A Playwright's Life for Me!

Young children's language and learning through drama

Shelby A. Wolf

A Playwright's Life for Me!

Young children's language and learning through drama

Shelby A. Wolf
University of Colorado at Boulder

A Playwright's Life for Me!

Young children's language and learning through drama

Shelby A. Wolf
University of Colorado at Boulder

Includes bibliographical references. 124 pages

ISBN: 0-7287-1268-7
978-0-7287-1268-3

Foreword

Learning never ends; it just goes on and on. Deluded as we often are into thinking that learning is somehow captured in the weeks, months, or years after instruction or experience, we forget that throughout life, we keep on calling up what we've learned years before. And we keep finding reminders of how our early learning experiences go right on shaping us as we grow older, change roles, and have to know and do more. As the years pass, we understand anew just how much our own achievements depend on innovative approaches to our own learning that emerge as we take the risk of learning from and with others.

This is a volume about keeping on learning—teachers and pupils and artists and researchers together. This line-up of four separate groups may seem to designate four different groups of learners. In fact, here the boundaries among roles is much more fluid as researchers become teachers, teachers become artists, and artists become researchers. Perhaps most important is the fact that pupils in this volume take on all these roles as they learn to create and interpret text dramatically. This role-shifting takes place especially when they find themselves stepping in to help others out in their learning, as well as to ask questions of themselves about their own learning processes and products.

The work reported in this volume began in 2003, when Bexhill Primary School, its headteacher, and several other teachers joined with Creative Partnerships Durham Sunderland to think about language and learning. Theatre Cap-a-Pie, a professional acting company well-known throughout the region, joined in this thinking. Actors Gordon Poad and Mark Labrow represented the company in this first year of work. Linda Nesbitt and Lesley Watson, two Bexhill teachers featured in this volume, joined with the actors and children to create a learning ensemble. The actors came into the school working with large groups of children under the watchful eye of student observers. Linda and Lesley began an after-school Drama Club, giving the students more and more opportunities to enact their ideas, explore movement, language, imagination, and work with props. For eighteen months, actors, pupils, and teachers learned together, and that story is told in Heath & Wolf (2005).

In the 2004-2005 academic year, the acting company stayed with Bexhill to create a new segment of ensemble work, and that

continuing story is told in this volume. The pupils of Linda Nesbitt's Year Two class took on the role of playwright for a script that the adults of Theatre Cap-a-Pie would perform. Roles expanded for adults and young learners alike as did dimensions of collaboration. Inextricably linked together now were trust, respect, artistic integrity, and mutual responsibility.

Imagine what learning would be like if all educators—both those within schools and those in the public realm of the arts—saw these affective and moral qualities as the foundation for learning through enquiry, communication, and reflection. This volume helps us along the way in this kind of imagining. Here we enter into the struggles, challenges, conversations, and commitment of adults and primary-age learners working together to ensure that these affective, emotional, and social components pulsed through all that the ensemble did.

Shelby Wolf leads us from imagining-if into knowing-that. Working as researcher from the beginning venture of Bexhill in 2003, Shelby sustained her role as insider-outsider, asking questions and working in the spirit of design experiments in which researchers help practitioners bring to fruition theories based on prior research. Throughout this volume (and that of 2005 noted above), the power of questions reverberates in the voices of the children, as well as those of Linda, Lesley, Gordon, Mark, and Shelby. Yet something quite curious happens as backdrop to all this questioning. Language weaves inextricably with vision. The most common questions are: "what are you seeing?" "how does that match the picture in your mind?" "what's your view of what should happen in this scene?"

Actors Gordon and Mark came to talk more and more of the need for the children and teachers to have time to "look over" how the actors were playing from the playscript that the children wrote. The actors and teachers closely observed how the children interacted with the props. The children came to realise that the words in their playscript had to be carried in large part by the gestures, facial expressions, and body stances of the actors. Finding it difficult to tell the actors "how" to play the words they had written, the children enacted, explained, corrected, and expanded so as to portray attitudes, humour, and intentions they had thought but not written into their text. They modified their text in accordance with the addition of characters, props, and puppetry. Complex

negotiations had to pair with patient demonstration of facial expressions and body movements, along with exploration of textual modifications.

Shelby Wolf's volume reflects innovation in the moment and into the future. Of the learning that went into the "playwright's life," we can be sure that ten, fifteen, twenty years hence, all parties will remember something of what they learned. And when asked to describe just what that learning was, all are likely to think of this ensemble's creative endeavor in terms such as innovative, risky, threatening, difficult, highly rewarding, meaningful, valuable, and truly fulfilling.

Learning that stays with us almost always has an "edge" to it—a sense of adventure, a trail unexplored, or an open sea before us. That certain quality of openness that characterises the partnering of drama, actors, researchers, teachers, and pupils comes through research and its accompanying risks. The majority of partnering with the arts comes in one-off, short-term, lesson-based events; young audiences see, enjoy, and soon forget, for they have not themselves been invested, set out to the open sea, or allowed to help plan the voyage and navigate the way. Bexhill Primary School and Creative Partnerships Durham Sunderland chose long-term investment and the guaranteed return that sustained research provides.

Shelby's presence at Bexhill carried several dividends. Foremost were her roles as enquiry colleague with both teachers and actors and as outlet for children's accounts of their experiences as playwrights and as dramatic coaches throughout the production of their play. Moreover, Shelby provided the facts and figures for the school and Creative Partnerships that told the full story of learning instilled through affective engagement, language development, sustained involvement in a long-term project, and experience playing multiple roles beyond that of "pupil" or "child." Policymakers and funders have the right to ask of their investment in the arts in schools: "How has learning increased? What is the value added from funds used to bring artists and other creative learners into schools? How extensive and long-term are pay-offs from the investment? Is this innovation giving good return for money invested?" Only by having a researcher on-site playing the insider-outsider role, moving in close and stepping back, can these kinds of questions have trustworthy answers.

Education research, too often thought to be of interest primarily to scholars in universities, provides the outside eye that informs those at the centre—teachers, actors, and policymakers. Education researchers look at all types of innovations: new alliances formed for the sake of creativity; key integrative additions, such as the arts; or inventive ways of bringing community and school together. The ways of seeing and lenses of interpretation education researchers use have been created and honed through theories of learning and of human development. Researchers thus cut through the well-intentioned hopes and sheer advocacy that lie behind certain policies and practices. The job of research is to tell the public and professional educators alike what is really going on in practices initiated through certain policies. Without such inside knowledge, neither parents and teachers nor policymakers can know where policies for improving the education of children have taken young learners or where new paths from these policies will lead.

All sensible risk-takers and innovators build, of course, with goals in mind. Creative Partnerships has from its beginnings sought to prepare young people to think and act creatively and with responsibility for their own future learning and that of the nation. Enterprise, entrepreneurship, and creative industries should and will result in the years to come from creative partnerships that reflect commitment to long-term learning. Pupils, teachers, creative partners (such as artists and scientists), and investors take that commitment when they ensure that on-going research monitors what happens in schools and communities involved with long-term creative partnering.

Invention is almost always the product of group intelligence, but it thrives also on looking beyond the usual or expected confines of its own space. Research ensures a long-range vista. Successful innovation that goes beyond the original creative spurt depends upon organisational learning and commitment to dynamic change. To be sure, the goal should always be for all participants the quest for a sense of achievement gained from having done the unique and of having built the new learning on solid foundations. Doing so will forever mean bringing others along in the looking, learning, and reflecting.

Shirley Brice Heath
July 2006

Shirley Brice Heath, Professor at the Watson Institute of International Studies of Brown University, carries out research internationally on the language development of children and young people. She is also Margery Bailey Professor of English and Dramatic Literature and Professor of Linguistics, Emerita, at Stanford University and Visiting Research Professor at Kings College of the University of London. She is the author of *Ways with Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms*, and she is also co-author with Shelby Wolf of *Dramatic Learning in the Primary School* published by Creative Partnerships in 2005. With Brian Street of Kings College, University of London, she has authored *On Ethnography: Approaches to Language and Literacy Research*, to be published in 2007 by Teachers College Columbia University Press.

Introduction

In the opening scene of *Shakespeare in Love,* Phillip Henslowe tries to talk his way out of painful punishment by offering his creditor a share in his theatre's new play—*Romeo and Ethel the Pirate's Daughter*. He explains, "I have a wonderful new play…. It's a new comedy by William Shakespeare…. It's a crowd tickler. Mistaken identities. Ship wreck. Pirate king. A bit with a dog, and love triumphant." In a few short lines, Henslowe summarises the essence of comedy. The trouble is, Shakespeare has yet to write a line.

When Shakespeare meets Christopher Marlowe in a local pub, they discuss his dilemma. As the two playwrights talk, Marlowe offers sage advice including some character tips and a central plot line that will eventually lead Shakespeare away from comedy to one of the most famous tragedies of all time—*Romeo and Juliet.* Still, in these very early days of shaping his play, Shakespeare believes that comedy with a pirate king is sure to please potential audiences.

He's right. Shipwreck, buried treasure, and pirate battles have long stirred the imaginations of both readers and audiences from *Treasure Island* to *Peter Pan* to *Pirates of the Caribbean.* And the image of playwrights putting their heads together over plays is also vivid. Marc Norman and Tom Stoppard (1998) collaborated on the screenplay of *Shakespeare in Love,* so why not Marlowe and Shakespeare? Indeed, some scholars feel that Marlowe helped to pen some of Shakespeare's early plays, though others believe that they were rivals who "circled warily, watching with intense attention, imitating, and then attempting to surpass each other" (Greenblatt, 2004, p. 256). Whether in collaboration or in wary imitation, there are enough links in their work to justify Bakhtin's (1981) famous claim that words come "already populated with the social intentions of others" (p. 300).

Stories also arrive rich with meaning, for the "cauldron of stories" that Tolkien stirred is one that multiple authors dip into as well. For example, in *A Room of One's Own,* Virginia Woolf (1929) explores the role of very early women writers—writing that was not only rare, but also often uncelebrated except by other women readers. She explains:

Without those forerunners, Jane Austen and the Brontës and George Eliot could no more have written than Shakespeare could have written without Marlowe, or Marlowe without Chaucer, or Chaucer without those forgotten poets who paved the ways and tamed the natural savagery of the tongue. For masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice. (p. 65)

Indeed, a recent text by Christopher Booker (2004) begins with an insight from Samuel Johnson: "…how small a quantity of REAL FICTION there is in the world; and that the same images, with very little variation, have served all the authors who have ever written" (p. 1). From his first recognition of this idea, Booker took over 30 years of widely diverse reading to establish his "seven basic plots," though he argues that there is a great deal of overlap in the patterns within these seven. Even more importantly, he stresses what knowledge of these fundamental plots does:

> …the more familiar we become with the nature of these shaping forms and forces lying beneath the surface of stories, pushing them into patterns and directions which are beyond the storyteller's conscious control, the more we find that we are entering a realm to which recognition of the plots themselves proves only to have been the gateway. We are in fact uncovering nothing less than a kind of hidden, universal language: a nucleus of situations and figures which are the very stuff from which stories are made. And once we become acquainted with this symbolic language, and begin to catch something of its extraordinary significance, there is literally no story in the world which cannot then be seen in a new light: because we have come to the heart of what stories are about and why we tell them. (p. 6)

However, coming to this heart is harder when you're six or seven-years-old, without the advantage of 30 plus years of reading. Indeed, for the Year Two children of Bexhill Primary School in Sunderland, the first years of school often mark their first experience with reading, for the mainstream pattern of bedtime story reading has not been a part of their nightly routine (Heath, 1982). Yet, even without extensive experience in reading and story shaping, when the 18 children in Linda Nesbitt's class were asked to write a script for the adults in Theatre Cap-a-Pie to perform, they immediately jumped on board. Their action was all the more appropriate, for they were asked to help write a pirate play!

We're All in This Together, Mate

Before embarking with the children on their journey, however, it would be helpful to talk about Bexhill's experience with drama, particularly with a key theatrical term—*ensemble*. For the last two and a half years, Year Two teacher Linda Nesbitt and her colleague teacher Lesley Watson have been involved in drama in multiple ways—working with a variety of dramatic artists, incorporating drama into their day-to-day curriculum, and running the Year Two Drama Club to study the potential connections between drama and children's language and learning.

The findings from the first year of the study (Heath & Wolf, 2005) revealed strong connections between drama and mental agility. The Bexhill teachers and the actors they worked with emphasised reflection, often marked with a call to the children to "Have a think about it." The talk that resulted included technical vocabulary, attention to detail, problem finding and problem solving through reflective critique, and most importantly, the ability to think and talk as a character might—taking on roles far outside the children's immediate world. Yet drama also offered children and teachers the chance to create worlds together, not just the world on the stage, but social worlds where they could collaboratively choose, create, and critique in a comfortable atmosphere.

In the theatre, such social worlds depend on *ensemble,* which is the spirit of an acting troupe or company. Theatre experts define the sense of ensemble in this way:

> Theatre arts are, by definition, a group undertaking. As opposed to many of the fine arts, where one person can paint a picture or throw a pot, a play requires a playwright to imagine the idea, a director to interpret the words of the playwright to a cast of actors, and a host of technical creators to bring the vision together. By the time even a small play is "put up," a programme is required to give credit to the many people who have had a hand in its creation (Mandell & Wolf, 2003, p. 33).

Constantin Stanislavski (1963), actor and artistic director of the Moscow Art Theatre, would agree. He argues that since the actor "was not alone in producing the play, he is not solely responsible for the work put into it. In such an enterprise one works for all and all for one. There must be mutual responsibility" (p. 57).

Mutual responsibility also lies at the heart of Creative Partnerships, which serves to forge strong links among artists and teachers to provide "children across England with the opportunity to develop creativity in learning and to take part in cultural activities of the highest qualities." In the best of partnerships, teachers and artists become colleagues, collaborating on projects that will encourage creativity based on the expertise of all involved and focused on the children's talents, interests, and needs. But setting off on joint ventures and reaching a destination successfully means forming relationships among children, artists, and teachers that include open and frank discussion, a willingness to negotiate and come to compromise about project planning and final production, and ultimately *trust* that all involved have the children's best interests in mind.

Within the world of the theatre, one of the exercises for helping to create ensemble is the "Trust Fall," in which one player falls backwards into the waiting arms of another. It seems straightforward and yet, like many theatre exercises, it requires complete trust that your partner will be there for you. On an even more metaphorical level, the "Trust Fall" calls on all players to fall into the embrace of the company, defying the distance between figure and ground.

Trusting is an essential part of the theatre, for on the stage actors lose parts of themselves and create new selves in combination with other actors and characters. Even though scenes can be set, rehearsed, even *known,* unpredictability still lurks behind the curtains. A prop that was to be there isn't. An entrance is delayed. A line forgotten. And players cannot "break" the scene and take a moment to recover. They have to carry on. Even when they enter what seems like a freefall, they have to trust that their wits, their training, and certainly their fellow actors on the stage will work to catch them.

In describing the necessity of "working together" Frost and Yarrow (1989) say, "When an improvising actor gets into difficulties, he or she has to *know* that somebody will come to their rescue, and that somebody will take what they are offering and develop it. Every member of the group is responsible for every other." The authors go on to describe a number of theatre games for instilling trust, including a "Trust Circle":

> The group stands in a circle, facing in, shoulders touching. Each member in turn (and all of these exercises include the director or teacher) enters the circle, closes their eyes, relaxes and leans in any direction. The surrounding circle takes the person's weight and passes him or her upright across the circle. The one in the middle has to do precisely nothing; the group takes the weight. The others take responsibility for not letting him or her fall. (p. 105)

Of Roles, Relationships, and Research

The role of research also exists in relationships. Together, with children, teachers, administrators, and artists, I entered the scenes to come and then left these stages to engage in hours of transcription, reflection, and writing about what I observed, what role I played in the ongoing project negotiation, and how certain patterns within the research could be substantiated or challenged by the research participants. Research thus balances in the space between total involvement and distanced observation, a space that E. M. Bruner (1986) clarifies as he reflects on the links between actors and ethnographers:

> Acting appears to be very much like doing ethnography, in that actors cannot just "become" characters, for if they were to forget themselves completely they could no longer act. The actor, then, must be half in and half out, a predicament characterised so well by Thoreau. Ethnographers, too, must be deeply enough involved in the culture to understand it, but uninvolved to the point where they can communicate effectively to their colleagues. Both acting and ethnography are reflexive in the attention given to the self in the en-act-ment. (p. 29)

The self in enactment stresses the performative aspects of both the theatre and research. As researchers enter into a scene, they enter into a performative relationship with those they study. Ordinarily, researchers are thought to separate themselves from the subjects under study, sitting in the back of a classroom or theatre, writing fieldnotes and monitoring technical equipment, maintaining a distance. A parallel idea in the theatre is called 'the fourth wall' —an invisible wall that separates the actors from the audience. But just as actors will sometimes reach through 'the fourth wall', speaking directly to the audience, so researchers will sometimes reach through and join the participants in a study.

As it turns out, the more active the performance, the higher the pay off and the higher the trust—a notion that Clifford Geertz (1979) attests to in his seminal piece "'Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight." He begins this piece by describing the difficulties of

entering into Balinese culture. He and his wife were virtually treated as invisible by the inhabitants of the small village until the auspicious occasion of a police raid on an illegal cockfight. Everyone ran from the authorities, with dust and feathers flying. Geertz explains:

> On the established anthropological principle, 'When in Rome,' my wife and I decided, only slightly less instantaneously than everyone else, that the thing to do was run too.... The next morning the village was a completely different world for us. Not only were we no longer invisible, we were suddenly the center of all attention, the object of a great outpouring of warmth, interest, and most especially, amusement. (pp. 184-185)

Through flight, Geertz and his wife had demonstrated solidarity with the villagers, and their spontaneous and perhaps fear-based decision provided them the kind of access to cultural life they had previously been denied. Still, there is always the danger of going too far. Being the centre of attention may tell you less about your subjects than your own concept of self. If you don't keep one foot out, you might just lose your balance and tip over into a place where no hands are waiting to catch you.

While it's true that a dramatic event can jumpstart a relationship, it more often takes time to trust a researcher. When I first arrived at Bexhill—invited by Creative Partnerships and my research colleague Shirley Brice Heath—it took several months of what Linda, Lesley, Joy Lowther (the Headteacher), and I ultimately came to call "the dance." We danced around multiple questions that seemed to centre on: Who was leading? Who was following? Who might be stepping on whose toes? What were the "real" agendas or dance cards to be filled? And what would happen if one of us fell? All of these questions were made more complex by the fact that I was an American, and it took a leap of faith for the Bexhill faculty to believe that I was there to learn not only from the exemplary teachers I worked with, but also from a government initiative willing to invest myriad resources in children's creativity. Fortunately, over time and conversation, we learned that we could lean on one another, especially since we too shared the Creative Partnerships' goal of working to up the ante on children's language and creative learning.

The same process of earning trust over time was true of my relationship with the artists. Just as with the teachers, I was there to observe and write about their life's work. Armed with a computer for fieldnotes as well as a recording machine for audio-taping their sessions with the children, I was anything but a casual observer. Still, the case of Theatre Cap-a-Pie was a special one, for out of the stream of dramatic artists that flowed in and out of Bexhill—with some successful and some not—the teachers were most favourably impressed with this company of players led by Gordon Poad and Mark Labrow. In addition, I wrote about their interactions with the older Bexhill children during the first year of the study (2003-2004), so we were well into a solid working relationship when the 2004-2005 school year began.

For this part of the study, I visited Bexhill for a total of four three-day visits interspersed throughout the school year, which began with initial project planning meetings with Linda, Lesley, Gordon and Mark and stretched into planning and playwriting with the children, rehearsals, and rewrites. My last visit allowed me to observe a dress rehearsal and the final performance of the play for Linda's children and their parents. During every visit I audio-recorded multiple interactions, including Drama Club sessions led by Linda and Lesley, the children's interactions with Theatre Cap-a-Pie, as well as classroom drama lessons or debriefing sessions led by Linda to ask the children their opinions about how the work was going.

In addition, I conducted interviews with all the adults involved—sometimes in small groups or pairings and sometimes individually—and I interviewed the children as well. I also collected pertinent artifacts, including children's sketches, teachers' plans, actors' scripts, etc. When I returned home from each trip, I transcribed the audiotapes and began my analysis of patterns in both language and learning. With each subsequent trip, I conducted extensive interviews with teachers, artists, and children to 'member check' my initial findings against their understandings.

Because of the expense of travel as well as the fact that I had a "day job" at my university, Linda, Lesley, Gordon, and Mark often audio-recorded their planning sessions in my absence. Beginning a research project for her Master's programme, Lesley tracked Linda's Y2 children's progress in "Community of Enquiry" sessions that focused on the quality of children's questions and their discussion of particular storybooks, and she sent me these transcribed

conversations. Finally, Theatre Cap-a-Pie asked their stage manager, Jessica Tyler, to take notes on their drama sessions with the Y2 children, and Jess sent me detailed summaries, including notes on the children's suggestions for character lines, plot events, and song lyrics. Thus the research includes my own transcripts and fieldnotes as well as summaries and transcripts from the participants themselves, which I analysed for the thematic patterns reported in this piece.

Of Piracy and Playwriting

Pirates are notorious thieves. They've plundered and pillaged their way across history and up to the present day, and whether on the high seas of ancient times or nabbing music off the internet, the term "pirate" is inextricably linked to ill-gotten gain. Still, the sea thieves of old had to follow a code of conduct—often called charters—to maintain discipline and put a stop to disputes on their ships. The rules were drawn up by the crews and concerned how treasure was to be distributed and the need to keep pistols and cutlasses clean and ever at the ready. But there was also a bit of democracy within the system. In fact, in one of the few surviving charters from the crew of the infamous Captain Bartholomew Roberts the first rule stated: "Every man shall have equal vote in affairs of moment" (Konstam, 2002, p. 186).

In creating the pirate play, the children, artists, and teachers worked toward equality as well. Some occasions were more successful than others. Caught up in the affairs of moment, some voices were temporarily silenced. However, the creation of a play from scratch is a long-term endeavour, and over the long haul the equal weight of all voices was heard.

In essence, this piece follows the progression of the Bexhill children and teachers with the players of Theatre Cap-a-Pie as they collaborated on the creation of *The Amazing Adventures of Mary Lou and the Ice Cream Pirates*, an original play which the adult actors in Cap-a-Pie ultimately performed for a variety of audiences, including the young Bexhill playwrights and their parents in a week-long run at their theatre, The Store. Still, when the collaboration began pirates were not even on the horizon.

Indeed, the key focus of the play was quite different in the beginning. Mark and Gordon met with the teachers and Headteacher, Joy Lowther, as well as the Director of Creative Partnerships Durham Sunderland, Lorna Fulton. In their initial presentation, the actors suggested that they would do a series of short scenes that the children would write based on their interpretations of life in their community. Cap-a-Pie had seen a prize-winning play put on by the Victoria Theatre in Ghent entitled *Practice* (2001). A synopsis of the play follows:

[*Practice*] is an intriguing symbiosis of theatre and film that has children imitate or practise an adult life on the screen, and film actors talk with children's voices. Six children act out and lip-sync a black and white silent film that shows an amicable party getting out of hand. Too much drinking leads to a chaotic display of petty concerns. The children are dressed exactly like the adult film actors, and they skillfully say their lines and re-create the film's missing sound effects. Is this the kind of life that awaits them or is it an ironical mimicry of the film?

While Linda, Lesley, and Joy were intrigued by the idea, they were also worried that in creating such scenes the children might cross the line into highly personal stories—stories that might not be appreciated by the adults in their community. Linda explained, "For all our children are very street wise for six and seven-year-olds, I think if the parents actually came to see this production, it could be quite uncomfortable for them... So I think we're going to have to be quite careful with it." Linda made it clear that she didn't have a problem with frank conversations, "But I'm aware that the school's reputation and its place in the community could be in jeopardy if something were taken out of context."

Linda went on to relate a couple of incidents that had occurred in her classroom when her children revealed more personal family issues, and parents subsequently showed up at her door upset that such conversations took place in school. Gordon responded: "The areas you're touching upon are the areas I'm really interested in as an artist. But how do we achieve that without losing the trust of the parents and taking you into areas that are uncomfortable? If you lose the trust of the parents, you lose the school." The discussion moved back and forth among the adults, debating the pros and cons. From the artists' point of view, such uncomfortable areas—though potentially problematic—also contained dramatic promise. And though the teachers were willing to give it a go, they continued to stress caution. Linda summed up her stance, "For you, it's going to be a feather in your cap. It's brilliant. But for us? Don't get me wrong. I'm really all for it. But we work here, and we are still going to be here when you leave." At this point, Lorna Fulton interjected, suggesting that we might be "stuck in a corner" in our conversation. Directly addressing Gordon and Mark, she explained:

You must agree with the teachers about what the parameters actually are. If somebody does start to talk about something which you might think "This is going too far," then the teachers are going to be better qualified in terms of how to deal with that than you are. So it may be the case that when you're exploring different kinds of stories, that the teachers are there to kind of pull it back a bit. If one of the kids starts telling you, "Oh, me dad was battering me mum," that's got to stop. I mean, you've very clearly said "Yes, we're interested in getting a good piece of theatre," but we're not interested in upsetting or *exploiting* children's own experiences.

Lorna's point was well taken by all, and Gordon clearly agreed that any kind of exploitation of children's lives and experiences was "wrong."

Another sticking point was the role of the children as playwrights. Linda and Lesley felt strongly that the children needed to be included in all aspects of the production. Based on his theatrical experience, Gordon stressed that the "point at which the play gets delivered" is usually when the playwright drops out, though sometimes writers do come in to witness and reflect on how their work is being interpreted. Lesley extended Gordon's comment by emphasising the children's need to experience critique. She felt it was essential "for the children to be able to criticise and say, 'Well, that's not the tone I meant.' Or 'You weren't supposed to stand like that.' Because that's what we want them to be aware of." Linda agreed, highlighting how she wanted her children "to be involved every step of the way":

If they were to go out as researchers into the community or if they were to decide on the themes for the scenarios, it's got to be something meaningful for them. It's no good asking them to write about something they're not particularly bothered about or that they've got no experience in. I would envisage that the children would be involved in every step of the process.

Thus, conversations that began with some conflict slowly evolved into compromise, and decisions that seemed set were—over the

course of more conversation—subject to change. While all left the initial meeting in general agreement that the children would create social scenes from their community life and that Cap-a-Pie would perform this play for an audience of *adults*, these initial intentions changed dramatically when the children entered the scene.

Auditioning Pirates

There was one more stipulation set by the teachers in the initial meeting: They wanted the players of Theatre Cap-a-Pie to audition with their children. Although Cap-a-Pie had a history of success with the older children of Bexhill, they had never worked with children so young, and Linda and Lesley wanted to see them in interaction with their six and seven-year-olds before committing to a long-term project. Cap-a-Pie was a bit taken aback by the request, but they agreed to set up three sessions—one in October, one in November, and a final session in December—to allow Linda and Lesley to see them at work with their children. If all went well, they would officially begin the project after the first of the year.

From the very first session, the winds began to change, for the children's interests immediately shifted the direction of the play from serious community issues for an audience of adults to comedy for children. In Linda's summary of the session, she wrote:

> Both Mark and Gordon worked hard to establish a working relationship with the kids, and I have to say that the work proved very successful. The style adopted was light and comic. The language used by Mark and Gordon seemed to me to be pitched at the right level— clear but not patronising and introducing technical vocabulary such as "clocking the audience." The response of the kids was total focus. They changed from the fun, physical warm up to a more focused phase when Gordon explained the children's role in the drama. They were required to make choices of props and had to develop a scenario for the character (Mark). They generated ideas; the actor was their puppet and had to do whatever they decided.

In their prop selection, one of their choices was what kind of hat Mark would wear. They chose a top hat, which Gordon felt was a sure sign of their interest in comedy. He explained that a top hat was typically "high status, but because it was bashed in, it actually made it quite low status, which is classic clown. The clown thinks it's high status, but it is in fact seen as low status."

The children developed a scenario in which Mark's clown-like character wanted to purchase ice cream but had no money. They

leaped that hurdle by suggesting that Mark just use his credit card, but then seemed stumped about where to go with the story. Gordon entered the scene and demanded Mark's ice cream, and the ensuing argument over the dessert allowed the two actors to really cut up, much to the children's delight. In the debrief after the first session, both Mark and Gordon felt that if they followed the children's lead, they were probably going to end up creating a comedy rather than a more serious play about community issues. The teachers agreed.

Linda: I think Joy would be happier with that. Safer ground. But one thing I would ask is from our point of view, we'd like some moral issue to come out of it. I would hope you'd mention what's the important thing to remember from this? And that if you mention it, it is given credence, it's highlighted. And we have something to work with.
Gordon: I'm with you.
Linda: From our point of view, it's fantastic and the language could be brilliant, but there's still something else that the school—
Gordon: /needs./
Linda: /needs./ And I think the moral that comes out of this—
Mark: Whatever that might be.
Linda: Right.
Mark: Because if there's no moral, it wouldn't be theatre. It would be pointless.
Linda: But that you highlight it. You give it credence, and we can then take it on board.

In essence, this discussion highlights the developing collaboration among the adults. Their conversation was marked by affirmations of agreement ("I'm with you." "Right."), overlapping talk ("Needs"), and extensions on each other's ideas ("Because if there's no moral, it wouldn't be theatre.") Rather than stand at odds with one another, they listened well to each other's points of view, and often their views came together into a single vision.

For example, later in the conversation, and with more than a little hesitation in his voice, Gordon brought up his vision for the production: "Because we're trying to translate the kids' ideas and this is crucial— This is a crucial ingredient. That it doesn't— And this

is with the greatest respect for school plays, and I don't want to sound snobby, but I don't want it to look like a school play." Rather than receive his words as an insult, Linda and Lesley both broke into laughter. Linda immediately agreed, "We don't either," and Lesley jokingly added, "We want a guarantee that it won't!" Even though Gordon felt strongly about his point, his pauses, backtracks, and asides show how tentatively he raised the issue. Still, his statement was immediately met with affirmation and even humour, as the teachers stressed that when it came to the professionalism of the production, they were on the same page as the players.

The shift to comedy was also a welcome one for the actors. As a theatre company, they had not done a lot of comedy—particularly comedy that tickled very young children—and they were eager to add these forms to their repertoire. They also felt that following the children's lead was at the heart of Bexhill's goals. As Mark explained: "What's going to make this work is that we're going to take this journey with you and the kids. And we're not going to come in and go, 'This is how you should do it.' 'We're going to go, 'What's the best way of doing this? Let's work it out!'"

Over the course of the next two audition sessions, Gordon and Mark continued to impress the children and the teachers. They introduced them to a number of theatre games. They had the children interact with a variety of props, and then imitated their actions in their own performance. They asked the children to script short scenes and after the players' performance, they asked for the children's critique. They engaged in joint story telling—starting a story and asking the children to fill in missing words, which led to developing plot points. Most importantly, they repeatedly stressed that in creating a play there had to be a problem:

Mark: There's an inciting incident. In most children's stories something goes wrong, something happens to change the direction.
Lesley: And that's what we're always trying to teach them about writing stories, because their stories are all happy. But there's got to be a problem!
Mark: Right. You lose something, then you go on a journey to find it. And then you find it, and it's resolved. You fall out with your friend, and then you go on a journey to get them back. Something happens and takes you off in a different

direction, but then you find your way back to somebody. It's a very simple structure. But for the children to get their heads round that, all this sort of stuff is certainly going to be the creative work. And two characters coming together will make it more interesting, and how they become changed by that experience. As soon as they've got that in their heads then they can start experimenting with different characters, the different shape of things, what could happen, where it could go, and as long as they know it's got to tie up at the end and there's a resolution, we'll have a structure for a play!

Lesley's woes about young children's writing and Mark's extended explanation of the importance of having a problem in a story aligns well with Kenneth Burke's (cited in Bruner, 2002) explanation of the need in any drama for *Trouble with a capital T*: "a story (fictional or actual) requires an Agent who performs an Action to achieve a Goal in a recognisable Setting by the use of certain Means—his dramatistic Pentad…. What drives a story is a misfit between the elements of the Pentad: Trouble" (p. 34).

Think of it in terms of one of the most famous stories for children—*Little Red Riding Hood.* Little Red (the Agent) sets off to visit her grandmother (the Action) and deliver a basket of goodies (the Goal). She must go through the woods (the Setting), and she's got a full list of admonitions from her mother about not talking to strangers or straying from the path to help her get there (the Means). But this would be a very dull story if the wolf did not appear as Trouble with a capital T on the path!

Unlike Booker (2004), Philip Pullman (personal correspondence) believes there are "eleven plots in the world," and Red Riding Hood is one of them. He suggests, *"Little Red Riding Hood*, or *Will you step into my parlour, said the Spider to the Fly?* Or Circe and Odysseus, or *Lolita*, or Iago and Othello, or Richard of Gloucester's seduction of Lady Anne in *Richard III*. It's the story of the seduction of innocence, which might or might not end happily." Without the wolf, there's only innocence, and without trouble, there's really no story at all. If you put it in pirate terms, where would *Peter Pan* be without Captain Hook? Or what would be the draw of *Treasure Island* if Jim Hawkins didn't encounter Long John Silver? If trouble didn't routinely appear on the horizon, stories could hardly set sail.

Yet for children, establishing the trouble in stories is a difficult task. In particular, young children often find it hard to move a story through time (Dyson, 1989), and that difficulty is often linked to a lack of trouble. As Wolf and Gearhart (1994) discovered in their work with early writers, children's first stories usually have only one or two events with little or no conflict ("Once there was a pirate. He sailed on the sea.") Later, as they learn to build a sequence of events, all too often they have events without a problem, a problem without a resolution, or little emotional response from the characters facing the problem. And without a problem, there is little hope for character growth or, as Mark explained, how characters "become *changed"* by their experiences.

Moving beyond the general characteristics of stories, Mark and Gordon were also interested in showing the children the specifics of comedy. In the third session, they brought in "eight extracts of funnies—some Marx brothers, some Laurel and Hardy, some Looney Tune cartoons." They had the children "watch the cartoons and have a quick chat about why they thought they were funny." The children were most impressed by the famous mirror scene in the Marx Brothers' *Duck Soup,* when Harpo imitates Groucho so closely Groucho thinks it's his reflection. They also admired Laurel and Hardy in *The Finishing Touch*—where Stan and Ollie were charged with building a house in a single day. In the debrief following this session, the adults all discussed the science of comedy:

Gordon: The show is likely to have this sort of clowning, of slapstick. And they can see our journey as well, because we haven't earned any business yet, have we? [In the old days, being an accomplished clown who earned his living through comedy meant that he was in "the business."]

Mark: Not really.

Gordon: So they can see our development as well, as we start to learn this business.

Mark: It's all about rhythm and timing, like that rule of three. Do it three times, it's funny. Do it four, do it once, no. Do it three times, it works. Getting them to understand that so that when we're creating, they can go "Why didn't you do that three times?" So that they've got this information bank, these strategies that they can use to create theatre.

Lesley: It's like we've said before, they've got limited experience.

And we've got to give them the experience, before they can create.

Mark: And that's why we didn't just sort of dive into it. I want to get them to the point where they create spontaneously in the early sessions, not really considering how it's put together. But then in the later sessions, they can take a step back and go, "Now we really have to plan this. We can't just keep making stuff up. We have to structure it and work out what comes first and how it works and why." It really is about creating business.

Gordon: The science of comedy, the serious business of comedy.

Linda: They do need the basic structure and they need support, so that they'll become comfortable with it. And then they'll change it and adapt it and do whatever they want with it.

Lesley: And they'll tell you *why* as well.

Gordon: That's the fundamental nature of pedagogy, isn't it?

In the world of story, the rule of three is fundamental (Wolf, 2004). There are three sisters, three questions to be answered, and three nights to be spent spinning straw into gold. Booker (2004) tells us that in stories, the hero or heroine often spends three days alone or wandering. He explains:

> The real point of this emphasis on three is the way it conveys to us, by a kind of symbolic shorthand, just how tortuous and difficult is the process whereby the hero or heroine is working towards their ultimate goal; and how there is only one, correct way for them to thread the path which will eventually lead them to their prize. (p. 232)

In comedy, however, the rule of three is a sequenced set of three lines with the first two in the same category and the third breaking the pattern. Kinde (2005) explains that this structure "sets a pattern like the train coming down the tracks… The first two items in the triplet set the pattern (the 'straight' line) and the third item breaks the pattern (the curve / the twist / the derailment). Breaking the pattern heightens the tension and creates the surprise, usually resulting in laughter." Gordon's point about the science of comedy is well taken here, for comics as well as those who study humour (e.g. Sankey, 1998) have analysed what makes a joke work or fall flat, and the rule of three is an essential part of its success.

An essential part of Cap-a-Pie's initial success at Bexhill was their willingness to learn from the children. As Gordon explained, "We want to learn how to make children's theatre and involve children in the process. It's the first time really that I've worked with children of six and seven. And what better way to learn about what makes them laugh?" The players' success also hinged on their willingness to listen to the teachers—to hear the teachers' suggestions for structure and support and to act on it in their own pedagogy. They also heard the teachers' continuing calls for the children to have opportunities to critique the process as it developed:

Mark: It's just about borrowing from them and them borrowing from us. And at some point making those two things settle into one unified whole. But I think we've got to be honest with them as well. If some things don't work, we've got to be able to talk about it. "It doesn't work because of this." And vice versa. We do some stuff and say, "What do you think of that?" They've got to be honest.

Linda: Well, they'll be fine with that because in my class they do that all the time. They're used to that.

Mark: They're balancing between being creators of theatre and then as an audience. As writers: "No that's not working. That doesn't feel right. That wouldn't happen, would it?" And that honest conversation can happen.

Gordon: We've got to make sure that they have as much time as they can have to look over the balance of our ideas.

These kinds of comments made the teachers feel even more confident that the project could be a good one. Linda, in particular, had been a strong advocate for the adults not to be too interfering in the process: "You have to be realistic about your expectations of the children as well and not be tempted to tweak it. At the end, you'll get to a level you can work with, but you'll have to back off and let them do their work. We need the adults to go alongside them, not to drag them." After this final admonition, they all agreed that the project was a go. Indeed, Lesley laughed and said, "You're off probation!" The auditions were over and the actors were now on board.

Polyphony & Playwriting

Even though the initial auditions were concluded and the actors, teachers, and children seemed in general agreement, it was no guarantee of smooth sailing. Indeed, over the course of the next few months, a number of shifts in direction were needed as storm clouds appeared. And though no one threatened to jump ship, there were times of tension. Still, this is the nature of dialogue—times of agreement and disagreement in infinite variety. Bakhtin (cited in Morson & Emerson, 1990) feels that true dialogue consists of:

> …several interacting consciousnesses, a "plurality" of "unmerged voices." Crucial here is the modifier *unmerged.* These voices cannot be contained within a single consciousness, as in monologism; rather, their separateness is essential to the dialogue. Even when they agree, as they may, they do so from different perspectives and different senses of the world. (pp. 236-237)

Mikhail Bakhtin, a Russian philosopher and literary critic, applied his ideas of dialogue in analysing prose, though Morson and Emerson argue that Bakhtin's analysis ultimately led to a theory of the creative process. Unlike other literary theorists of his time, Bakhtin was not interested in the monologic novel—a novel written by an author who creates and controls his/her characters through a highly structured sequence of events. Instead, he was intrigued with the novels of Dostoevsky, and he argued that Dostoevsky's ability to truly engage in dialogue with his characters made him the first polyphonic author. In a monologic novel, authors have an "essential surplus of *meaning*" (p. 241). They know what's going to happen to whom, when, where, and why. But a polyphonic author has much less ready information. "It is as if the author could pick the hour and room for a dialogic encounter with a character, but once he himself had entered that room, he would have to address the character as an equal" (p. 242).

Morson and Emerson believe that Bakhtin bumped up against two established ideas about the creative process: one, a Romantic view that creativity comes in a flash of inspiration, and two, a formalist view that creativity emerges through careful and reflective

execution—a step-by-step process with the author in control all along the way. Polyphonic creation, on the other hand, "is an open process that seeks 'surprisingness'" (p. 245). Seeking surprise, "Dostoevsky continually went back to already written dialogues, opened them anew, tried to provoke new responses, and so changed their outcomes" (p. 244). Thus, in the novels of Dostoevsky there is always a sense of unfinalisability—a term that was close to Bakhtin's heart, for it suggests "innovation, 'surprisingness,' the genuinely new, openness, potentiality, freedom, and creativity" (pp. 36-37).

Polyphony has remarkable resonance with the kind of playwriting Cap-a-Pie did with the Bexhill children. As Morson and Emerson explain, "In the polyphonic work, we sense the dialogue as it actually unfolded; we sense the author addressing characters like people *'actually present…*and *capable of answering him'*" (p. 246). Because Mark and Gordon were actors and the children put dialogue into their mouths and actions into their bodies, their characters *were* actually present and they *were* capable of answering the children both as characters and as actors.

However, Bakhtin's view of polyphony is not without its critics. Emerson (1997) suggests, "as the most thoughtful Bakhtin scholars now acknowledge, a pure and unalloyed polyphony challenges not just systematic thought but also the very integrity of the personalities it pulls in" (p. 156). If polyphony is always open to surprise and unfinalisability, how will decisions get made and goals accomplished? And in terms of story, what happens to structure and plot? What will the characters actually do and when and *why*? What's the Trouble with a capital T, and how will it be resolved? Emerson explains:

> First, as a rule, Bakhtin does not do beginnings and ends. He only does middles. Wholly committed to process and to the dynamics of response, Bakhtin concerns himself very little with how something *starts* (a personality, a responsibility) or how it might be brought to an effective, well-shaped end. This neglect of genesis and overall indifference to closure left a profound trace on his thought, imparting to his literary readings their strange, aerated, often fragmentary character. (p. 187)

Rather than resonance, this distance from structure and plot suggests dissonance with the work of Cap-a-Pie. They were a theatre company hired to co-write and put on a play. While it's true that they had several months to do it in and that their process allowed for multiple voices to be heard, there were still overarching dates and deadlines to be met, characters to be developed, settings to be staged, and plots to be resolved. While everyone involved was more interested in the process than the product, no one wanted the play to drift about at sea forever. Come hell or high water, everyone agreed that at some point the show must go on.

Thus, the openness and "surprisingness" of polyphony batters up against the very real constraints of putting on a show, and this tension will be seen throughout the pages to come. Still, if we take Morson and Emerson's (1990) extension of Bakhtin's theory of polyphony as a theory of the creative process, this tension will not be as tense as it might sound. In the typical sense, we think of unity in a novel as a clear sequence of events leading in a systematic way to a definitive ending. But in Bakhtin's mind, there was a much higher unity: "In polyphonic works, unity derives from our sense of a specific kind of creative process at work, a process that may itself evolve in unexpected ways as the event of creation proceeds" (p. 258). And that was certainly the case of Cap-a-Pie and the Bexhill children and teachers as they created and put on their play.

Keeping polyphony as a theory of creativity in mind, let's return to pirates. In the first few sessions after the beginning of the year, the play began to take shape. It would be a tale of two brothers who are unsuccessfully trying to sell ice cream on the beach, when a magic bird somehow comes to their aid. In fleshing out the initial components of the play, sometimes an idea would come directly from one of the children. At other times an idea would emerge from a scene the actors had performed. Ideas introduced months before reappeared, and new ideas were dropped for lack of success. For example, in their first session with the Y2 children of Bexhill, Cap-a-Pie had performed a scene of two men fighting over ice cream, and the children brought that beginning of an idea into their present playwriting. They also decided that Mark and Gordon should be brothers, especially since many of the professional comic scenes they had witnessed also featured siblings like the Marx Brothers. The magic bird flew into their play based on another bird from a scene with Mark in the autumn of the year.

The play took a giant step forward when Cap-a-Pie provided multiple opportunities for object theatre—allowing the children to choose particular props to design individual scenes. Of these props, a set of Lego pirate people and a telescope proved to be the most popular, and very soon the children were designing pirate scenes, scanning the horizon through the telescope, taking on swashbuckling stances, and shouting "Argh!" with a vengeance. Their enthusiasm was contagious. Thus the two ice cream-sellers emerged into brothers who in their heart of hearts wanted to be pirates, and the magic bird transformed into a parrot to help them.

Putting Words in a Pirate's Mouth

Writing a play with 18 children, two teachers, and two actors is a far cry from a solitary playwright or a pair of playwrights in collaboration. Still, the sheer numbers have intriguing links to the way real pirate crews worked. Cordingly (1995) explains:

> …pirates operated with very much larger crews. The typical crew of a merchantman [ship] of 100 tons was around twelve men. A pirate ship of similar size would frequently have a crew of eighty or more. The pirates therefore had many more hands to haul on ropes, heave up the anchor, set the sails, work the pumps, load and unload provisions, man the boats, or go ashore for firewood and water. (p. 91)

Unlike the Royal Navy, pirate ships were run as democracies. Captains were elected and could be asked to step down if the crew was not satisfied. Even more importantly, "The crew, and not the captain, decided the destination of each voyage" (p. 96).

Such a democratic view of pirate life, however, does not reveal the tensions behind the decisions, and as I've indicated earlier, such tensions were an inherent part of Cap-a-Pie's work with Bexhill. For example, in Cap-a-Pie's proposal for the project, they indicated the consistent plans for each workshop session: "Mornings will be spent with artists working collaboratively alongside the children. After lunch, the children will return to their classrooms and artists will 'process' the morning's activity and create a short performance that will be performed for the children at the end of the school day." While Linda and Lesley thought the mornings were highly collaborative, they also felt that when the actors "processed" the morning's work on their own, many of the children's ideas were lost. They also worried that even more was lost between workshop sessions. The actors would often leave a session with one plan in mind but return at the next session with a shift in plan, which showed that their processing continued to evolve without the children's input.

In a session in the spring, Gordon and Mark specifically asked the teachers to have the children write about what would happen that would cause the two brothers to argue and split. Linda carefully made

up copies of a pirate's scroll and asked the children to fill their individual scrolls with their ideas, and she scribed the words for children who had difficulty with writing, but no difficulty with thinking up interesting ideas. When the project was completed, Linda prepared to send the children's writing to Gordon, but he said that they had already moved on to other plans. Linda and Lesley explained:

Linda: The two brothers—the Fearless brothers—were together, and the next scene was when they were going to be looking for something, and Gordon asked them to think about "How could they become separated?" And there were basically five different story lines that they came up with. So we wrote them down. Dean came up with a really good idea. They had a pirate ship, and they were arguing over which way to go over the steering wheel, and they crashed onto a rock and they drifted apart. Another was Peter's: One of them had a treasure map and the other one didn't believe that the treasure was actually there, so they had an argument. One went with the treasure map and the other one went elsewhere, and they both actually found treasure. But they weren't happy because they weren't speaking. They weren't friends. And that's why the journey would be to come back to where they started. So the children had very plausible ideas.
Lesley: But Cap-a-Pie had basically decided what they were going to do and didn't want to hear the kids' ideas.
Linda: So I said I'm going to send you a selection of them and I expect to, at some point, see some of the ideas in the next session. And Gordon said, "We'll explore them. We'll only do one or two of the freeze frames we planned, and then we'll incorporate these ideas."

When Cap-a-Pie threatened to take too much control of the "process," the teachers were there to remind them that in making decisions for this play, all hands must be on deck. Still, Gordon's swift capitulation demonstrates Cap-a-Pie's willingness to sacrifice some of their own creative ideas to yield to a more collaborative, and thus a more polyphonic, view of process.

Another tension emerged when the Cap-a-Pie players tended to listen to the more outspoken children, somewhat neglecting the shyest. Both Linda and Lesley were quick to point this out, and they encouraged the players to occasionally group the children so that the strongest voices could be grouped together, effectively separating them from the shyest children who then might actually have a chance to talk. This suggestion highlights the teachers' view that *all* the children should be heard, not just a dominant few, making the conversation even more polyphonic.

Mark and Gordon followed the teachers' suggestions and in their planning for the next session, they not only used the children's written ideas, but they also concentrated on *cooperation* and let the teachers organise the children when they broke into smaller working groups. This focus on cooperation and collaboration came out in a number of different aspects of this critical session—critical because in this session in March, the children would need to commit to whether or not they were really ready to pursue a pirate play.

First, they asked the teachers if they could bring in a musician as well as a fellow actor—Benny Graham—who played the accordion and knew all the old sea shanties. Their choice was a good one for not only was music an integral part of a pirate's life at sea (Cordingly, 1995), but it also played a strong role in pirate plays and movies. From *The Pirates of Penzance* to the famous Disney song "'Yo Ho. Yo Ho. A pirate's life for me" 'for *Pirates of the Caribbean,* music is as strongly linked to pirates as wooden legs, cutlasses, and parrots. As with Cap-a-Pie, the teachers agree to "audition" Benny with the children, and if it worked out well, he too could join the company.

Benny was a hit. Gordon introduced him to the children as a pirate, and charmed, they even said he looked like one! He had a full beard and wore a sailor's navy cap, and he had a boatload of stories about the sailing days of old. Even more important, he stressed to the children that the purpose of singing shanties on a ship was not for entertainment, but for cooperation.

Benny: Shanties were designed for men to work a ship part. And so everybody had to pull on the rope at the same time, otherwise the sails went up that way.
Chorus: [Benny held his arms akimbo, and a loud chorus of laughter erupted].
Benny: Really a bad idea as you can see. You don't want it to go higgledy-piggledy. So the song is to keep everybody in

rhythm while they're doing a job. That's the whole point. The song's not for entertainment by any manner of means. It's simply a matter of keeping men in rhythm while they're working on the ropes or working on pumps or working a capstan bar, a hand-propelled windlass that pulls the anchor up.

Benny taught them a sea shanty called "Donkey Riding"—explaining that sailors often "slept on straw mattresses so the line 'riding on a donkey' referred to a donkey's breakfast." Then Gordon and Mark put the children in groups of three, with one child in the middle playing the capstan with arms outstretched, while the other two pushed on the capstan child's arms to spin him or her in a circle and wind up an imaginary anchor. The children marched in time to Benny's playing and many joined in the chorus: "Way, hey, and away we go. / Donkey riding. Donkey riding. / Way, hey, and away we go. / Riding on a donkey!" Then they paired up to do other sailor's work—pulling on ropes, working the pumps, and staying in rhythm with the song.

Gordon and Mark then asked the teachers to organise the children into three small groups, and the children worked together to demonstrate the ideas of the players. They started out easily with numbers, asking the children to *show* 11 or 17 or 33, and the children lay on the floor and worked together to put themselves in the required number shape. But Gordon soon upped the ante on the task, asking them to stand up and together create a "ship" and "a magic bird," all the while exhorting the children to "really listen and really communicate and help each other."

Then Gordon suggested "The SEA! The SEA!! The entire sea!" In their groups of six, the children cooperated to make the sea, making uniform whooshing sounds of the wind on the sea, undulating together, dipping and diving. Gordon pretended to swim through one sea, while Mark remarked on the ensemble quality of the work: "That's teamwork. That's teamwork!"

Then Mark asked them to form a gang of pirates. Cathy— typically a quiet child— immediately hunkered down, popped one hand over her eye for an eye patch, and contorted her face into a terrible grimace. When Gordon asked the pirates to choose a name, she claimed she was Captain Bossy Boots! Laura—one of the shyest children in Linda's class—decided to be a captured princess, and Richard—calling himself "One-Legged Sam"—immediately

clasped her by the arms, laughing demonically. Laura refused to look afraid, however, and insisted she was a princess, but that she was going to "turn pirate." The entire process was marked by hilarity as the adults commented on the children's choices:

Mark: Come and look at this gang of pirates.
Linda: Oh, my!
Gordon: Vicious! So one by one, say your name.
Mark: In a pirate voice.
Gordon: Your best pirate voice.
John: Blackbeard!
Mark: BLACKBEARD! He's got no beard!
Lesley: He's growing one.
Mark: It's on its way. Peter?
Peter: Arghhhh!
Mark: Who?
Peter: John the pirate.
Gordon: He's so vicious, his teeth are clenched. He's so tough, he can't even open his mouth.
Mark: He's always got it closed, even when he's eating. [Moving to Kate] Okay, pirate, what's your name?
Kate: Cutlass Melee!
Mark: And you?
Eleanor: Stinky Eleanor.
Mark: Everybody go somewhere else in the boat! It's Stinky Eleanor!!

The players consistently elaborated on the children's one to three-word answers, narrating their facial expressions, such as Peter's clenched teeth, as well as dictating an appropriate response to a shipmate's name when they cleared the other pirates away from "Stinky Eleanor."

When they saw some ironic contrast in a child's chosen name with his/her physical countenance, they commented on it. Mark questioned John's choice of Blackbeard, for unlike the infamous pirate who wove black ribbons into his long, black beard, six-year-old John clearly had no facial hair. But then Lesley stepped in to explain: "He's growing one." And the players listened to these cues as well, for Mark immediately proclaimed, "It's on its way."

Still, these very short contributions of the children make it seem that the adults were doing most of the talking. Yet these exercises were only warm-ups to the central work of each session. Stretching the children's language into more expansive directions occurred during the actual scripting of scenes. Gordon and Mark played the parts, but the children determined what they said and did. In creating this session's scene, Gordon and Mark asked the children to stage the argument between the brothers that will eventually separate them. At first, the children's suggestions were stories, rather than specific bits of dialogue that the characters would actually say.

Gordon: So why did they have a fight?
Kate: Because they want the magic bird.
Eleanor: And they're fighting over it.
Carl: I know! Because they were suffering, because they did have a fight. But they went in two different ways, so one got lost. One went on the island to see if there was some treasure. And the other one went on the boat with pirates on it, and they went the other way to get the treasure.
Eleanor: I've a better one. They were fighting, and one let go of the bird. And then he fell into the sea, and he went on a wave. He saw the island and the treasure was abandoned and they couldn't find it, but then they found it at the end.
Mark: Good story.

Mark is right that these attempts could make a good story, but it's clear that in their thinking the children are making huge jumps between scenes, and their scenarios not only leave out details of plot, but also exclude necessary transitions from event to event.

Most importantly, there was no dialogue between characters, and as a result, the actors had to be quite explicit in their calls for direct speech:

Gordon: They're excellent stories. Let's just start with the beginning though. If Mark and I are on stage— [They arranged the children as an audience and went in front of them as if on stage]. What do we do?
Mark: Where do we start?
Carl: You have to talk to him.

Gordon: About what?
Carl: The bird.
Mark: Talking to each other about the bird, but we haven't got a bird.
Gordon: Where's the bird? Is it gone?
Carl: It's gone.
Gordon: So what do I *say*?
Carl: [in angry voice] "You let that bird go!"
Gordon: [Repeating the phrase several times to let Carl decide on the tone. Once Carl decided, Gordon began.] "You let that bird go!"
Carl: "On purpose!"
Gordon: "You let that bird go on purpose!"
Mark: What do I say? Kate?
Kate: You say, "No, I didn't. You did!"
Carl: "No, I didn't. You did, because you were arguing, and you let it go because you were distracting me."
Gordon: "You let that bird go on purpose!"
Mark: "No, I didn't. You did! Because you let it go! Because you were distracting me."

Pushing the children to come up with direct speech exemplifies the polyphonic nature of the scripting. In the Bakhtinian sense, "When polyphonic authors… address their creations not vertically but horizontally, they are designing their characters to know, potentially, as much as authors know. Such authors frequently craft a hero of whom they say: He has to do that, but I do not know why. How might I encourage him to show me his reasons?" (Emerson, 1997, p. 127).

Cap-a-Pie also addressed the children horizontally, for in their scene creations they avoided the vertical imposition of "Here's what the characters will say." Instead, they asked, "What do I say?" Carl seemed to latch onto the idea first, explaining that the actors needed to talk with one another, but the other children in the group soon joined in. Cap-a-Pie's choice to repeat the lines several times allowed the children to reflect on tone as well as to add to their earlier suggestions, such as when Carl added the words "on purpose" to his initial idea. And Carl was also the first to mimic a classmate's suggestion and then stretch it even further into more elaborated talk. He took Kate's response for Mark, but he added the

reasoning behind the action. Still, Gordon felt the need for even more elaboration:

Gordon: How?
Eleanor : Because you were having a real bad fight, so you let the bird go.
Mark: But what do I *say*?
Lauren: "You little minx."
Mark: "You little minx."
Gordon: What do I say back to that?
Kate: "YOU little minx."
Mark: Let's do it again.
Gordon: "You let that bird go on purpose!"
Mark: "No, I didn't. You did, because you were distracting me."
Gordon: "Ha!"
Mark: "You little minx."
Gordon: "YOU little minx!"
Eleanor : Walk away and then say it together.
Gordon: Should we walk away and then come back and say it together?
Carl: Yeah!
Chorus: [The children all began to call out now, telling the actors to do it three times—once each alone, then walk away, come back, and then shout it out together. Gordon and Mark again started from the top.]
Gordon: "You let that bird go on purpose!"
Mark: "No, I didn't. You did, because you were distracting me."
Gordon: "Ha!"
Mark: "You little minx."
Gordon: "YOU little minx." [The two players stormed off in opposite directions, then turned and simultaneously shouted.]
Both: "YOU LITTLE MINX!"
Chorus: [The children broke into spontaneous applause and laughter.]

The children's delight was no doubt linked to the players' earlier explanations and reminders of the comic rule of three, and even though the three lines were the same, having both actors shout the third line together changed an ordinary line into a punch line. And all of this developed in a collaborative way. Lauren came up with the line for Gordon, Kate called on Mark to repeat it, and then Eleanor suggested the final joke. Her suggestion was accepted by all, as the children clamoured for the actors to say the line three times—first alone and then together.

As the scene progressed, the children continued to build off each other's ideas. But they also began to make counter suggestions, listening to their classmates' ideas and offering alternatives:

Mark: But what about this bird?
Lauren: You could say, "I'm going off to find it."
Gordon: "I'm going off to find it." Do I go?
Lauren: Yeah. And then Mark could say, "I bet you I could find it first," and go the other way.
Kate: [speaking to Mark] Or you could stay, and when Gordon goes away to find the bird, you could cry.
Gordon: Shall we try it both ways? There's two ways there. [They played Lauren's version with the two brothers stomping off.]
Mark: Okay, there's one. Now for two. [They played the same scene, but ended with Kate's suggestion for Gordon to stomp away and Mark cry.]
Chorus: Ohhh!
Kate: Poor Orphan.
Gordon: So we've got two routes. "I'm going to go and find that bird."
Kate: [Leaving her crying idea behind] You could say, "Well I found that bird first, and it's mine.
Eleanor: "No, it's not. It's both of ours."
Carl: "No it's not, it's both of ours because we found it together."
Eleanor: Stop copying, Carl!
Mark: No, that's good. He's taken what you've said, and he's adding to it.

The children were learning to separate dialogue from action. Their dialogue was often offered as a hypothetical "You *could* say…" followed by a line of direct speech. Yet even when they used the hypothetical in their calls for action, it was clear that the action was not to be spoken.

Seeing their hypothetical suggestions enacted allowed them to judge the effectiveness of their ideas. Although Kate's suggestion of a crying scene was successful, seeing it staged set her to thinking of yet another alternative. In addition, the immediacy of seeing the actors set their ideas in motion, encouraged the children to respond directly to one another as characters, for when Kate suggested her new idea, Eleanor offered a potential response *in character*. Intriguingly, Carl jumped in and expanded on Eleanor's idea, which caused Eleanor to retaliate with a young child's common claim: "Stop copying!" Thus, there were times when the children confused collaboration with copying, and Cap-a-Pie had to explicitly remind them that building on each other's ideas was a valid way of working.

When the session with the children ended, Cap-a-Pie withdrew to a room to build on the children's ideas. Their own way of working was highly collaborative and ideas zoomed in from every member of the group—Mark, Gordon, Benny, and Jess, the stage manager. While some ideas were offered and then eliminated, others combined with earlier thoughts. They returned repeatedly to the children's suggestion that the brothers break up, but are eventually reunited. Gordon explained: "All of their stories have been about us splitting up or arguing. And they're interested in the idea that we can split up and that we can come back together again. That's something that concerns them—maintaining relationships." Mark agreed, adding: "And some stories that they wrote had us finding treasure and finding out that that wasn't as valuable as our relationship." After much conversation, Jess wrote a summary of the play thus far:

> Two brothers, Orphan and Fierce Face Fierce, are ice-cream sellers that receive an inheritance, which leads them to discover who they are: pirates. Parrot gives them clues and gives them guidance to find each other (clues to find what's *really* important—bird is trained by their grandfather to give them this). They begin by thinking that treasure is important, but go on to find piracy is about much more—brotherhood, solidarity, etc.

In the ensuing conversation, the overlapping nature of Cap-a-Pie's talk is clear:

Gordon: So now we're on to a *Harry Potter* kind of thing. Two brothers are pirates— though they don't know they're pirates—receive an owl.

Chorus: [Laughter].

Gordon: Receive a parrot as something that got left to them in the will—

Mark: From their grandfather. And maybe the parrot just arrived. Like in our first story about Orphan, and he was playing on his flute and this bird just turned up.

Gordon: Perhaps the idea of inheritance. Hmmm. But if that information was sent to them—a box of items was sent to them, so for example, an eye patch, a cutlass—they could put together "What are we? Who has this come from?" They piece it together from being ice cream sellers on the beach: "We don't know much about our parents. I can remember them, but you can't, and that's why we have to call you Orphan." But it's their inheritance that makes them somehow think—

Mark: That they were cut out for this.

Gordon: That they could be cut out for this. You know, "I wondered why we were called Fierce!" It is quite *Harry Potter*, I know. But they have to go out to sea and become pirates, and they're not very good at it—

Mark: And things happen to them.

Gordon: Things happen to them, but all the way the parrot is providing them with—

Mark: Clues.

Gordon: Cryptic clues.

Mark: And really it's about them finding each other. They're arguing, but when the parrot comes into their life he helps them find—

Jess: He gives them guidance.

Mark: Yeah, guidance.

Gordon: Yeah, what the grandfather left behind was what he wanted us to—

Mark: Remember.

Gordon: He's giving us advice.

Mark: And the parrot is giving us clues to find each other.

Gordon: To find what's important. To focus on the real goal of what will give you happiness.

Mark: And they're torn between which way to go. Because adventure and treasure and all those other things are enticing, aren't they? And that's what pirates are all about, obviously. Getting treasure.

Benny: But they have to come full circle. They have to come back to them being happy selling ice cream.

Coming full circle in this conversation meant contributing, suggesting, and building on each other's ideas, even to the point of finishing each other's sentences. Just as the real goal of the play was to move beyond treasure and focus on relationships, the players were also concentrating on their own relationships—to make ample room for everyone's contributions and to keep the children's ideas ever present even when the children were absent.

The players were also interested in how their play connected to Christopher Booker's (2004) text, *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories.* Gordon had recently read the book, and the company discussed how many of these plots applied to their play.

Mark: So how many of these do we think are covered by our story? Or how many would we like to cover with our story?

Gordon: Well, we'd like to have a *Lord of the Rings* thing [which covers all seven of the plots], but we're not going to get that.

Mark: And overcoming the monster is—

Jess: Couldn't that be an emotional monster? A metaphorical monster?

Gordon: Absolutely. Voyage and return is clearly in there.

Mark: The quest we've certainly got.

Gordon: Rags to riches and back to rags. We could do that as well.

Jess: With a different kind of riches.

Chorus: Yes!

The resounding "Yes!" signalled group agreement that they finally had a handle on their play. Not only did they have a series of events, but it connected well to stories that had come before.

They even had an important message to deliver about relationships. When the children returned for their afternoon performance, the players did not perform. Instead, they summarised the basic plot of the play so far and invited the children to contemplate the theme or *meaning* of the play. Still, they were careful to explain that the play could have multiple meanings.

Lauren: I think that they're too good to be pirates, because they're too kind.

Gordon: They're too kind to be pirates.

Richard: They have to learn.

Gordon: They've got to learn *how* to be pirates.

Eleanor: I thought it's all about taking care of people. You've got to know which people you want to talk to and which are baddies.

Gordon: Taking care of each other, knowing who's good and who's bad.

Dean: I think it means that at first their jobs were too hard on them, but then they were able to be ice cream sellers.

Linda: [Elaborating on Dean's idea] They thought they wanted to be pirates, but they realised it was too hard for them, so they wanted to go back to ice cream, to realise what they had.

Gordon: We were thinking that as well. The grass is always greener?

Lesley: Take care what you wish for.

Kate: Take care of yourself and try not to get lost without your brother.

Gordon: Good stuff. Lots of meanings here, aren't there?

Eleanor: Be helpful! You should be loving and kind.

Gordon: That's right. Somebody who hasn't said one yet?

Henry: Don't get in fights with other pirates.

Chorus: [Laughter.]

Gordon: Especially if they're bigger than you. That's good.

Lauren: If you're handling the steering wheel, watch where you're going.

Chorus: [Laughter.]

Mark: I love that!

Richard: If you be nice to other pirates, you'll make friends.

Linda: It's all about treating each other well and relationships.

Treating each other well was also at the centre of this conversation. The adults listened carefully, complimenting the children's ideas as well as extending them. And they accepted all meanings, realising that the riches in the play could be literal as well as metaphorical.

All these conversational features link to the idea of ensemble— where all voices are heard. Yet, there was another notion of ensemble that needed to be voiced, that of mutual responsibility. If the children were satisfied with the play thus far, now it was time to sign on in an official way. In the world of pirates, Cordingly (1995) tells us: "At the start of a voyage, or on the election of a new captain, a set of written articles was drawn up which every member of the ship's company was expected to sign" (p. 96). Cap-a-Pie did not expect the children to sign a contract, but they made the need for commitment clear:

Gordon: Now, I've got a question. Are you happy that we write this play?
Chorus: Yes! Yeah!
Mark: Are you sure?
Chorus: Yes! YEAH!
Mark: Then I want you to take a pirate oath. Put your hands on your hearts and say, "We solemnly promise that this is the play that we want to make. Or we're not to be called pirates ever again!"
Chorus: [The children repeated the oath in stages with growing enthusiasm.]
Mark: Argghh!
Chorus: ARGGHHHHH! [The children repeated the cry and swaggered out of the room in a variety of pirate styles.]

Thus, the children's chorus of cries and stances signalled that the pirate play was now on its way.

The teachers were ready to sign on as well. At the end of the school day they met with Mark and Gordon and agreed that Benny's audition went well, and he should be hired. Linda explained: "He fit in so well. I feel quite happy with that. And the thing is he wasn't patronising. Actually he was quite sophisticated, but they responded well to it." Lesley agreed and added: "I just like his attitude with the kids, and it keeps our focus on the writing because of the song lyrics." They also admired the development of their children's language:

Shelby: Tell me about the children's language development. Are you seeing enough of what you were hoping for?
Linda: Well, I would say yes. Sometimes their language isn't that complex that you can see the difference, but the difference in their confidence, even in the likes of Charlotte and Laura. Charlotte had her hand up. At the beginning of this, you could ask her something, and she'd burst into tears. So their confidence has increased, and their ability to extend their sentences is developing. And the whole atmosphere of when they're together is different. They can work things out. They negotiate with each other now. So they've now got the capability, the techniques, and because their language is developing they can speak to each other rather than resorting to insults and physical violence. They are better at just communicating with each other and solving problems.
Chorus: Yes. Yes.
Mark: Though they need reminders. Today in the session, Eleanor said something: "You have to say this." And Carl went, "Yeah. Yeah. You say…" and he repeated exactly what Eleanor said, but then added more lines onto the end of it. And then Eleanor said, "He's just copying." And I said, "Well, he didn't copy. He just took what you said and then built on it."
Lesley: He valued what you said.
Mark: Yeah! And that's an important thing in drama, accepting something and building on it. Like if you said, "Hello, Mr. Simms." And I responded "I'm not Mr. Simms," then it's dead. So it's accepting that and then building on it. And that's what Carl was doing—copying exactly what somebody said, and then coming up with something coherent to add. He didn't sort of go off on a tangent. It had the same through line.
Linda: I also think they're far more aware of language now because in the past, I've read them stories, and we've done work with quite sophisticated words, and they'll just accept it. But now, they question if there's ever a word they don't know or understand. They'll stop you straight away, so they're obviously far more aware of language.
Mark: In the past when we've gone, "Who knows what this word

means?" They go, "Yeah, yeah, I know," when obviously they don't have a clue. "What does spontaneity mean?" "Yeah, it means when your brother's got his dog—"

Chorus: [Laughter]

Mark: And they just come up with something to stay involved. Whereas today when we asked, "What's the inheritance?" everybody went, "We don't know."

Linda: I think that the big step will be going from their use of language to the uniqueness of language, because they're far more aware of language and they now question everything, especially vocabulary.

For Lesley and Linda, putting words in a pirate's mouth was having definite payoff for their children. But the growth in the children's language did not just come from their sessions with Cap-a-Pie. Though Gordon and Mark were very talented, Linda and Lesley's vast teaching experience made an even stronger contribution to help the children move beyond the *use* to the *uniqueness* of language.

Linda worked with her children five hours a day in her classroom, constantly nudging them to clearer articulation of their thoughts, as well as inviting them to listen well to one another. She continually modelled the value of language—for discussions that included comparison and contrast, shared decision making, the questioning of vocabulary as well as ideas, and the posing of alternative ideas with substantive justification were a hallmark of her pedagogy. Lesley joined her in their once-a-week Drama Club, where they often used Cap-a-Pie exercises, though they more often came up with their own ideas. Lesley also contributed by conducting Community of Enquiry sessions with Linda's children, and the focus of these sessions was also on listening, developing key questions about stories they read together, and building on one another's ideas in shaping potential answers.

As they closed their debrief of this session, Linda mentioned that she had an idea for their upcoming work. Since the children had suggested that the brothers had to learn how to be pirates, she could teach them about job interviews, and they could discuss just what a person would have to know in order to apply for a pirate's position. Gordon loved the idea, and asked if Linda could work on this in her classroom before their next session. Thus, the sparks in

the Cap-a-Pie workshops were definite contributions, but it was the combination of working with talented teachers—who knew well how to fan children's growth in language—that caused the combustion.

Of Pirates and Ministers

The fire of this session spread very quickly. The next day, Linda prepped the children by discussing all the jobs a pirate might do on a ship (swabbing the deck, hauling up the anchor), as well as what they knew about finding jobs in general.

Linda: Do you know how you find jobs? If you needed a job, how would you find out about where the jobs were? So what would I do? Would I just go wander around and hope? That would take a long time. James?

James: Go on the computer.

Linda: Ah, you could go on the computer to a special site where there would be job vacancies? How else? What if you haven't got a computer? Steven?

Simon: Go to the job centre, 'cause I've went with me dad. You go where people work and sit, and you talk with them about the job.

Linda: And do they ask you the sort of jobs that you would like? Do they ask you what you're good at?

Simon: [nods]

Linda: So they might be interested in the sort of skills you've got.

Simon: And what job you want and everything.

Linda: Right. So once they've established what sort of job you want, can they then help you?

Simon: Yeah. By telling you the day and date to go and find the job.

Linda: Right. So we can get on a computer, on a web site. We can go to the job centre. Is there another way?

Jonathan: At college.

Linda: Sometimes at college people advertise jobs. What else?

Richard: You could go to the job centre and you could go on one of them things and you could look on it and see what it is and where it is.

Linda: So do they have a list of jobs that are vacant? Because you can't have a job that somebody else is doing. It's got to be a vacant job. What else?

Cathy: It's like a job book, 'cause some books have got jobs, and you can get a job book and see what jobs are in there.

Linda: A job book. Now I haven't seen one, but that would be great 'cause I can't just go knocking on doors and say "Excuse me, I need a job." Anything else?

Henry: Go up on the crow's nest and look for one.

Linda: Ah, that might be a good idea if I was a pirate or a sailor. I could look for another job on another ship.

Linda's skill with stretching the children's language is evident in this exchange. She encourages them with multiple questions, as well as imagined scenarios that could help them think about job searches. Some of her scenarios, however, helped them eliminate less effective ways of beginning a career: "So what would I do? Would I just wander around and hope? That would take a long time." And later, in response to Cathy's suggestion about looking in a "job book," Linda remarked, "that would be great 'cause I can't just go knocking on doors and say 'Excuse me, I need a job.'"

Her speech is full of positive confirmations of her children's thinking as she repeats their suggestions. Still, she doesn't hesitate to elongate their responses with further questions and comments as well as technical vocabulary appropriate to the topic. For example, when Richard suggested, "You could go to the job centre and you could go on one of them things and you could look on it and see what it is and where it is," Linda responded by suggesting that the job centre might have lists of "'vacant jobs.'". Even when Henry quite seriously made the suggestion that jobs could be found from a ship's crow's nest, rather than chuckle, Linda responded with equal gravity about the possibility.

After this discussion, Cap-a-Pie returned to conduct a short session with the Bexhill children to demonstrate their work for a visiting set of ministers. Hosted by Lorna Fulton (Director of Creative Partnerships Durham Sunderland), the list of guests included Paul Collard (National Director of Creative Partnerships), Sir David Normington, KCB (then Permanent Secretary at the Department for Education and Skills), Sue Street (Permanent Secretary of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport), and Patrick Chapman (Director for Children in Government Office for the North East).

Hosting such an august crew might prove daunting, but it was made even more complex by the fact that it was 'Red Nose Day', and the Bexhill teachers and children were decked out in red with a variety of hats and funny noses. To say the least, spirits were high. Yet, rather than a litany of threatening instructions about behaviour in front of important guests, Theatre Cap-a-Pie's Gordon Poad prepared the children to align their work with the humour inherent to the charity fund-raising day: "There are some visitors, but we'll just do our own thing. Now as it's Red Nose Day, why don't we try and make this scene funny?"

Funny it was. The children and Cap-a-Pie decided on a scene between Benny and Gordon. In character as Fierce Face Fierce, Gordon was applying for a job aboard Benny/Captain Bossy Boots's pirate ship. Based on their earlier conversation with Linda, the children felt that in applying, Gordon would want to demonstrate his shipboard skills—mopping the deck, pulling the ropes—but a few minutes into their session Gordon again emphasised the need for humour:

Gordon: So Captain Bossy Boots has already said, "There's only one rule: You have to listen to me." And I've said, "Yes." How do we make it funny?

Richard: [Entering into character in a loud commanding voice] "We::ll—"

Gordon: Oh, I see, you've got a funny voice on.

Richard: "We::ll, you have to do ONE rule. Listen to me!"

Gordon: So that's how Benny's going to do it? Okay, show me again. Really clearly. On your feet.

Richard: [Stands and with hand on hips, assumes a commanding stance.] "We::ll, there's only ONE rule and that's LISTEN TO ME!"

Gordon: [The entire group of ministers and Gordon break into laughter.] Great stuff!

Having watched some classic comedians at work on the videos Cap-a-Pie brought in during an earlier session, Richard knew that humour could come through intonation, and he imitated the blustering boom of a sea captain, stressing key words of command. When Gordon reminded Richard that there was potential in physicalising a scene, Richard stood tall, puffed his chest out, and jammed his hands on his hips. Thus, the vocal combined with the physical to heighten the humour.

Still, the children felt that the most potential for humour lay in slapstick and encouraged Gordon and Benny to execute the scene with enough silliness to rival the comedies they'd seen. For example, when Gordon admitted that his character had a bit of a hearing problem, especially when it came to orders, the children had Captain Bossy Boots swab out his ears with a mop. When the Captain pretended to insert it in one ear and slide it behind so the mop seemed to emerge from the other ear, the children cheered their approval. Later, they encouraged Gordon to repair a board and retaliate by nailing the Captain's boot to the deck. This series of events was accompanied by cries of outrage as well as clever exchanges of rueful though insincere apologies.

When Gordon reminded the children that the Captain would need to consider this action in light of whether Fierce Face Fierce was ultimately employable, the following exchange ensued:

Gordon: [Gordon hammers the nail into the Captain's foot.] "There you are. All fixed!"
Chorus: It's not!
Gordon: So what's he gonna say?
Cathy: "Stop that, man!"
Gordon: I should think so!
Henry: "You are—"
Jane: "You are— You are— You cannot have a job."
Benny: "No job for you. You cannot have a job."
Kate: Then you run away, and he chases you.
Gordon: Is there anything else to be said? Kate, is there anything else to be said?
Kate: "You're useless at this. You cannot do anything."
Benny: Okay. "You're useless, lad. You can't do anything. You cannot have a job."
Richard: Gordon, I've got another one. "You're not soopable for this place."
Gordon: Not soopable? Not *suitable*! So you're going to get posh with me.
Benny: I'm going to get posh with you. [In character] "Now lad, you're not suitable. There's no job for you." [Points to Gordon] What's he gonna do? He wants a job.
Gordon: Let's see if I can get closer to getting a job here.
Lauren: This is Benny's line: "Unless you get this nail out of my foot."

Benny: "You're just not suitable for this, lad. There's no job for you here except for one thing. Get this nail out of my foot."
Cathy: Gordon! You know, you could have said, "Just give us one more chance."
Gordon: That's a lovely one. Okay. So I'm going to resort to pleading, aren't I? The exact line is what?
Cathy: "Just give us one more chance."
Gordon: So I do this— I'm going to try and get the nail out. [Captain moans.] "Just give us one more chance."
Benny: "We::ll—"
Gordon: What's he going to say?
Carl: "Well, I'll give you another chance, but don't fix anything, unless I move out of the way."
Gordon: "Please give me another chance."
Benny: "Well, all right then, but don't fix anything else until I'm out of the way."

Gordon and Benny's exchange with the children aligned well with the patterns demonstrated by their teachers. Indeed, their practice was parallel in terms of being genuinely curious about what young children have to say and constantly providing a way for children to reach for higher levels of communication.

Note that in this last exchange, the emphasis was once again on dialogue as Gordon made repeated requests for *language.* When Kate suggested an action, Gordon explicitly reminded her: "Is there anything else to be *said?"* Gordon and Benny also emphasised the need to stay on plot point as well as focus on character motivation and intention. When the children began to slip so far into slapstick that they forgot the character's purpose in the scene, Gordon reminded them: "Let's see if I can get closer to getting a job here." The children's attempts at more sophisticated vocabulary were greeted with respect, for when Richard suggested that Fierce Face was not "soopable for this place," Gordon supplied the correct term "suitable" and then gave even more insight into the Captain's character by suggesting, "So you're going to get posh with me." The emphasis on character motivation and intention was repeated when Cathy suggested that Gordon ask for one more chance, and Gordon responded with, "So I'm going to resort to pleading, aren't I?" If Fierce Face really wanted the job, he just might have to beg for it.

Following this session, the teachers and Gordon met with Creative Partnerships administrators and the ministers, and the latter asked several serious questions about drama's impact on the children's language and learning. Joy Lowther, Bexhill's Headteacher, explained the school's three objectives: "One is the widening and developing of language. The second is the development of the teachers and eventually the cascading of that around the school. And the third is to think about using the curriculum much more creatively than perhaps we have been allowed to and encouraged to do in the past." Then Linda, Lesley, and Gordon described the recent changes they'd seen in the children:

Lesley: As part of a previous course I did on thinking skills, I've started to use the 'Community of Enquiry' to encourage children to ask questions rather than just giving the answer. I'm looking at their questioning skills, trying to get them to move beyond just asking closed questions all the time and open up ideas and look deeper. And also debating particular questions to see what the answer might be rather than "Well, the answer is such and such." Instead, the focus is on "What do you think?" They're debating backwards and forwards and disagreeing and agreeing and backing up their arguments. And I've been transcribing everything they say and analysing how their language has changed from closed questions to more open questions, using more connectives in their answers, and connecting each of those answers and adding on. So it's all building up in quite a short space of time.

Gordon: And that was one of the things that was interesting to watch in the performance out there—to watch how they build on individual ideas. I thought that was really strong today.

Lesley: And their discussion is becoming like that.

Linda: You've just seen how it's a double-edged sword. Rather than accepting, they're now questioning.

Chorus: [Laughter.]

Linda: And it's wonderful, but you'll be reading them a story, and they'll be lots of words they wouldn't know, but now they'll say, "Stop!" and "What's that mean?" And "What's that?" And we're studying about George Stephenson in history.

He went to work when he was eight and couldn't read until he was 12. And we had to spend a whole session on why? "Why did he go to work when he was eight? Why couldn't he read until he was 12?" Now at one time, and not that long ago, the children would have just absorbed the whole thing and said, "Yes, well, this happened." But they're not ready to accept all of this now. So [laughs & teases] I don't know whether this is a good thing.

Chorus: [Laughter]

Lesley: You have to think about the effort that goes into it. If somebody said to us, "Why are you doing this?" two years ago, I would have said we were just giving it a try. Now we can actually justify it. Now we can see the difference.

Linda: Drama gives the children so much confidence. It gives them the opportunity to express themselves, and so much of the school day and the school curriculum doesn't allow for this. We found that this was an ideal way of accommodating the children. We do a lot of oral language within school, but the children's language wasn't very sophisticated. So drama provided an ideal opportunity, and it seemed to evolve naturally. And a focus seemed to emerge because their verbal communication was becoming much better. But then the problem was: Could we transfer those skills into playwriting? And this is where we are now.

Although Linda questioned the "double-edged sword" of making room for children's questions, her teasing tone and the laughter in the room made clear her comment was facetious. Indeed, Linda's practice was marked by helping children *make meaning,* an action that invites questions, comments, and conjectures. Like Jerome Bruner (2005), Linda believed in the power of the guess and that effective instruction included teaching children "good guessing," for Bruner argues that "facing up to dilemmas and paradoxes…leads to enriching conjecture."

Lesley's Community of Enquiry sessions had the same goal—to move from a single and simplistic answer to the multiple possibilities available when interpreting a piece of literature. Rather than try to narrow their discussions, she encouraged "debating backwards and forwards and disagreeing and agreeing and backing up their

arguments." Her practice also aligned with Bruner's philosophy, particularly his wonderful comment, "Never mind Piaget, kids take to skeptical epistemology like a duck to water." And like Bakhtin, she saw both agreement and disagreement in a complex yet positive light.

> Bakhtin cautions that it is a crude understanding of dialogue to picture it as "disagreement," and this crudity is only one short step from the outright mistake of reducing dialogue to the logical relation of a contradiction. Agreement is as dialogic as disagreement. Agreement has countless varieties, infinite shadings and gradations, and enormously complex interactions. (Emerson, 1990, p. 132)

Gordon's characterisation of agreement was that the children were learning to "build off each other's ideas" within the performance space. They were learning to move away from the "stop copying me" claim that marked some of their initial scene construction. And they were learning that if one began an idea, another could potentially complete it, or, even more complex, the idea could continue to develop and grow.

Whose Line Is It Anyway?

Over the next few months, the play also continued to develop and grow, and the conversations were marked by both disagreement and agreement in countless varieties. The most complex interactions hinged on the difficult combination of keeping to Bakhtin's notions of polyphony—with the hallmarks of openness and surprise—while still paying close attention to the very real constraints of creating an effective piece of theatre. In the meeting with the ministers, Gordon was asked about his goals.

> We have done a lot of work with younger children where we've asked them to participate, but this is a new way of working for us. I don't think many people work in this way. But we also have a long-term aim in this project, which is to produce a piece of theatre that they will themselves have written for other children of their age. This is again something that people rarely do. They work by themselves. They work with other adults. But this is basically starting with the children's own ideas and refining them.

The ministers were curious about what drove the work—whether it was to create a piece of theatre or to enhance children's language and creative learning. Gordon replied, "For us, very definitely, our focus is to make a piece of theatre. And if we stick with that one, everything else comes along with it." The crux of agreement and disagreement, however, came in the process of refining the play.

Most of Cap-a-Pie's suggestions for refinement were met with enthusiasm by the children, and Cap-a-Pie was quick to take up the children's ideas. The children were particularly good at developing lyrics for songs with Benny and Jess Tyler, Cap-a-Pie's stage manager. When one group of children created the "Work Song," for Fierce Face and Orphan to sing while they went about their ship's jobs, they came up with a rousing chorus and a number of clever verses:

Chorus	Verse 4	Verse 5
Aye aye, me hearty crew,	As we sail the ocean blue,	When the wind begins to blow,
Hands on deck now!	There's a stingray!	Ships a rockin'!
Hands on deck now!	There's a swordfish!	Ships a rollin'!
Aye aye, me hearty crew,	A crab, a starfish and a dolphin too.	Fierce Face's tummy rollin' too.
Here's a song to work to.	Thought I saw a mermaid.	Run and fetch a bucket.

As Jess wrote in her synopsis of this session, "When we showed this back to the rest of the class, everyone was delighted with it, especially joining in on the chorus." She continued, "I think that the kids are starting to realise that we have to start creating something, and that it needs a certain form. Their language certainly seems to be developing, and even the shyer ones seem more comfortable expressing their ideas."

The ideas came from all directions—not only from the children's verbal suggestions for lines and song lyrics, but also from their facial expressions and their gestures. A dance choreographed by Dean—shifting between heel and toe—in a morning session became part of Gordon's performance in the afternoon. The shake of a fist, a hands-on-hips stance, and an expression of determination moved from the children's faces and bodies into those of the actors.

Over the course of several months, the play shifted and slipped, turned and transformed many times. Lauren suggested that the original decision of the Fierce Brothers inheriting a half a treasure map from their pirate grandfather should change into a grandmother pirate, and this decision made sense. Though rare, there were women pirates, including the infamous Anne Bonney and Mary Reade. And the girls in Linda's class were especially pleased with the appearance of a 'Nana' in the brothers' lives. They decided that she was old, and though she couldn't visit the brothers themselves, she would send her parrot to help the brothers fulfill their pirate ambitions. Cathy felt that Nana "had arthritis in her feet and her toes hurt her." Lauren added, "And she's probably just had to move to a bungalow, 'cause she cannot manage the stairs." Eleanor suggested that the parrot be named Mary Lou. Later, when they were analysing the character of the two brothers, Henry said: "When they're playing chess, Fierce Face thinks he's really good. Orphan's much better at it, but lets him win."

Cap-a-Pie's contributions also ranged from small to large. After brainstorming with the children about the potential title for the play, they came up with *The Amazing Adventures of Mary Lou and the Ice Cream Pirates,* and the children loved it. They renamed the Fierce Brothers the Gelati Brothers, explaining that since the two sold ice cream, having the Italian dessert for a name could be amusing. They shifted the mop scene between Captain Bossy Boots and Gordon to a mopping frenzy between the two brothers, and the children were enchanted with the scene and had many suggestions for further antics. Even when Cap-a-Pie made a critical decision, they tried to keep the children's ideas and interests in mind. As Jess wrote about one Cap-a-Pie actors-only session: "We are currently deciding what frame to set the story of the Gelati brothers in. It is likely that Benny will be a story-telling musician who was there when the action took place and has now come to tell the audience that story. This seems to be a style that the children enjoy."

Because Cap-a-Pie felt the children would enjoy adding puppets to the play, they invited puppeteer, Alison McGowan, to join the team. Their reasoning went beyond enjoyment, however, for Cap-a-Pie knew it would be difficult to stage the parrot. They asked Ali to create and play the part of Mary Lou as well as help them with other aspects of the play that might lend themselves to puppetry. Over the course of several weeks the play charmingly shifted to a bedtime story that Captain Bossy Boots told his beloved little parrot to help her sleep. Of course, Mary Lou figured prominently in the story as she helped the Gelati brothers leave their unsuccessful lives selling horrible flavours of ice cream (including Starfish Surprise and Sea Weed Ripple) and learn about their heritage as pirates. Mary Lou and Captain Bossy Boots had the other half of the pirate map, and together the four sailed off to discover the treasure.

On the way, the two brothers fought over the steering wheel in a storm and were dumped in the sea. There they saw mermaids, danced with jellyfish, and swam frantically away from a shark. But they were swallowed by a whale that later sent them flying through his spout. They landed on an island, but were separated. Orphan landed on the beach, but Fierce Face landed in a tree! Mary Lou helped to rejoin them, and following the map they found their Nana's treasure. Yet, the treasure was not silver and gold, but jars of special flavourings to add to their ice cream. They returned home to their old life, but selling delicious ice cream helped the brothers become as successful as Ben and Jerry!

Ali taught the children how to make the shadow puppets for the sea scene, and they had a wonderful day working with art materials and overheads to make their mermaids swim, their whales spout, and their jellyfish wriggle. Kate was particularly proud of her whale, and Cap-a-Pie used it as well as many of the children's puppets in the final play.

However, the summary of the play I've just given took *months* to reach, and as the date of the opening came closer and closer, Cap-a-Pie felt that more and more of the planning needed to be done on their own. They continued to consult the children, but when they came for a workshop session, they stressed the looming deadline and the realities of stage work. Jess wrote in her notes about one workshop:

> This session was very much about script development, and making the children realise the parameters in which we have to work when creating a play for a deadline. The children needed reminding that because we are using theatre to tell our story, we are more limited than if we were using film, and the action that moves the story along must happen on stage or be reported from offstage, if it cannot be portrayed on stage. (I suppose that after the cartoons and the computer-generated films that they are used to, theatre must appear rather limited!)

Although Linda and Lesley wanted their children's ideas to take precedence, they saw that given free rein the play got "bigger and bigger." As Linda explained, "Cap-a-Pie knew they had to get the play tighter, but they didn't know how to do it without taking control."

Linda advised them:

> At some point you're going to have to take command and say, "This is what I want to happen. Have you got any ideas that would make it happen?" And then the psychology of Mark and Gordon having the idea and presenting it in such a way that the children would then feel it's a part of their ideas. So don't railroad it. You know, "That's no good. This

is what is going to happen." But you just plant the seeds, and as soon as somebody's got one idea—providing they can see that there's something in there of theirs—then they've thought of it! But they're quite happy, from the evidence I've got. I've got to go along with them, because they're quite discerning. They know now when they're being patronised and when they're not. But they seem quite happy with the work.

Linda's advice encouraged Cap-a-Pie to surge forward as long as they didn't railroad their ideas, but instead brought the children in for clear consultation—showing them how their own ideas helped to inspire the adults' creative additions to the play.

Linda's comments about the children being "quite happy" with the work as well as their discerning natures played out in a conversation I had with a group of Linda's children in the late spring. I had not been to England for several weeks, and I asked the children to catch me up with the latest progress in the play:

Shelby: Now I've been gone for a long time, and you have continued to work on the pirate play. How's it going?
Chorus: Good. GOOD!
Shelby: It's good! What's good about it?
Lauren: Because we're doing loads of detail, and we're starting to put props and things in it.
Richard: It's got loads of pressure.
Shelby: What do you mean?
Richard: We've worked hard.
Shelby: You know, when I think of pressure, Richard, I think: "Oh, it's weighing me down and making me unhappy." Is it weighing you down and making you unhappy? Or are you enjoying it?
Richard: I'm enjoying it.
Shelby: Okay. So it's pressure, but you're enjoying it. You like it?
Richard: [Nods yes]
Shelby: What do you like the most about it?
James: Richard put in loads of good answers. And Dean. And Kate.
Richard: And I made a song up. [Starts singing] "Aye aye, me hearty crew,"

Chorus: [The rest join in singing loudly.] "Hands on deck now! / Hands on deck now! / Aye aye, me hearty crew, / Here's a song to work to."

Shelby: Richard, did you make up the line, "Aye aye, me hearty crew"?

Richard: The group did.

Shelby: When it comes to the songs, and you're in the audience, do you want to sing along?

Chorus: Yeah.

Kate: We're allowed!

Shelby: You're allowed?!

Kate: We made up all the songs, and when people go to the show, people will think, "Children wouldn't have made that up!" But we have!

Shelby: How do you feel about that?

Richard: We might just think we're clever!

Clever, indeed! But the refreshing thing about Richard's last comment is his clear emphasis on ensemble. When asked about who came up with the popular line—"Aye aye, me hearty crew"—Richard answered, "The group did." Though he began his contribution with the pronoun "I" in "I made up a song," his final statement emphasised the "we" of group camaraderie in "We might just think we're clever!"

Several members of the group used "we," and though a small word, it works in large ways to capture the ensemble of the group. Kate excitedly related that "We're allowed" to sing the songs along with the actors on stage. In fact, their teacher Linda later told me, "Who could stop them?!" And Kate reiterated that even if adults in the audience thought the songs couldn't have been created by children, the children were clearly responsible: "But we have!" When asked what he liked about the play so far, rather than stress his own contributions, James exclaimed: "Richard put in loads of good answers. And Dean. And Kate."

Both Linda and Lesley saw a difference in their children's social worlds. Linda called it "melting pot" language—rather than tussle over whose idea was whose and stake claim and credit for it, they were happy to know that what mattered was the group contribution. Lesley agreed and talked about the difference between the children earlier in the year and now:

They were all very, "That was my idea. That was *my* idea!" That was before Christmas, but now it's not relevant. The relevance is the quality of the whole thing and that they're all a part of that. They're happy if their line gets dropped, if someone thinks of a better line. It's not an individual effort. It's, *"We* are going to make this better."

Even though the work was stressful—as in Richard's statement about pressure—when asked to explain, he suggested, "We've worked hard." Yet even though the work was hard, all the children agreed that it was worth the candle.

Steering Off Course to Ice Lolly Land

For all that the progress was "good," there were a couple of setbacks looming on the horizon. One of the sessions that occurred just before my spring trip, focussed on lines that the two brothers might say when they were separated on the island. At this point in the play, Gordon's character of Fierce Face was stuck up a tree, and Mark as Orphan was stranded on the beach. Gordon and Mark separated the children into two groups, and each needed to express their character's emotions about his predicament. As Lesley explained, the session began beautifully:

> Gordon said, "Come up with 12 lines that I say. How I feel. What I'm thinking about. What I'm going to do next." And they did the same with Orphan. Where is he? He's landed on the beach. He's wandering around. So they've landed in different parts of the island. So Mark's group went off and Gordon's group went off, and they did 12 lines that they thought their characters would say. The adults scribed the lines as the kids said them. We did more than 12, so we read them back and asked which were the best 12. So they were critiquing them. Neither group could hear what the other one was saying. When they came back with their scripts—with the 12 lines—and not knowing what the other one had, all they did was alternate. Gordon said maybe three of his lines. Then Mark would say maybe two of his. And they actually fit. It was incredible. It absolutely formed a pattern, and the effect was excellent.

The pattern was eerily similar in both groups. Each began with lines that expressed aggravation and even anger at the other brother ("It was his fault. He nearly broke the steering wheel!"). But this frustration soon gave way to an admission of guilt ("We should have gone the way my brother said. I know I should have let him steer."). And this admission soon transformed into concern for the other brother ("I wish my brother was here. I wonder where he is. Has he been eaten by a shark, bitten by a snake, or captured by pirates? I'm going to find him. This time I won't let him down.").

In the morning rehearsal, Gordon and Mark moved from aggravation to anger to worry to determination to be a better brother in the future. They spoke their lines directly to the audience, and their accompanying gestures and facial expressions supported their shifts in mood. The children were thrilled with the results. As Lesley explained, "They were dead happy, and they were hugging each other!" But when Cap-a-Pie went into their own consultation in the afternoon, though they kept the lines, they changed the scene considerably. Lesley said, "And then we came back in the afternoon, and it was a puppet thing! They were behind screens saying the words, and you couldn't see their expressions. Because in rehearsal when we could see them, you could see Gordon fed up, and you could see Orphan looking worried."

The children were confused by the shift, and Lesley was upset. Because Linda had been absent for this session, Lesley called her at home to relate the details. Both teachers felt that such a dramatic shift could potentially undermine not only their children's input, but also lessen the impact of the play's theme. Linda later explained, "That's what's at the crux, really. It's the relationship between the two brothers. And that was from the beginning what the children wanted—that the search for treasure wouldn't necessarily be gold and silver. But it was the idea of having your family close." In both teachers' views, transforming the scene where you could see the brothers lamenting their losses into a puppet scene behind screens lost the essence of the play.

Before the teachers had a chance to discuss their worries with Cap-a-Pie, Gordon called Linda to describe the upcoming plan for the children to visit their theatre, The Store. Linda listened as Gordon sketched out the day's plans, but then began to worry anew. She discussed the plans with Lesley, and decided to call Gordon back to express her concerns, but she called late, and Gordon wasn't able to return her call that night. Since the plan was for the following day and buses had been arranged, Linda and Lesley decided to trust that the actors knew what they were doing.

Again, the day began well. Gordon took the children on a tour of The Store, and they were impressed with the size of the theatre and the lights and musical possibilities. Mark and Gordon led warm up exercises that stressed ensemble, and the children also learned about stage directions. Then Gordon turned to the work of the play and talked about the Gelati brothers. Because they were ice cream

pirates, he explained that they were going to "make the set entirely out of ice lollies." He led the children to a large meeting room of the theatre, where Ali, the puppeteer, gave them the opportunity to make large cardboard ice lollies, which they could cover in construction paper, paint, feathers, sequins, etc. As with any artistic adventure, the children were entranced, and working in small groups they happily created a number of lovely lollies.

The teachers were less entranced. When I spoke with them after this session (while everyone was eating lunch), they said that they had wanted the actors to move the play forward in more substantive ways:

Shelby: Do you feel like the design of the activity today was a little bit more toward entertainment, rather than getting the children to roll up their sleeves and get to work?

Linda: I mean, it's nice, but not *today*. Not when we've got this precious little time. If they had said that's what they wanted to do, we could have set that up at school. No problem. You know, it's not something that isn't available at school. When we made our Christmas plays, we did all the sets. That's not a new experience for them. We needed to make use of the fact that they're on a real stage!

Shelby: Now, I don't mean this as a criticism, but why don't you say something?

Lesley: Because they're the professionals.

Linda: And I'm presuming that they're going to make this worthwhile this afternoon. I'm hoping.

Lesley: To me, we should have done a run through of the play this morning and written down what the problem areas were— the stumbling blocks. And then we could have brainstormed to get across those problems, and then come back in the afternoon to try our ideas out. That's what I had foreseen for today.

The teachers' worry contrasted with their willingness to go along with the professionals' plan, but they too were professionals, and they wanted to up the ante on their children's participation in the work of scripting the play. In their view, the creation of the lollies, though enjoyable, did little to propel the play forward.

Unfortunately, the afternoon's work did not meet the teachers' hoped-for expectations. Gordon and Ali led the children in 'lolly acting,' bringing the ice lollies to life on the stage. The children took their lollies through a series of moods, from sadness to excitement, and they ended the session with a 'lolly disco,' as the children gyrated about the stage.

The children had a ball cavorting with their lollies, but their teachers were concerned. When they returned to school, Linda led them in a discussion of the day's events, and she specifically asked them how the ice lollies worked within the context of the play. The children tried hard to see a fit. James suggested, "We could put them at the end for a happy ending." Eleanor concurred, proposing that an "ice lolly disco" would make the ending of the play "more exciting." While all of the children knew that 'ice lolly land' was not their idea, they didn't mind that the actors had introduced it. Still, they wanted the actors to know that for the most part the play should be made up of their ideas, and they voted 17 to 1 for "the balance of the ideas to be ours."

In a follow-up to this discussion, I asked the teachers what they thought of the children's positive reaction:

Linda: They've gone along with it and seem quite happy, but they are aware that that's not one of their ideas. But they've taken this and made sense of it. Tried to make something of it.

Lesley: Which is more than I can at the minute. [Laughs.] I think they've taken a leap into something that isn't really necessary. We've got four little bits of a play that we've got to string together, and we haven't done that yet.

Linda: It just goes to show the children's thought processes. Yes, they like the idea of directing adults and the power. But they've still got this thing that adults normally tell us what to do. And the adults have introduced ice lollies, so they obviously want us to work with this. So it's interesting that it reverts back.

Lesley: But it's not in the spirit of what we've been trying to do.

The spirit of the work focussed on *language*—stretching the children's potential for expression, for problem finding and problem solving, for comparison and contrast, and for connecting and building off each other's ideas. Linda saw the children's more passive acceptance of the adults' choice of direction as reverting back, rather than moving their language forward. And Lesley felt that steering off course to 'ice lolly land' was an unnecessary diversion.

However, Cap-a-Pie's point of view was that 'devising'—creating a play with a great deal of group input—was a necessarily messy part of the process. Linda called Gordon to discuss the teachers' worries, and Gordon knew it was a low point in their work together. Still, he felt that "out of lolly land came quite a lot, especially understandings about how people work."

Gordon: At that stage we were in a period of messy. And we were attempting to manage so many people's agendas at that time and so many egos, especially in the company. But the theory is that a group of people will say, "I like that." "I don't like that." "What about this?" "I like that."

Mark: "Does this work? I've got a reservation." "What's your reservation?" But then at one point you say—

Gordon: "Well, shall we try it?" So in lolly land, we got to the point of "Shall we try it?" We had to try it, and it actually did unlock a lot of things for us. And it's still sort of in the play, but not in the way that we tried it. So I expect that the devising process brings along *messiness*. And perhaps that happens in the process of creativity. Perhaps at some point you get into messy. You have a rough idea of where you're going. You start. You get everything in place. And then you get to the point where you say, "Oh, no! I don't know what's happening here." It's very frustrating. But out of that comes an answer.

Shelby: I see. So you actually need time to muck about?

Gordon: Right. But it's so difficult to manage, a teacher in a school may actually try to avoid messy.

Mark: Teachers know where they're going and what the children have to understand and the targets they have to hit. Whereas sometimes you just go, "I don't know. I haven't got the answer." And you throw it back at the kids and you say, "We all don't know. We're all lost." So great! This is exciting 'cause someone's going to lead us. Or I'm going to come up with an idea. And it is equal. In devising, you're all equal and you go, "Nobody's got the answer, so we'll try

lots of different things." We experiment. We play. That's the whole creative process.

The creative process that Mark and Gordon describe is akin to the polyphony that Bakhtin advocated. Indeed, he cited a quote by Victor Shlovsky with admiration: "As long as a work remained multi-leveled and multi-voiced, as long as the people in it were still arguing, then despair over the absence of a solution would not set in" (Morson & Emerson, 1990, pp. 244-245). And this was true for the teachers and actors alike. Though they had disagreed about the success of the day and had voiced their disagreement, no one was close to despair over the absence of a solution. And the fact that Linda and Lesley had stated their opinions rather than simply trust in "the professionals" was an important step in making the conversation much more multi-leveled and multi-voiced.

Sailing Home

Over the next month and a half, Cap-a-Pie, the teachers, and the children continued the conversation, and the play slowly evolved toward its final shape. The week before the opening of the show, they all assembled at the theatre to see a dress rehearsal and give final commentary on the progress of the play. Gordon explained that they would run through the play, but every once in a while the players would stop the show to indicate trouble spots that needed to be discussed. After the run through, they had the children talk in small groups and then as a whole about their questions and concerns.

The children were very pleased with what they saw. They were fascinated by the workings of Mary Lou as the parrot appeared in multiple places, and they had Ali reveal her secret of sprinting behind the stage and hiding behind a variety of props. They were charmed by the shadow puppet scene as Fierce Face and Orphan swam for their lives and were eventually shot out of the whale. And they loved the scene of Gordon clutching the ropes on high when he was "stuck up a tree."

Still, they had several concerns. They thought that the slapstick mop scene was not long enough and encouraged Mark and Gordon to extend it considerably. Mark agreed, though he explained that the trouble with slapstick was that it didn't move the story forward. The children also worried about the addition of a couple of new songs and the shifts in some of the verses they had written. Eleanor seriously asked if Cap-a-Pie didn't think "our verses were exciting enough." Benny explained that some of the changes they'd made in the plot demanded more songs and with time pressing, he wrote them himself. He also said that they decided they couldn't sink the ship as was originally planned, because the brothers would need a way to sail safely home. Because of this, and not because the children's verses lacked spark, they needed to change some of the words. The children seemed satisfied with the actors' answers.

The actors then asked the children to consider the shifts in character. How, in essence, had the brothers changed over the course of the play?

Kate: One wants to go on the ship and one doesn't.

Gordon: One wants to and the other doesn't. [In character] "Please."

Mark: "No, we'll stay here and sell ice cream."

Gordon: "Please!" [Turning to question the children.] Why do you think he doesn't want to go on the ship?

Lauren: Because he doesn't like storms, and he might go down with the ship in a storm.

Henry: Because he'll die.

Kate: Because you're really not supposed to be behaving like this. Because you're really ice cream sellers and not pirates.

James: It's dangerous. And it's got sharks in.

Gordon: So he's got all of these worries. It's dangerous. He knows he should be an ice cream seller. All of these things. But look at him when he gets to the island. What's the first thing he says?

Mark: [In character as Orphan.] "Hooray. Yes! Yes! Yes! That was the best thing I've ever done!"

Gordon: Has he changed?

Chorus: Yes!

Gordon: How has he changed?

James: Like he might have liked it in the whale and getting shooted out.

Eleanor: He's gone from being a nasty grump to shouting and screaming happily.

Gordon: He's now changed. And what about me at the beginning? [In character as Fierce Face.] "Oh, what a great thing it would be to be a pirate. Full of adventure. Come on. Let's go down to the Ruby Dog! Let's go and be pirates."

Henry: You're different from the way you were when you were stuck up a tree.

James: It's the opposite way around because you might be scared of heights.

Eleanor: [Pointing to the spot on the stage where Gordon tried to convince his brother to sail away as pirates.] You're happy there.

Richard: [Pointing to the rope—"tree."] And then you're scared there.

James: And sad.

Mark: Why's he sad?

James: Because he thinks you've been eaten by a shark.

Gordon: [In character] "Ohhhhh! Perhaps Orphan was right. Perhaps I'm not cut out to be a pirate."

Mark: Scared. Sad. What else, Eleanor?

Eleanor: First he's trembling with excitement, but now he's trembling with fear.

The shift in the two characters was obvious to the children. Mark had moved from being a "nasty grump," who feared the consequences of sailing, to elation with his new status as a pirate. Gordon, on the other hand, had shifted from sheer excitement over the possibilities of a pirate adventure to his fearful perch in the tree. As James stated, Gordon had turned the "opposite way around." Most stories work in this fashion—especially in children's literary worlds. Nodelman and Reimer (2003) call this basic pattern "home-away-home" and describe it as a circle: "A child or childlike creature, bored by home, wants the excitement of adventure. But since the excitement is dangerous, the child wants the safety of home—which is boring, and so the child wants the excitement of danger—and so on" (p. 201).

Gordon and Mark's emphasis on character development over the course of the play was key, because the children needed to help them figure out a perplexing scene. How were they going to get Gordon down from the tree? Knowing his character, what would actually persuade him to descend? When they asked the children to help them solve the problem, they initially suggested somewhat outlandish ideas that had little to do with his character. Richard said that Gordon could just jump, and Dean thought he could fly down with Mary Lou. Lauren interjected, "But you can't stage that!" Gordon was a grown man, and Mary Lou—as a little puppet parrot—could never support him in flight. Gordon followed Lauren's lead, reminding the children that the solution had to be something they could actually stage, and even more important, something that was linked to how the *characters* would approach this problem. Then the conversation shifted to more serious suggestions:

Kate: Why don't you say, "Remember when we were little? At the park you used to climb the climbing frames and you weren't scared then, even though it was very high."

Mark: That's nice. So remind him of when we were little.

Cathy: Or Captain Bossy Boots could say, "Get down from there!"

Lesley:	"Pirates aren't frightened of heights!"
Cathy:	"Pirates can't be scared of heights 'cause on ships they have to tie the rigging and go up in the crow's nest."
James:	You could say, "If you don't get down, you won't get any of me jaffa cakes."
Chorus:	[Laughter.]
Gordon:	So it's a combination of those ideas. Can we get Mary Lou involved in this?
James:	"Because I'm little and you're big, and you can do anything. I'm scared of heights too, but I just went down. I flew down."
Gordon:	Ah. "When I was little I was scared of heights, but I had to learn to fly." So perhaps the three of them can talk him down.
Richard:	You could just leave him. Benny, you could say, "We better be getting going now 'cause the other members of the crew could be wondering where we are."

Gordon jumped on this idea suggesting that they probably needed "a trick to get me down." As Mary Lou flew off and Captain Bossy Boots and Orphan strolled away talking animatedly of treasure and getting back to the crew, Fierce Face slowly climbed down on his own and then stomped over to berate the two about leaving him "stuck up a tree." When he realised he was no longer in the tree, his surprise was such that the children all laughed aloud.

The children's suggestions were much more in line with character now. As his brother, Orphan probably would appeal to him with more compassion as well as connect to a childhood memory. True to his nature, Captain Bossy Boots would be bossy and remind Fierce Face of his status as a sailor. And Mary Lou would appeal to Fierce Face with her own fledgling experiences. The fact that they would leave him also made sense, for Orphan was so caught up in his new found excitement over a pirate's life, he could forget—even if only briefly—about his brother. The image of Fierce Face descending from the tree while all the while admonishing everyone about abandoning him also added to the slapstick that the children so admired. Gordon ended this session by saying, "That's a good scene, and that will definitely be in."

It was. A few days later the children returned to the theatre with their teachers and parents to see the opening of *The Amazing*

Adventures of Mary Lou and the Ice Cream Pirates. They had travelled by bus and buzzed the entire way in anticipation. When they came into the theatre, the excitement was palpable, and the children sat as close as they could to the front. Then the lights dimmed and the actors appeared on stage, and the children leaned in even further. When Benny strapped on his accordion and the first song began, the children all joined in. James turned around in his seat to encourage the others to sing, but of course they already were. And when not singing, they watched the play intently. Jane had a big grin on her face. Kate mouthed the words, and she clutched her hands to her face and giggled. Carl leaned forward pleading with both hands on the line "Oh, come on! Orphan, let's go down and see if we could get a job on the Ruby Dog and become pirates just like we always dreamed of!" Eleanor laughed aloud, while Laura watched with a contented smile. Henry was more serious, but his concentration was fierce. When the famous mop scene between the brothers began, the children could see that the actors had increased the slapstick, and they crowed their encouragement. Even the twins, the shyest in Linda's class, both laughed with delight.

When the brothers were finally reunited, they followed the map to the treasure, and Nana's wonderful ice cream flavourings were finally revealed. A small panel, complete with a large 'X' to mark the spot, dropped slowly down unveiling the flavourings, surrounded by glittering lights. The children had not seen this completed prop, for it was still under construction when they'd come for the dress rehearsal, and most gasped right along with the actors. The actors then read the explanatory letter from Nana that the children had helped the actors write on that dress rehearsal day.

Dear Grandsons,

Well done! If you find this letter then you must have found my island and this, my hidden treasure. These here jars contain the most delicious flavours in all the world. I've been collecting and plundering them for years on my travels around the globe. I expect you'll grow up to be a fine pair of handsome pirates, but don't forget you're never too big or fierce for a hug from your old Nana, eh Fierce Face?

All my love boys,

Captain Peggy 'Nana' Gelati

With their treasure in tow, the boys, Mary Lou, and Captain Bossy Boots sailed home on the tide. They become famous "made men," and the play ended with a rousing chorus of the song of 'The Ice Cream Pirates.' Naturally, the children all joined in.

The day ended on a completely high note. After the performance, the children and their parents were abuzz with positive comments about the play, and the teachers were ecstatic. Lesley said she was "deliriously happy" and Linda found the final production "just amazing." Both teachers were pleased that Cap-a-Pie had followed the children's dress rehearsal suggestions, even to the point of adding more slapstick and putting back in several of the children's original song verses. Linda commented, "They really did listen, and obviously they had to do a lot of work to put those bits back."

The children were still flush with their success when Linda sat them down the next morning for a final debriefing:

Linda: Can I just ask you if you can cast your mind back to yesterday, and before you went you had to think of something that you were looking forward to seeing. Can you remember that? And then we went, and you saw the whole production for the very, very first time—

Richard: I feel amazed!

Linda: Amazed. Why?

Richard: 'Cause of all the hard work that we done.

Henry: I thought it was good because we did all that work.

Linda: And was it what you were expecting?

James: It was better because they put bits and bobs in to make it exciting for us.

Linda: You know last Wednesday when we went, Eleanor's question was: "Why had they changed the verses?" But if you'll notice yesterday, they had put our original verses back in. So what do you think about that?

Eleanor: Excellent.

Linda: Do you think that the bits that Mark and Gordon added were better than yours? Or did you think they worked alongside so that they sort of complemented each other?

Lauren: It's a draw.

Henry: Complemented.

Linda: Do you think it balanced out well? That their bits weren't better than ours? They weighed it up and it balanced?

Chorus: Yes. Yes!

Linda: I think I do agree with you. I must say, I was sitting next to Kate, and Kate laughed the whole way through. How did it feel?

Kate: It was all funny. I felt giggly.

Richard: I was right next to her, and she was laughing that hard, she was nearly off her seat.

Linda: Yes! You know, when you came out of the performance yesterday, did any of your parents say anything to you?

Jennifer: My mum said it was excellent when Gordon was stuck up a tree.

Linda: So the play was good for everybody. The children and adults liked it. Laura, what did your mum think?

Laura: She thought that it was brilliant when the door [to the treasure] opened.

Charlotte: [Picking up on her twin sister's comment] 'Cause she liked it when it shined up.

Cathy: My mum liked the bit when Gordon and Mark mopped the deck. The slapstick.

Richard: My mum said that the chorus "Aye Aye, me hearty crew"— She thought that fit in 'cause it was a pirate show. And she liked the part with Gordon stuck up a tree.

Linda: You know the comment about the chorus fitting in? I hope you told her, "Of course it fit in because we wrote it, and we aren't daft." I hope you told her. Because we are very professional, and we've thought about this.

Henry: My mum said it was brill, and she liked the songs and she liked the end one the best.

Linda: Now that you've seen the complete production, whose story is it?

Chorus: Ours. Ours!

Linda: So you feel happy that the production yesterday was the result of your work?

Richard: We were the boss, 'cause we made it. We're so pleased that it's like being the governor of something!

Jerome Bruner (2005) emphasises the importance of "appreciating divergent perspectives." He suggests: "There are always *different* ways of understanding things—kids certainly know that! But it's

important not only to know it but to respect it." And the children in Linda's class seem to have a sound understanding of this concept. They respected the "bits and bobs" that Cap-a-Pie added to "make it more exciting," though they felt that the balance of ideas between the adults and the children was "a draw," and the ideas "complemented" each other to make the play all the more effective. Moreover, their own "amazed" and "giggly" feelings along with their parents' many compliments assured them of their play's success.

Again, though small, words like "ours" and we" have large implications when it comes to collaboration. Henry stated, "I thought it was good because *we* did all that work." And when Linda later asked to whom the story belonged, the resounding chorus was "Ours! Ours!" Even Richard's final comment, which employed words of seemingly singular leadership ("boss"), included three uses of the word "we." In Richard's mind, leadership was shared, and the satisfaction of making something together with his classmates and Cap-a-Pie had the effect of making them "*so* pleased that it's like being the Governor of something!"

Summary

In J. M. Barrie's (1911) *Peter Pan*, the boy who never grew up tries to lure the three Darling children off to the Neverland with fairy dust. Giddy with the exhilaration of flight, the children still worry about leaving the safety of the nursery, but then Peter provides the perfect words to persuade them.

'I say,' cried John, 'why shouldn't we all go out?'
Of course it was to this that Peter had been luring them.
Michael was ready: he wanted to see how long it took him to do a billion miles. But Wendy hesitated.
'Mermaids!' said Peter again.
'Oo!'
'And there are pirates.'
'Pirates,' cried John, seizing his Sunday hat, 'let us go at once.' (pp. 41-42)

Pirates are a powerful temptation for all children, even those with definitive plans for growing up, and the children of Bexhill were no exception. Yet unlike *Peter Pan*—which carries the classic structure of "voyage and return"—the Bexhill children were asked to write a *comedy*.

In detailing the structure of comedy, Booker (2004) suggests, *"The essence of Comedy is always that some redeeming truth has to be brought out of the shadows into the light"* (p. 123). But before this happens, the shadows can be long. In *The Amazing Adventures of Mary Lou and the Ice Cream Pirates*, the shadows were both literal and metaphorical, for the brothers were lost at sea as well as lost to one another. Orphan wandered on the beach, while Fierce Face was stuck up a tree, and both thought the treasure they sought was silver and gold. Once reunited and standing in front of the treasure, they learned that Nana's flavourings would not only bring them success as ice cream sellers, but more important, the treasure of their relationship.

The treasure of relationships was also true of the creative process that surrounded this comedy. Indeed, the process developed by the actors of Theatre Cap-a-Pie and the Bexhill children and their teachers was unique. Rather than have a single

director, who held others tight to his or her vision, there was no director, and the playwrights were multiple and dialogic in their continuing conversation. Not that this is necessarily easy. In fact, keeping the conversation continually open to surprise can even be frustrating. Mark and Gordon both expressed the difficulties inherent in such a creative process:

Mark: I think it's been difficult because of the structure, because we didn't have a director. It would have been much easier to have a director.

Gordon: But in this system if we'd had a director, some of the good ideas maybe wouldn't have got in. But it's frustrating. This business of making stuff is the most frustrating thing in the world. But I'm very proud of the show. And I'm very proud of the people who've worked in it, particularly the children.

Shelby: Linda and Lesley would agree. Yesterday, Lesley said, "I think everybody got what they wanted out of this project. We got our children's language extended. Whether a particular line ended up in the final production is not as significant as the fact that that the *opportunity for language* occurred." And she said, "I think that Cap-a-Pie got what they wanted, in that they have a polished show."

The opportunities for language played out in a variety of ways that might not have appeared if a director had been present. Within the polyphonic process of creative expression, the children were given multiple opportunities to practise a wide variety of linguistic and academic structures.

1. Comparing and contrasting: The children compared and contrasted scenes, intonational choices, and gestures as the actors served as puppets to the children's suggestions. Gordon argued that the differences in their life experiences as well as their dramatic expertise allowed the children to see their ideas come to immediate life: "Five years at university drama school compared to their five years on the planet. Once they see, 'I've asked him to do this, and he's pulled it off,' then they can be braver and braver and braver and braver in giving their suggestions." Looking over the range of options allowed the children to weigh their choices and consider the most effective alternative.

2. Using hypothetical language: The children were given plenty of room for hypothetical language (marked by "maybe," "if…then" constructions, and modals such as "could," "would," "might," etc). Such hypothetical language allows children to carry out the "good guessing" that Bruner (2005) finds essential. In fact, he suggests, "Teach them good guessing, how to use the inherent structure of what they've learned to leap beyond it."

3. Posing questions: The children posed multiple questions. All too often children in school *answer* rather than *ask* questions. Yet in Lesley's Community of Enquiry sessions, in Linda's classroom lessons, as well as in the Cap-a-Pie workshops, the children were encouraged to create queries related to the work at hand. Just as one example, their questions about George Stephenson ("Why did he go to work when he was eight? Why couldn't he read until he was 12?") showed their keen engagement in the conversation. Bruner argues, "Kids in school sometimes fail to recognise that what it's all about is *making sense* of what's offered, not just storing it in your bean. 'Making sense,' of course is the precursor of 'thinking theoretically' or putting bare 'facts' in a richer context." Even more important, the children were explicitly taught the difference between slight and substantive questions.

4. Answering questions of substance: Closely connected to the point above, the children were given myriad occasions to ponder and express their opinions about the questions the adults posed. Like British educator, Dorothy Heathcote, the adults consistently used "freeing questions" in which the teacher "clearly signals there is no one right answer. He or she poses as a person curious and wondering and asks the class for help. In this way the teacher takes rank and status out of the question and frees the child to wonder, too" (Wagner, 1976, p. 60).

5. Utilising sophisticated vocabulary: Whether specifically connected to drama ("stage left" and "auditions"), the pirate's life ("capstan bar" and "riding on a donkey"), or hinged to character ("You're *useless* at this."), the children expanded their vocabulary and had occasion to put it to good use. When they stretched beyond their immediate limits ("You're not soopable for this place."), they were respectfully given the proper term and could see it immediately dropped into the dialogue. Furthermore, they grew in their attention to new vocabulary, asking for definitions. Linda found this to be an important shift in their thinking: "You'll be reading them a story, and they'll be lots of words they wouldn't know, but now they'll say, 'Stop!' and 'What's that mean?' And 'What's that?'" Children's sheer attention to new and enticing vocabulary will no doubt add to their expanding repertoires of expression.

6. Analysing character: The children moved beyond the surface features of character to analyse motivation and intention. What drives characters to do what they do? Remember Henry's suggestion, "When they're playing chess, Fierce Face thinks he's really good. Orphan's much better at it, but lets him win." What choices would characters make in particular situations that would allow them to stay "in character"? Think back to Kate's idea: "Why don't you say, 'Remember when we were little? At the park you used to climb the climbing frames and you weren't scared then, even though it was very high.'" And how does a character grow and change over time and situation? Think of Eleanor's comment: "First he's trembling with excitement, but now he's trembling with fear." Thus, the children were learning that characters experience emotion, are motivated by life's circumstances, and have purposes and intentions for accomplishing their goals. And when two characters meet, their emotions, motivations, and intentions intertwine.

7. Learning about structure: The children were learning that stories have structure and that plays in particular are marked by dialogue, rather than long, prosaic descriptions. Recall how often the actors called for language ("Is there anything else to be *said?").* The children began to understand that stitching scenes together called for necessary bridging ("How can we get Fierce Face out of the tree?"). And they even began to learn that plays had to fit within the structure of the possible ("But you can't stage that!"). Moreover, they came to realise that all genres have rules that must be followed or broken with care. A joke often relies on the "rule of three." And comedy is often marked by confusion, with characters "not fully conscious of the truth, either about other people or about themselves." But this confusion is "finally opened out so that they can see everything and everyone, including themselves, straight and whole" (Booker, 2004, p. 151). Certainly the Gelati brothers had to overcome much confusion before finding their true career path as well as finding each other.

8. Analysing theme: It is often thought that very young children can handle character, setting, and plot, but are not ready to analyse the themes within stories. But this was certainly not the case here. Because the adults asked them for their thinking and stressed that themes were multiple, not singular, the children's suggestions ranged from the amusing, but no less accurate ("If you're handling the steering wheel, watch where you're going.") to the heart of the matter ("Take care of yourself and try not to get lost without your brother."). Booker suggests that once "the shadows are dispelled" in a comedy, "the situation is miraculously transformed and the little world is brought together in a state of joyful union" (p. 150). As Linda summed up the children's thinking: "It's all about treating each other well and relationships."

9. Experiencing ensemble: Linda's last point goes to the heart of the language of teamwork that emerged and grew among the children. They moved from the singular "I" of their own individual ideas to the "we" of "we're all in this together, mate." Time and again, when asked about the work, the children emphasised the contributions of all. James, for example, lauded his fellow students: "Richard put in loads of good answers. And Dean. And Kate." The sense of ensemble was marked by pride in their shared work, even in the potential face of audience skepticism. As Kate remarked, "When people go to the show, people will think, 'Children wouldn't have made that up!' But we have!" Critical to this process, was the children's growing

understanding of collaborative problem finding and problem solving. Initially, if one child picked up another's idea and ran with it, the phrase "Stop copying!" rang out. But over time and with specific guidance from the adults, they learned to accept and even applaud the 'group think' that came to pervade their work together.

10. Growing through critique: Because the children learned to lean on each other's ideas, didn't mean they always agreed. And even when they agreed, it's critical to remember the admonition that "Agreement has countless varieties, infinite shadings and gradations, and enormously complex interactions" (Emerson, 1990, p. 132). In essence, the children were learning to observe closely, weigh options, and make suggestions for further refinements. Linda explained, "They've got the time to think and reflect and come up with things. They're not frightened to agree or disagree and *justify*: 'I don't think that's a very good idea because...' Whereas before it would have been 'yeah' or 'nay' with no explanation. It's not 'Well, my friend said that, so I agree.' So it's no longer the case of little cliques agreeing or disagreeing. They've got the confidence and the ability. They know they can do it. They're *listened to.*" In the final dress rehearsal, the children were quick to compliment aspects of the production they thought were particularly good. But they didn't shy away from even painful questions about whether Cap-a-Pie didn't think "our verses were exciting enough." And they pressed the adults hard to include more slapstick. They, more than the adults, knew what would make young children laugh.

The list above addresses key aspects of what makes polyphony so instrumental to the creative process. In its promise of openness and surprise as well as dialogic rather than monologic conversational spaces, there is ample room for children's voices.

But there was another aspect of Cap-a-Pie's work that bears consideration, and that is the need to ultimately *finalise* the production. Intriguingly, in discussing creativity, Sir Ken Robinson (2001) welcomes the balance that comes with such constraints. Indeed, rather than view a final product as constraining, he argues for "outcomes that are original and of value" (p. 118). He suggests:

Creative processes are rooted in imaginative thought, in envisaging new possibilities. But creativity goes further. Imagination can be an entirely private process of internal consciousness. You might be lying motionless on your bed but in a fever of imagination. Private imaginings may have no impact in the public world at all. Creativity does. It would be odd to describe someone as creative who just lay still and never did anything. Whatever the task, creativity is not just an internal mental process: it involves action. In a sense, it is applied imagination. To call somebody creative suggests they are actively producing something in a deliberate way. A first definition of creativity then is *imaginative processes with outcomes in the public world.* (p. 115)

And an *original* play that was of *value* both to the host of playwrights as well as their audience members is the very definition of *"imaginative processes with outcomes in the public world."*

Still, what would Bakhtin, who so lauded unfinalisability and surprise have said to a play that tied up its plot points so neatly at the end? He conceded that even Dostoevsky—whom he designated as the first polyphonic author—"usually failed to work out a way to end his novels without violating their polyphonic essence, which is why his endings are so often out of keeping with the tone of the works they conclude" (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p. 253). How can we find value in a final performance that ultimately stops the conversation?

Yet, Bakhtin was thinking about the conversation among characters and a single author, with each just as surprised as the next about what is said and done within a piece. Here, however, we are focusing on the conversations among *authors*—conversations that stretched over time and argument, agreement and disagreement, age and ability, children and adults. The openness and surprise that Bakhtin so admired was given full play in this collaboration. Adults were open to children's voices, and the surprise was inherent in a creative process that truly couldn't predict the directions the children would take them.

True, as the pressure of the production grew, some aspects of conversation reached closure, but this did not serve to silence the children. Instead, they pulled together to make the key points of their critique heard, and they respected the actors' opinions when they

could not comply. Furthermore, it opened them up to future conversations, for they had learned the value of being heard and listening to others in turn. And though Richard said "We've worked hard," and the work "had loads of pressure," it was clear that the payoff was tremendous: "We might just think we're clever!" Within their creative collaboration, new vocabulary, new structures, new motivations and intentions all entered into their repertoires of expression. Their new-found self confidence, not only in themselves, but also in the group, would serve them well when new opportunities arose.

And arise they did. The following year, five children in Linda's playwriting class were invited along with their teachers to London to give a presentation on their work at a Creative Partnerships conference most aptly entitled "Listening to Young People." After much consideration, Linda and Lesley selected James, Cathy, Richard, Kate, and Eleanor to go, and on an early morning before sunrise we all boarded the train in Newcastle along with the director of Creative Partnerships Durham Sunderland, Lorna Fulton, for the three-hour journey to London.

It was a day of astonishing firsts, with a trip to London being at the head of the list. But many others followed. The Bexhill children were the youngest at the conference, and during their presentation video cameras, boom mikes, and bright lights surrounded them. It was enough to make even the most experienced presenter nervous, but the children stood their ground. They talked about the process of making up "loads of words for the play" as well as how it felt to "control the adults instead of adults controlling us!" James ruminated on the oddity of such a role reversal, "It was a bit strange because we were like telling them what to do." Still, he reflected that perhaps it wasn't as unusual as one might think: "But our teachers listen to what we say to them." Even when Cap-a-Pie took some control, the children said, "Most of us weren't really bothered 'cause at least some of our ideas were in." To enhance their presentation, they performed the slapstick in the "mop the deck" scene, demonstrated the workings of the puppet Mary Lou, and boisterously sang "Aye Aye, me hearty crew."

The teachers also commented on their own professional development. In answer to a question about what made this particular creative partnership work so well, Linda responded:

I think basically it was the relationship between Mark and Gordon— it's their personalities really. They were excited with the prospects of this. I don't think a lot of adults would be. And seeing what we thought our children were capable of. Because in the past, we've had a lot of drama practitioners who've come in with a package. They deliver the package and then leave. And they didn't really achieve very much. I mean, we certainly had a pleasant afternoon, a pleasant day, but there was nothing we could use from it to follow up because it was a set package. In and out, and the relationship wasn't there. Whereas here, we built the relationship.

Linda's words were confirmed in an earlier interview with Mark and Gordon. As Mark explained: "Linda and Lesley have been really strong. It's the first time I've worked that closely with a teacher. Most of the time, the teachers go, 'Come in. Do your thing, and get on with it.' But from day one, Linda and Lesley have been with us." Linda characterised it in the following terms: "They listened to us. And we listened to them." And most important, everybody listened to the children.

At the end of their presentation, Creative Partnerships generously supplied two taxis to squire the children and their teachers about London. Since it was the first visit for most if not all of the children (Kate had a vague memory of visiting London as a baby), it was a thrilling trip. We visited Westminster Abbey, Big Ben, 10 Downing Street, and Trafalgar Square. We gazed up at the London Eye and took in The Tower. We flew about London, just as the Darling children—with the help of Peter's fairy dust—flew over the rooftops of London on their way to the Neverland and their "awfully big adventure" with pirates. At each stop, we leapt from our taxis and rushed to the entrance, hoping for a glimpse of The Tower's ravens, or the Prime Minister, or to hear the big clock chime. At Buckingham Palace, we pressed our faces against the wrought iron gates to see if the guards in their tall fur hats would break into a smile, but of course, they did not. Linda gathered the children and pointed to the flag fluttering high above the palace, and she said that when the flag was flying "the Queen is in residence." James stared at the flag, but then dropped his gaze to the lighted windows below. He responded, "Of course she is, Mrs. Nesbitt. Look! There's a light on!"

Seeing into the light of children's minds means not only close observation, but a willingness to listen well. How will we know what they're thinking, if we don't ask? And how will we comment on their ideas, if we don't allow them to do much of the asking? How can we recognise their insights, their contributions, and even their charming confusions if we don't make space for their talk? And how will they grow in their ability to express themselves, if we don't constantly up the ante on their ruminations and reflections, just as they will with ours? In just about any good conversation you can name, much depends on the *exchange* among equal partners, no matter their age. Without being open to children's comments and conjectures, best guesses, and goals of *meaning making*, we will silence them or, even worse, goad them into parroting their elders.

"All children, except one, grow up." Thus begins the classic tale of children and pirates in J. M. Barrie's (1911) *Peter Pan.* But the question is not one of inevitability. It's really a question of *how* they will grow up. In a recent speech to the National Academy of Education in the United States, Jerome Bruner (2005) had this to say about instruction:

> My own view is that pedagogical instruction should take as a central task not only passing on knowledge, by making students aware of the *possibilities* inherent in or opened up by what they are learning. It is a sure way of assuring an escape from the ruts of the ordinary, helping kids make the leap to possible worlds. We know all too clearly already that the world of the future will *not* be a stable and easily predictable one. It's such a world that we must have in mind in thinking about our pedagogy. How do we go about preparing a next generation for a world of expanding possibilities? I'm less interested in *what* we must teach our young, but *how* we might go about teaching them in that spirit, no matter what the subject matter. *How* do you teach in order to broaden a grasp of the possibilities that lie on the other side of what we've just learned?

In *Peter Pan,* it's clear that J. M. Barrie (1911) shares Bruner's interest, for he bemoans the fact that children's minds remain as incomprehensible to adults as the Neverland: "On these magic shores children at play are for ever beaching their coracles. We too have been there; we can hear the sound of the surf, though we shall land no more" (p. 8). But perhaps we can get closer to the shore, and even expand the horizon, if we listen to the Bexhill children, their teachers, and the artists of Theatre Cap-a-Pie creating their own original and much valued pirate play, especially if we realise that "helping kids make the leap to possible worlds" has less to do with fairy dust than loads and loads of language.

References

Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination.* Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Barrie, J. M. (1911). *Peter Pan*, illustrated by T. S. Hyman. New York: Atheneum.

Booker, C. (2004). *The seven basic plots: Why we tell stories.* London: Continuum.

Bruner, E. M. (1986). Experience and its expressions. In V. W. Turner & E. M. Bruner (Eds.), *The anthropology of experience* (pp. 3-30). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Bruner, J. (October, 2005). *Aiming for the future: Cultivating a sense of the possible.* Presentation for the annual meeting of the National Academy of Education. New York: Teachers College.

Bruner, J. (2002). *Making stories: Law, literature, life.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Cordingly, D. (1995). *Under the black flag: The romance and the reality of life among the pirates*. London: Harcourt Brace.

Creative Partnerships. (2003). *What is Creative Partnerships?* Retrieved July 20, 2005, from http://www.creative-partnerships.com/aboutcp/.

Dyson, A. H. (1989). *Multiple worlds of child writers: Friends learning to write*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Emerson, C. (1997). *The first hundred years of Mikhail Bakhtin.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Frost, A., & Yarrow, R. (1989). *Improvisation in drama.* New York: St. Martin's Press.

Geertz, C. (1979). Deep play: Notes on the Balinese cockfight. In P. Rabinow & W. M. Sullivan (Eds.), *Interpretive social science: A reader* (pp. 181-223). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Greenblatt, S. (2004). *Will in the world: How Shakespeare became Shakespeare.* London: W. W. Norton.

Heath, S. B. (1982). What no bedtime story means: Narrative skills at home and school. *Language in Society*, *11,* 49-76.

Heath, S. B., & Wolf, S. (2005). *Dramatic learning in the primary school.* London: Arts Council of England.

Kinde, J. (2005). *The rule of three.* Retrieved September 10, 2005, from http://www.clown-ministry.com/Articles/the-rule-of-three.html.

Konstam, A. (2002). *The history of pirates.* Guilford, CN: Lyons Press.

Mandell, J., & Wolf, J. L. (2003). *Acting, learning & change: Creating original plays with adolescents.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Morson, G. S., & Emerson C. (1990). *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a prosaics.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Nodelman, P., & Reimer, M. (2003). *The pleasures of children's literature*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Norman, M., & Stoppard, T. (1998). *Shakespeare in love.* Miramax Films/Universal Pictures/The Befford Falls Company.

Robinson, K. (2001). *Out of our minds: Learning to be creative*. West Sussex: Capstone.

Sankey, J. (1998). *Zen and the art of stand up comedy.* New York: Routledge.

Stanislavski, C. (1963). *An actor's handbook.* New York: Theatre Arts Books.

Victoria. (2001). *Practice.* Summary under "Remarkable Productions." Retrieved August 28, 2005, from http://www.vti.be/en/sub.asp?xvader=168&xvader2=380&xvader3=428.

Wagner, B. J. (1976). *Dorothy Heathcote: Drama as a learning medium.* Washington, DC: National Education Association.

Wolf, S. A. (2004). *Interpreting literature with children.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Wolf, S. A., & Gearhart, M. (1994). Writing what you read: Assessment as a learning event. *Language Arts, 71* (6), 425-444.

Woolf, V. (1929). *A room of one's own.* London: Harcourt.

Permissions

Credits

John McGagh began working for Creative Partnerships Durham Sunderland at its inception in 2002 after several years working in literature development in the North East of England. In previous work on the series *Dramatic Learning in the Primary School* as well as current work on this monograph *The Playwright's Life for Me!*, John has been a key advisor. Through multiple meetings with multiple parties – researchers, Creative Partnerships directors, and the Headteacher of Bexhill, Joy Lowther – John repeatedly demonstrated the essence of 'creative partnerships'. His insights, expertise, and diplomacy helped guide the monograph through the myriad decisions involved in the creation and completion of any academic text. With an ear for editing, an eye for design, and the persistence needed to acquire necessary permissions, John's contributions helped bring this monograph to life.

The author would also like to thank Lorna Fulton – Director of Creative Partnerships Durham Sunderland – for her support in the development and delivery of this research programme.

Ripe was established in 1993 as a multi disciplinary design consultancy – headed by creative directors Emma Pinwill and Martyn Price. Over the past 13 years, Ripe has become a recognised and successful business – building a loyal and varied portfolio. Ripe works primarily in the cultural and education sectors.

Creative Partnerships is the Government's flagship creativity programme for schools and young people, managed by Arts Council England and funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Department for Education and Skills.

Creative Partnerships Durham Sunderland operates over a large geographical area, covering urban and rural schools. It takes 2 hours to travel from Wearhead Primary School (35 pupils) overlooking the rolling green landscape of County Durham to Bexhill Primary School (335 pupils) located in the heart of an urban landscape in Sunderland.

Creative Partnerships Durham Sunderland works in two large geographical areas covering 18 schools in urban and rural areas. The group includes two special schools, two infant schools, eight primary schools and six secondary schools.

Creative Partnerships Durham Sunderland has been working since 2002 with cultural sector partners and schools to find new ways to enhance, diversify and enrich learning in the classroom. We aim to deliver a research-focussed programme of work through partnerships and collaborations between our partner schools and the cultural sector that extends creative learning, develops new knowledge and brokers new collaborations and cultural production within school settings across Durham and Sunderland.

Creative Partnerships Durham Sunderland programme has been driven by research and developed through continuous learning and consultation. A key priority for our programme has been the development of long-term partnership relationships that develop intensive work with groups of young people, an emphasis on involving teachers in the planning and delivery team and a commitment to delivering high quality results in relation to brokerage/curation, collaborative practice and programme content/outcomes.

Bexhill Primary School
Since 2002 Creative Partnerships Durham Sunderland has supported pupils and teachers at Bexhill Primary to work intensively with the dramatic arts. Professional actors helped pupils create plays during short-term residencies. Teachers began after-school Drama Clubs and brought numerous techniques of dramatic production and critique into their thinking about the entire curriculum.

Examination of Key Stage tests across subject areas revealed that the tests expected pupils to use language in ways not generally found in daily classroom life. In addition to the joy of work in the dramatic arts, teachers at Bexhill saw participation in the thinking, creating, and critiquing that come with drama as a way to improve language fluency of primary-level pupils.

Bexhill Primary is situated in a housing estate on the outskirts of Sunderland. Built in the early sixties, the housing has been attractively upgraded. Bexhill stands in a green environment, characterised by tree plantings and 'hides' – in which both children and adults can relax. The school plays an important role in a community with high levels of unemployment, a range of family contexts and little cultural diversity. There is a positive community spirit, strengthened by links with the on-site library, community association and the local church. The school has a roll of around 350 3-11 year-olds and seeks to raise aspirations through close involvement with families. Speaking, listening and social skills are major foci for the early years. The development of oral confidence and facility remains a focus through key stages 1 and 2. While the school performs well in national tests, it strives to raise attainment. The school also holds Artsmark Silver. Bexhill children are engaged in a range of quality arts experiences, which broaden their cultural experience and encourage them to develop skills and attitudes, which could enrich their lives and offer future employment and leisure options. Bexhill is determined to build language and thinking skills through an innovative approach to the curriculum – believing that drama-rich curricula can take children's understanding beyond their own experience and encourage higher order language skills. Bexhill is also a training school for Initial Teacher Training and is committed to sharing expertise with others.

Theatre Cap-a-Pie is a professional theatre company which has been based in the North East for the past 10 years. The company has built a strong reputation for producing high quality work with and for children and young people, and for developing long-term relationships with schools, artists and agencies. The company seeks to develop an understanding of the place of theatre arts in society and, over the past four years, has worked alongside Creative Partnerships Durham Sunderland and its partner schools to develop programmes aimed at developing creativity and spontaneity within the classroom.

Theatre Cap-a-Pie is passionate about harnessing the energy, enthusiasm and creativity of young people in the development of their work, and the current artistic direction of the company involves the creation of professional productions in a unique and exciting way. During the development and rehearsal period the young people work in close collaboration with educators and learners. Working within the school environment, the aim of the work is to explore text and performance development in an atmosphere of shared creative endeavour towards the clear and valuable outcome of creating a public, professional theatre performance.

Shelby Wolf is professor of education and an award-winning teacher and educational scholar at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Her research centres on children's language and learning through engagement in literature and collaborative as well as creative modes of expression – discussion, writing, the visual arts, and drama. Her most recent book, *Interpreting Literature with Children* (Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004), portrays her close work with teachers as co-researchers in the study of children's literary learning. She has worked within numerous school-change programmes to validate the perspectives of teachers who undertake enquiry into how learning works in their classrooms. She is a senior author of *Houghton Mifflin English*, a textbook series devoted to helping children improve as writers. With Shirley Brice Heath, she wrote *The Braid of Literature: Children's Worlds of Reading* (Harvard University Press, 1992). Most recently, Dr. Wolf has joined again with Shirley Brice Heath to look closely at how language, attention, inspiration, and collaboration within two schools in England changed through artistic partnership. One set of booklets reports on *Visual Learning in the Community School* (Creative Partnerships, 2004) while another set concentrates on *Dramatic Learning in the Primary School* (Creative Partnerships, 2005). For more information on Dr. Wolf's teaching, research, and presentations see:
http://www.colorado.edu/education/faculty/shelbywolf/

A Playwright's Life is an innovative and compelling monograph, offering real insight about the benefits of combining drama and literacy. Literary connections are woven throughout, illuminating both the teachers' and the children's learning and enriching the potency of this fascinating and unusual book. The detailed analysis of language learning in dramatic contexts is particularly perceptive. All in all, it's an accessible, arresting and imaginatively engaging read.
Professor Teresa Cremin
(previously known as professionally as Teresa Grainger)
Canterbury Christ Church University

A Playwright's Life is a captivating book – a voyage of discovery into previously uncharted territory. Using a novel 'polyphonic' approach to understand creativity, collaboration, and language, Wolf artfully analyses key moments from her tale of playwriting to show children's development in core aspects of learning. This book is a testimony to the creative power unleashed when adults listen to children, act on their ideas, and engage in authentic dialogue. The children's increasingly confident voices pervade this tale of a genuinely creative partnership: they make suggestions, laugh at jokes, shape ideas, question decisions, explore with peers and adults, and reflect in public on how much they have come to know along their journey with their teachers and Theatre Cap-a-Pie.
Brian Edmiston, PhD
Associate Professor of Teaching and Learning with Drama
Ohio State University

A Playwright's Life is thrice a surprise and delight to read. How can teachers and actors together create an environment where Year 2 children write a script for actors to play? How can Wolf as researcher, crossing the Atlantic for only a few 3-day visits, collect such a rich set of materials on that work in process? Finally, how can Wolf, now as writer, create such an unusual research report: a true suspense story about troubles overcome and professional production achieved? Read, enjoy, and learn!
Professor Courtney Cazden
Harvard Graduate School of Education

ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

hmmm
Creative Partnerships