

11/09 – the Space in our Hearts

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JONOTHAN NEELANDS

Warwick University, UK



A new age?

Until recently it was difficult to try and talk seriously to policy makers about humanising concepts such as the imagination, creativity and the necessity of art. Throughout the post-industrial world policy makers have focussed our attention on the idea of a monolithic, back-to-basics, training, curriculum as being a sufficient education and preparation for our students.

Policy makers have tried to persuade parents, commerce and other powerful constituencies that the greatest challenge we face is not the need to address new cultural, work and career identities, new economies based on communication rather than manufacturing, endemic poverty and the creation of disaffected underclasses. No the real challenge is falling literacy test scores.

In his analysis of the schooling system and educational policy culture in Queensland, Allan Luke creates resonance with the state of education in the state of England.

These are turbulent times for policy making in public education, which must contend, with claims that it is not meeting the extensive and often conflicting expectations of many stakeholders. Some students, particularly in the middle years, appear disaffected with school routine, disengaged from learning and unchallenged by classroom tasks they regard as irrelevant. Managing student behaviour is a major concern. Many teachers are fatigued by waves of reform that they view as failing to address what really matters in schools – support for classroom teaching and learning. New syllabuses include so many mandated outcomes that many teachers are overwhelmed by the apparent scale of what is required.

Media reports criticise schools and teachers for not producing the educational outcomes most valued by parents, employers and the wider community. More external testing of minimum standards in basic skills is usually advocated as the solution. Taken together, these are complex problems for a state educational system – a state system that has begun to act as a social shock absorber for larger social, economic and cultural change and conflict as early as the mid-1970s¹

But of course since 11/09 we are told that we now live in a new age, in a changed world. It seems that we were unprepared for the events of that day – that these events came to me and to others as a shattering surprise. It makes me need to ask what else in this new age I/we may be just as unprepared for.

It makes me wonder about education and whether or not we are busy preparing students for a world that they will in fact be unprepared for. And of course, this feeling that education is preparing students for a world that may no longer exist has been about for some time, certainly before 11/09.

Faced with the challenges of a New World, the idea that improving spelling, handwriting and

1 Luke, A et alia (200) *The New Basics Technical Paper* <http://education.qld.gov.au/corporate/newbasics/html/library.html>

grammatical awareness will be a sufficient preparation or remedy now seems ridiculous. The idea that technology and the mastery of technologies will resolve political, military and economic problems has been turned on its head by the deadly, low-tech assaults on America.

Basic skills may be necessary in education but they are not a sufficient education.

The human imperatives

In his analysis of the structure of Social Dramas, the anthropologist Victor Turner suggested that there were four phases, shared both by personal and social dramas in our lives and also in the structure of much Euro-American theatre.²

These phases are: *estrangement* the drifting apart or alienation of groups or individuals leading to an inevitable *crisis*, such as the Twin Towers tragedy, followed by a period of *redressive actions* to try and put things right which either leads to *re-integration* or *schism*.

We can see this pattern very clearly in the events of 11/09. A growing sense of alienation amongst many of the poorer peoples of the world, a genuine sense of anger about the foreign, environmental and economic policies of the world's remaining super power and a sense of impotence and voicelessness created the foul crucible for terrorism that day.

The important point is that these feelings of helplessness and indignation had been festering for some time before September 11th. We did not recognise them, in time, as potentially lethal world-changing energies, nor apparently did we heed enough the warnings of moderate Islamic and other voices that the poor and dispossessed must be given a voice and a place at the table of the richer nations.

Meanwhile, apparently, we believed that raising standards of literacy and numeracy were our prime problem. Basic skills are necessary, but they are not sufficient.

In Turner's model we are now in a period of redressive actions. Trying to make the world safe again. Whether we come out of this period having achieved re-integration between cultures and peoples at war, or whether it results in a deadly and perpetual schism that will make the world unsafe for our lifetimes and destroy the careful fabric of the multicultural, multiracial, multifaith societies we have worked so long to create, has become the most pressing problem of our age.

The human need for art

In times of crisis we turn to art as a necessary response, When the events in the world are of such magnitude, such horror, such a challenge to our notions of civilisation and culture we are drawn to the explanations of artists as much as to politicians and 'experts'. For a time our newspapers were full of the words of poets, dramatists and other artists – all trying to offer us some human explanation of these shocking events.

Jeanette Winterson wrote of the human efficacy of art in times of social and cultural crisis in her Guardian column:

Art is part of the answer – not as a panacea but because art has a way of going into the hurt place and cleaning it. Some wounds never heal but they need not remain infected...³
.....It is not ineffectual game-playing, it is a way of re-energising people who have been hit hard

2 Luke, A et alia (200) *The New Basics Technical Paper* <http://education.qld.gov.au/corporate/newbasics/html/library.html>

3 Turner, V. (1982) *From Ritual to Theatre*, PAJ Publications; New York

by bewilderment and despair. To understand our lives, and to keep them in context, not unmoored into lonely seas, we need wisdom and truth.....Art can be the creative open space that gives us room to rebuild where there is no steel and glass – the space in our hearts.

Ian McEwan appeared on the front page of the Guardian with these words:

*If the hijackers had been able to imagine themselves into the thoughts and feelings of the passengers, they would have been unable to proceed. It is hard to be cruel once you permit yourself to enter the mind of your victim. **Imagining what it is like to be someone other than yourself is at the core of our humanity. It is the essence of compassion, and it is the beginning of morality.***

The hijackers used fanatical certainty, misplaced religious faith, and dehumanising hatred to purge themselves of the human instinct for empathy. Among their crimes was a failure of the imagination⁴.

Of course McEwan was writing in the immediate heat of those events and with the perspective of time he might now wish to add those foreign policy makers over the last two decades whose imagination could not encompass the thoughts and feelings of the poor and dispossessed of the world. The same foreign policy makers that first stamped 11/09 in the world's memory when they supported Pinochet's act of terrorism against an elected government, which caused 12,000 mostly innocent deaths, on that day in 1973.

He might also wish to include the negative consequences of curriculum reforms which have purged and 'dumbed down' the curriculum of its humanising potential and debased our capacity to imagine. Reforms, which are not intended to produce a 'thought provoking' curriculum, let alone a curriculum that addresses our humanity. The exorcising of 'empathy' from the History National Curriculum for instance, no longer seems so smart.

And of course the events of 11/09 were not a failure of the imagination at all. They were brilliantly, if terribly, imaginative. For the imagination is, as Edward Bond reminds us, morally neutral; it can imagine for good, it can imagine for evil. Nor does education give a child its imagination – the imagination is natural. The cultural choice is whether schooling is designed to feed, nurture, guide and fulfil the humanising and compassionate potential of the imagination.

The human importance of acting

It is at times like this that an apparently soft and marginal subject like drama takes on a more central and urgent place in the curriculum, for a number of vital reasons:

At the heart of all drama and theatre is the opportunity for role-taking - to imagine oneself as the other. To try and find oneself in the other and in so doing to recognise the other in oneself. This is the crucial and irreducible bridge between all forms of drama and theatre work. It is at the core of the legacy of Dorothy Heathcote and it is also the principle aim of actor training at drama schools, for instance:

A growing ability to analyse text and character and to inhabit it, and to transform into a being other than the self.

There is also a commonality of understanding in DiE and professional training about the personal and social benefits to students of 'acting' – imagining and behaving as the 'other'.

A growth of physical and mental confidence and freedom, enabling the student to embrace the extremes of character and convention that may be encountered in the course of training, and in a professional career⁵.

⁴ Guardian page 9-13/11/01

⁵ Guardian page 1 - 15/9 01

Many of our students can have an impoverished and limited sense of 'self' and 'other'. Their range of possible selves is often limited to who they have been told they are by others. Their range of possible 'others' is often similarly based on what they have been told, or shown, of others which in turn may contain prejudicial, stereotyped, distorted images of the other. Through role taking students may discover a more complex sense of other, they may also discover a more complex range of selves or multiple subjectivities that now includes, as the result of their role taking, a confident self, a powerful self, a risk taking self, a compassionate self.

Students can learn and un-learn through the processes of constructing 'others'. Acting provides the space for students to re-imagine and extend their 'multiple subjectivities' – their possible and potential public and private 'selves'. The process of acting requires the 'actor' to re-frame himself or herself as the 'other'.

Creating a 'character' includes finding oneself in the 'other' – what-if? – finding the 'other' in oneself – behaving 'as-if'. The space of possible 'others' extends to include oneself. The boundaries between 'self' and 'other' meet and merge – the core of our humanity, the essence of compassion, the beginnings of morality are to be found in our capacity to merge 'self' with 'other'.

Communities in times such as these also need performance as means of collectively grieving, remembering, reaffirming, celebrating, hope. The scale of the human drama we face requires some representation and as so many others have done in my culture and others we turn to drama and to dramatists asking them for new ways of seeing the new world in which we live.



The problem of individual and collective identities

We are born, of course, with an innate and infinite sense of empathy for the 'other'.

Anyone who has had more than one baby in the house will know the truth of this. When one cries they all cry. The baby has not separated itself from others – it believes that it feels sees and thinks the same as all others. It is only over time, that the child begins to see itself as an individual self, which is differentiated from others – to discover that the image in the mirror is an independent being.

Later the child will discover that others may be experiencing quite different emotions and thoughts – the perfectly happy child who sees an adult who is angry and/or sad realises that the adult's emotion are not hers – they are different. And from that point we grow individually whilst learning to try and see things from other points of view and perspectives. We try to 'read' other people's minds, but of course we can only do this culturally.

In a recent experiment into children's developing capacity to 'read minds', psychologists presented young children with a piggy bank full of coins. Then they changed the coins for marbles. The children were asked what a child coming into the room following the coins/marbles switch would think was in the piggy bank. Less 'developed' kids said marbles because they still assumed the 'other' child would know what they knew, more 'developed' kids said coins because as one of them said: "Everyone knows that piggy banks are supposed to have money in them".

To me this is not about reading minds – it's about cultural literacy. The child is acknowledging a shared cultural expectation. In my culture we recognise that people hoard money in plastic pigs! As we grow, we never quite lose that sense of a collective as well as an individual identity. We grow as individuals but we still have a sense of belonging to those who are most like us – those who share and use the same collective cultural and linguistic resources, those whose stories we know and belong to.

We become aware that others are different not just in terms of their individual differences but also in terms of their collective cultural identities and the problem that we have faced and now face with a

dramatic urgency is the problem of building societies that are inclusive of and representative of different collective identities, different cultural, linguistic and narrative resources.

And for our students, this issue is very complex – they are often *between* collective identities of one sort or another – of community, kinship, peer, school, mother and adopted cultures. We cannot continue to essentialise them by gender, class, race or creed identities alone. They come with raw and complex strips of cultural DNA, which demand and seldom receive classroom attention, let alone mediation through the creative processes of the imagination.

The new paradigm

In most theories of change, a crisis such as that precipitated by the Twin Towers massacre demands a shift of paradigm – new ways of thinking, new ways of doing things. In his classical analysis of progress and change in the natural sciences, Thomas Kuhn talked of ‘crisis’ in terms of the failure of orthodox or normal science to address new problems and ideas emerging in the field.⁶

The response of science is to enter into a new period of experimental science in which people seek new means of addressing the complexities of the new problems or the failure of orthodox methods to properly account for phenomena in the natural world. Eventually this period of experimentation will produce new, innovative methods and results, which become the basis of the new paradigm – the next more or less stable period of normal science.

Clearly our ‘unpreparedness’ for the crisis of 11/09 and the failure of orthodox means of detection, diplomacy and military response suggest the need for a new paradigm.

And that will include a radical rethink of what we mean by ‘basics’ in education. The parameters of this new paradigm must now include the need for us to forge a humanising curriculum in which more attention is given to developing compassion, empathy, tolerance, highly developed interpersonal skills and respect for difference.

Of course the ‘basics’ of literacy and numeracy will continue to have a place in the new paradigm. Literacy is the most important weapon in the arsenal that the poor, the dispossessed, the underprivileged can use to transform themselves and the societies that marginalise them. Witness this boy of 14 who has recently been freed from bonded labour in a carpet factory in Pakistan. He sits alone under a tree with a tattered reader and a scrub of paper copying with a pencil end:

**If you are illiterate everyone can cheat you,
if you re literate no-one can**

And this emancipatory theme echoes through the testimonies and struggles of the dispossessed. In African-American literature and in the writings of



others who have languished under various forms of oppression there is the same fierce demand for an emancipatory education based on a demand for access to the linguistic and literary tools and weapons of the oppressors.

It has been my privilege to spend some time this year in so-called developing societies.

In Pakistan for instance, there is a real awareness that emancipation can only be achieved through universal literacy. But these literacy programmes are not narrowly defined in terms of technical competencies and measurable but limited outcomes. No, they are from the outset tied to a vision of a fairer, progressive society. This diagram for instance has been produced by an NGO named INSAN.

It clearly places literacy as a first goal for education not as its end result. Literacy is seen as the foundation for building a 'pro-human' society in which all citizens can participate regardless of gender, caste and difference through virtue of their universal education.

In this new curriculum, concepts such as imagination and creativity will not be seen as 'soft' concepts but as core concepts. Core concepts that may lead to more creative and imaginative responses to the way in which we organise ourselves socially, economically, environmentally, and militarily.

What 11/09 has taught us all is that the old methods, the old beliefs, the old paths are no longer sufficient to the day.



The new basics

As well as foregrounding the centrality of empathetic imagination, creativity and art, these events also suggest a radical re-think of what we mean by the *basics* in education generally. Remember Allan Luke wrote these words some time before 11/09:

The new work order involves not only skills in high-tech and print literacy, but also skills in verbal face-to-face social relations and public self-presentation, problem identification and solution, collaborative and group capacity and so forth. These are the New Basics, and they extend considerably beyond traditional versions of the '3Rs'.

In this regard, the curriculum challenge is not just preparing people to learn with and learn through new technologies. It is also about preparing people to deal with the cultural and community changes that flow from their use. New technologies, globalised economies and communications media will require:

- *new skills and knowledges for dealing constructively with rapid community change;*
- *new forms of cultural and social identity;*
- *the blending and reshaping of cultural traditions;*
- *exercising new rights and responsibilities of citizenship and civic participation;*
- *communication across diversity and difference of culture, gender and background.*

At the heart of Luke's project is a focus on improving the quality of pedagogy rather than the quantity of outcomes and assessment points. He argues, and is implementing in Queensland, a future orientated, humanising curriculum which focuses on four clusters of *productive pedagogic practices*:

- *Intellectual quality:* are students thinking, talking meaningfully and responding to their learning?
- *Relevance:* is learning made relevant to the world and its problems and to the students' lived and imagined experience of the world?
- *Student support:* are students personally and socially supported and supportive?

- *Recognition of Difference:* are different ideas about the world and who and why we are given sufficient attention?



Following Basil Bernstein, Luke seeks to reclaim pedagogy as one of the three principle message systems of schooling, which includes curriculum and assessment. In England, of course, we remain obsessed with curriculum and assessment at the expense of pedagogy. There is virtually no discussion of pedagogy beyond the ‘official’ advocations of single method literacy teaching for all children regardless of their difference.

What does this all mean for us as a community of drama educators? The recent history of drama in education in England at least, now seems to me particularly sad. A decade ago drama was a strong, unique and powerful pedagogy in need of a curriculum and assessment framework. It was a vital and cross-curricular process or method of learning and teaching. Just what is needed now for the future.

Over the last decade, a desperate and uncritical urge to find consensus and to normalise drama so that it appears and becomes as arid as any other official subject has led us to ignore, and not continue, to debate and develop the essential pedagogic principles underpinning the best DiE work.

We now tend to use the term Drama Education, rather than Drama in Education to describe our work in recognition that most of us are more eclectic and inclusive in our choices of genres, styles and methods of drama work. That is a good thing, but the removal of that small word ‘in’ has, I think, distracted us into debating curriculum content and assessment at the expense of focussing on core pedagogic principles and practices – to focus on what drama is rather than what drama does for students.

The events of 11/09 show us that there is still life left in the old contest between subject and method, process and product. The difference between the way we teach may no longer be transparent in curriculum and assessment documents. The difference now is in the way we teach. The way students learn. What the content of their learning is. What the human purposes of our teaching are. Whether we teach a subject or whether we teach the subjects – our students. Whether drama is our priority or whether understanding and contributing to the world is.

In closing I would like to offer a vision of a pedagogic contract for drama teaching and learning. It draws on Luke’s work and on Dewey, Vygotski, Bruner and Friere. We are used to the idea of behavioural contracts, which establish the enabling and safe culture of the drama class, but a pedagogic contract, such as this, may serve as a vital re-affirmation of the basic principles of drama **IN** education. As with so much of my work I’m grateful to the influences of others in preparing this contract and hope that it serves as a confirmation and re-statement of your own values and practices – now in a changed world.

A pedagogic contract for human learning

The deepest impulse was the desire to make learning part of the process of social change – Raymond Williams

The pedagogic context is expressed as the living dynamic generated by locating teaching & learning practices and the lived experience of schooling within a set of *dialectics*

Betwixt and between:*Mindfulness* ←————→ *Playfulness*

- We think about what we do
- We take the human content and context of our work seriously
- We consider how what we learn might change us and who we are becoming
- We are mindful of self, others and the world
- We feel safe to experiment, risk, fail, bend and stretch the rules
- We play with language and other sign-systems to find the new, the unspoken, the fresh voice
- We are creative in the world
- Nothing is 'sacred'

Planned ←————→ *Lived*

- Our local communities have a clear plan or map of where we are going, what we need to learn, how we will be valued
- We are entitled to the knowledge that will give us power
- We are human, with human needs, emotions, fears and dreams
- Our experiences shape our worlds, our learning and our 'becoming'
- Our differences are our strength

Necessary constraint ←————→ *Necessary freedom*

- We work within a community and live within its traditions, codes and rules
- We access and work with culturally powerful genres of communication
- We have structure and structures to grow with
- We are individuals
- We must have choices in our learning
- We are free to change our worlds
- Knowing the 'rules', gives us more choices, greater freedom to be

Imagination ←————→ *Knowledge*

- We imagine what we cannot yet know
- We imagine and re-imagine ourselves and others
- We are free from ideologies that replace the imagination
- Imagining reminds us that we are human
- What we imagine is anchored to what we know
- We realise that what we think we know is often 'imaginary' (cultural)
- We create our own 'map of the world'
- We are changeable and so is the world

Jonathan Neelands
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