have a particular role to play in helping young people come to know their world, and their place in it (Best 1992). Drama education, in particular, has evolved with a strong social and political agenda over the past forty years. This development is clearly reflected in such influential texts such as Development through drama (Way 1967), Drama as a learning medium (Wagner 1976) and Drama as education (Bolton 1984). It is interesting to note how the titles of these three volumes reflect the development of drama education theory and practice over this period – a development that has always been concerned with young people’s ways of knowing.

The influential drama scholar Richard Courtney (1990) has described how this way of knowing happens. First, when we wish to understand the world we dramatise it. That is, we compare the actual world with the fictional one that we create. This comparison provides a point of difference or contrast, and so provides us with new information. What this means is that we use the fictional, or ‘as if’, world to test and inform the real world, and vice versa.
Human beings are able to do this because we operate in our cognitive processes both with the ‘is’ and the ‘as if’. The implication of this process is that the ‘as if’, or fictional, world of drama always has the possibility of the real world, or ‘is’. This possibility lies at the very core of change of understanding. In this way, young people can compare the actual with the fictional, and it is the ‘as if’ of drama in particular that allows us to project and transform what we know, and potentially who we are.

As a form of social practice drama is highly dependent upon both inter- and intra-personal skills – where the intra-personal is concerned with the development of the internal aspects of a person, and the interpersonal with relationships between others. The participant in this practice playfully interacts on many levels; with co-players, presented material, his or her own projected imaginations, specific art forms and cultural (arts) conventions. In short, drama is a complex social art and is given power by its human context.

One of the first things taught to pre-service teachers in our drama education courses in both Australia and Norway is the importance of working with the intra-interpersonal dynamic. For example, knowledge passed between equals takes on a very different character to knowledge passed from a superior to a subordinate, and a dramatic way of knowing implies understanding and experience as both a producer and receiver of knowledge. Drama, in this sense, is a social art.

Implicit in this notion of drama as a social art is the idea of mutuality; that is, we create our knowing reciprocolsy with others. As Courtney highlighted, ‘mutuality is functional’ (1990, p. 23). These socially constructed forms of knowledge are constantly being transformed by dramatic actions – actions that become increasingly more complex as young people mature. The idea of knowledge being transformed by action is supported most recently by the postformalists. Kincheloe (1999, p. 11) and others, for example, have asserted that, ‘the verbal meaning [knowing] learners acquire is shaped by their interpretive activities’ and these interpretative activities are ‘constructed in relation to some form of action’. While these notions challenge traditional thinking in teaching and learning, they are part of various dynamics used in drama. That is, knowing in drama is developed as much by interpreted action (mimesis) as it is by words.
Drama is a form that validates emotions and sensuous experience as sources of information to, and for, the individual – sources, that, until recently, have been discounted in education as ways of knowing (Boler 1999; Hinchey 1999). This notion is also strongly supported by Kincheloe (1999), who provided a broader conception of Aronowitz’s (1988) notion of ‘alternative rationalities’. What this term does, in its expanded form, is to illuminate how drama contributes to young people’s ways of knowing – specifically, an awareness of power in relation to thinking, a sensitivity to sign, symbol and pattern, a mindfulness of the role of emotion and feeling in thinking, and a sensitivity to the role of the (un)conscious in learning. In short, the role of emotion in drama has provided, and continues to provide, a window of opportunity for teachers to develop as an important way of knowing (Ball 1999).

Finally, because drama is based on story, it is immediately understandable as a recognised way of knowing. What is important about this way of knowing is that we are ‘storied’ beings who use story and narrative both as a way to make sense of experience, and to project ourselves into the future. In short, an education in drama not only allows students to explore what they know, and want to know, but also how they came to know it.

**Elements of drama**

When we conceptualise drama as a way of knowing, a number of elements are foregrounded. First, drama requires of its participants a personal involvement. This is because ‘good drama’ contains an element of tension (O’Toole 1992) where participants cannot help but look inwards, and to participate in decision-making that is targeted at the resolution of such tension. Second, drama uses the emotions – not just as means of expression, but also as a source of information. As a consequence of this use of the emotions, drama uses symbol and metaphor to represent what is abstract and difficult to articulate otherwise. Third, drama uses the body – as a tool for investigation, as a source of new knowledge and as a means of representation. Finally, drama bridges the divide between emotion and intellect. This is because drama involves all of the senses, the mind and the body in a way that is interconnected and multidimensional; in short, a Gestalt where two disparate
events are combined into a whole, with the meaning being amplified by the elements of each (Ricouer 1977). In addition, we would like to highlight what the post-structuralist critique of this position offers. That is, that drama as a way of knowing allows us to not only connect disparate items in a holistic way, but also to disconnect or deconstruct given representations and hold a playful attitude to those representations. What this inter/disconnected continuum does is to highlight the multidimensional nature of drama and to provide a space for knowing that is inbetween ourselves, others and things.

**Drama as an aesthetic way of knowing**

Drama, first and foremost, is an aesthetic way of knowing, and the focus of this aesthetic way of knowing is feeling. Courtney (1995, p. 20) described this feeling as balanced between, ‘emotions and moods; intuition, insights and hunches (aspects of cognition); and psychomotor thinking’. It is also important to realise that imagining is crucial to all aesthetic thoughts and action, and that it is felt-meaning connections that makes the aesthetic mode qualitative. In this way, aesthetic learning can occur through a linking of the inner psychic world with the outer world (Best 1992).

The aesthetic component of drama in education fills a number of important roles. First, students are engaged with experiences that take the participants ‘outside’ themselves. What this does is to allow students to move away from the familiar, and to exist in what Greene (1999, p. 10) described as ‘the realm of the possible’. This ability to work imaginatively, in Coleridge’s famous phrase ‘as if’, allows students to view things as though they could be different, and provides them with the opportunity to engage with alternative forms of reality. What is important about this working ‘as if’ is that students get to see many more possibilities and potentialities for meaning. Hence, aesthetic ways of knowing can be seen to work through various ways of ‘standing for’, and these different modes of symbolic and metaphoric thought allow for variation in the student’s world. This variation is important, because when students can see difference they can move out of the uni-dimensional domain of everyday life, and drama is a powerful way of providing that difference.

Finally, drama as aesthetic knowing offers students a provocation to wonder about real and imaginary places, to ask questions about issues of
power and to make meaning through dramatically enhanced ways of knowing by reaching deeper, and seeking more than they already know. It is these attributes, so powerfully developed in drama education, that are a powerful adjunct to the power–knowledge struggles described by Foucault (1970), for whom the role of education is to provide individuals with access to ‘any kind of discourse’ (Foucault 1982 p. 227). Significantly, these attributes are learnable through drama (Kincheloe 1999).

**Multiple intelligences and the dramatic medium**

The conceptualisation of ‘Multi-Intelligences’ (MI) has been influential in theorising about arts education (Gardner 1983; Commonwealth of Australia 1995). This is because, for the first time, arts experiences can be seen to exist within a broader framework than the logocentric frame within which so much of teaching in Western schools occurs. Importantly, what this form of theorising does is raise the possibilities of different forms of experience – experience that is different, not less, than traditional notions of the ‘Three Rs’. It is also clear that when we have an expanded notion of what intelligence or sophisticated thinking involves, and the forms that it takes, we have a better chance of facilitating its development.

The theory of MI conceptualises a number of ‘intelligences’ or ways of knowing about the self and the world. Drama education can be clearly seen to be linked directly to a number of these ‘intelligences’ (language, spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic and inter/intra-personal). The expanded conception of ‘ways of knowing’ has allowed us to reconsider the importance and potential of dramatic knowing as a part of a cultural aesthetic practice. While Gardner’s work can be construed as providing a rationale for instrumental ends for the arts, we would argue that dramatic knowing is a way of knowing in, and of, itself. What is important about drama as a cultural aesthetic practice is that there is recognition that this practice reflects particular cultural locations at specific times in history, and so is situated in the lives that our young people live.

More recently, expanded ways of knowing also has been supported through post-formal thinking in education (Kincheloe 1999; Steinberg, Kincheloe & Hinchey 1999). Kincheloe (1993, p. 125), for example, described post-formal theorising as ‘expand[ing]s the boundaries of what can be labelled...’
sophisticated thinking'. We would contend that drama as a way of knowing explicitly expands the boundary of what is commonly accepted as sophisticated thinking, and in this sense, can be seen to be linked with elements of MI.

Drama as linguistic intelligence

In the framework of post-structuralist cultural theory, drama can be seen as a way of understanding or making meaning. One of the ways that drama does this is both through connecting and disconnecting thought, language in its broadest conception, and action. Importantly, when ways of thinking, communicating and doing are linked, destabilised and relinked, powerful learning occurs. This is because drama combines a number of ways of being and doing in the world. Hence, drama can be seen to be multi-modal. Secondly, drama is a fundamental scheme for linking human actions and events into interrelated aspects of an understandable composite.

Learning can also be conceived of as the ‘making of meaning’, and meaning is constructed most powerfully with others and is mediated through language (in its widest sense). This mediation may occur through the language of narratives and stories. Bruner (1986) described narrative knowing as one of the two basic ways that people know of their world. The second part of this traditional view is that of ‘paradigmatic understanding’. The difference between the two is that paradigmatic understanding seeks to find ‘universals’; that is, conditions that hold across location and time, whereas narrative understanding seeks to understand the part in relation to a Gestalt that is rich and full of meaning. While oral language and drama are intertwined, it is also important to note that narrative knowing is only one way of knowing the world, and that the post-structuralist position suggests that there are no ‘universals’, but rather labile meanings constructed in specific relationships and contexts.

Finally, drama as we conceive of it, is a language in and of itself. A language where words can be replaced by other symbolic actions, such as sound, gesture and movement in space and time.
Drama as embodied knowledge
What is important in drama as kinaesthetic knowing is that the participants can know about themselves and their worlds through their bodies. This is both through the individual's perceptions and the meaning he or she makes of those perceptions. Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 25), for example, described how our experience of physical objects (especially our bodies) and substances provides 'a further basis for understanding' and this understanding can be described as embodied knowledge.

In drama, the whole body is used to communicate reciprocally with others, and as we exist in the world in an embodied way, it is the body that is generative and creates meaning. Speaking, then, can be seen to be a bodily activity that refines preverbal behaviours of communication – such as gesturing. Hence, the bodily experience of the world is the precursor to language and an important way to be in the world.

What an education in drama does, in part, is to educate the body. However, this education is more than just the ability to move, because as Grosz (1994, p. vii) highlighted, 'Bodies have all the explanatory power of minds'. Hence, educating the 'body' is an important component of drama education. This education can be achieved in a number of ways. First, students are taught a range of physical skills that encompasses both the simple and the sophisticated – like juggling – and the potent, such as powerful ways of communicating through gesture. Second, students are taught to use their bodies as centres of perspective, insight, reflection, motivation and agency. Students, therefore, are taught both to listen to, and to be 'in' their bodies, in order for them to express and be able to go 'out' of them. The ability to be centred in oneself not only allows a student to be able to portray someone accurately who is completely different to themselves, but also is an important way for students to know about their world.

Drama as personal intelligence
Drama can also be conceptualised, in part, as personal intelligence. The personal intelligences are described as both inward and outward looking; that is, knowledge and examination of one's own feelings, and the ability to know and examine the behaviour, feelings and motivations of others (Gardner
1983, p. 241). These intelligences include both intra-personal and interper-
sonal. Kincheloe (1999) has provided an insightful commentary on these 
forms of intelligence where he described a sophisticated notion of intraper-
sonal intelligence as the ability of an individual to ‘discriminate [between 
their] feelings, isolate and define them, and to employ them as a means of 
comprehending and shaping one’s behavior’ (p. 315).

Interpersonal intelligence, by way of contrast, Kincheloe went on to say, 
is ‘outward looking’, and allows an individual to ‘deconstruct intentions and 
motivations [of others], even when they have been hidden, and to operate 
effectively on the basis of such analysis’ (p. 316). What is important to realise 
about this intra/interpersonal ability is that each one is a facet of the same 
construct, and in this sense, cannot be usefully separated from each other. In 
addition, development of one facilitates development of the other. What 
drama as a way of knowing does in relation to personal intelligence, then, is 
both to provide skill and to empower students to name, interrogate and 
describe, and ultimately understand, ‘symbolically ambiguous and highly 
diverse forms of feelings’ (Kincheloe 1999, p. 315); that is consciousness and 
awareness. This ability lies at the core of drama education.

An Australian and Norwegian experience
In a previous study by Wright (1996), a drama program was conducted with 
five classes of Years 5 and 6 students (eleven- and twelve-year-olds) in north-
western regional New South Wales. In this program students were taught 
a variety of drama skills relating to social interaction, expression and movement. 
They were then ‘enrolled’ in a series of whole-group improvisations with the 
teacher also being ‘in role’. These improvisations, now called ‘Process Drama’ 
(Haseman 1991), explored a series of scenarios suggested by the students and 
based on issues that were of concern to them. These scenarios included 
a series of process dramas based on such issues as a local environmental topic, 
problems with friends and bullying at school, and difficulties at home. 
Furthermore, each session was designed so that all students participated in 
each of the essential elements of a good drama lesson – imagination, enactment 
and reflection.
What happened in these process dramas was that students drew on their previous experiences that included a range of aesthetic experiences of their everyday worlds. These experiences were then framed by and through the dramatic framework using language, movement and inter/intra-personal skills. This aesthetic framework offered students perspective, a means whereby enquiry could be made, experiences examined, and meaning revealed. In short, the drama program fulfilled many of the functions of art. Furthermore, this program, and drama education more generally, valued students’ contributions and their affective lives.

A similar drama program for sixteen- to eighteen-year-olds has been run in Norway as an action research project since 1996 (Rasmussen & Khachik 2000). In this program, drama was conceived as a way to support an increasing population of ‘school-tired’ teenagers who displayed such characteristics as arriving late at school, shirking, tiredness, indolence or disorder, low self-esteem and low academic achievement. The role-playing practice that was at the core of this program was not part of the usual arts education program in the participating schools, but rather was designed to fit within an educational program that supported students and teachers generally. One important aim of the project was to give young people a forum within which to express themselves, and to give shape and form to young students’ learning experiences through provision of dramatic fiction in a safe and tolerant environment. Overall, it was important to help the students regain the motivation to learn by reconnecting their experiences from discrete social arenas and enabling them to recover a greater level of control in their own lives.

The results of this project indicated that these students increased their motivation to learn and lessened their feelings of alienation as a result of the role-playing program. This increase could be attributed to the role-playing where students both expressed and created understanding relevant to their own learning through the act of playing, negotiation and discussion, both in and out of role. Importantly, students’ personal contribution from their own life-worlds seemed vital to their increased motivation, awareness and concentration. Students, therefore, are encouraged to stage, share and reflect their own personal positive attributes in a safe dramatic context, and hence reconnect such roles and attributes across disparate social arenas.
Educational partnership and an authentic voice

Process drama is a form of drama education where students have both status and voice. The students have status because the ‘teacher’ is a joint investigator and creator within the dramatic frame, and the teacher often chooses a low-status role within the drama, specifically in order to empower the students. The students also have an authentic voice because the work is built from their ideas and concerns, and is based on experiences from their everyday life. In this way, drama offers an aesthetic frame within which students can explore, investigate and seek to understand their world and their place within it.

Conclusion

Drama is a way of knowing that is cogent and powerful. This is because drama contains elements of language, the body, emotions, intellect, context and imagination. What is unique about this way of knowing is that drama is concerned with what it is to be human in a holistic way, the development of the affective domain and the development of what Ball (1999) calls the ‘community dimension’ (p. 30). This community dimension is more than using our multicultural society as an educational resource, but also is effective in removing some of the binary opposites such as ‘them’ and ‘us’. In this way, education can be seen as a life-long process where young people’s voices not only make sense of their experience, but also where their experience informs their voices. We will then be moving closer to Villaverde’s (1999, p. 254) proposition that ‘both teacher and student become active researchers of their experience in and out of schools’.

REFERENCES


