

Constructing Knowledge Together: A Reflective Practitioner Case Study on the Use of Ensemble Pedagogy to Shakespearean Text in a Y8 Drama Class¹

Herlin Putri

English Study Program, University of Indonesia

Abstract

Most research on the teaching of Shakespeare in school settings has focused on how active approaches can foster learners' motivation and confidence. While this point is essential, the value of collaboration among learners remains a relatively neglected area of study despite its significance in determining the quality of the learning process. This article explores how ensemble-based learning can enable the process of knowledge construction through collaborative work among learners. In doing so, I designed and facilitated six drama lessons exploring Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in a Y8 drama class in England as my pilot study. Adopting Vygotskian socio-cultural approaches to the development of knowledge and Jonothan Neelands' principles of ensemble, the study draws on analysis of qualitative data. Overall, the preliminary findings suggest evidence to support the conclusions of previous studies that ensemble-based learning can (1) generate an "open space" which fosters an inclusive environment through mutual trust and collaboration among learners; (2) bring learners to the centre of collaborative sense making with teacher serving as a facilitator to support autonomous learning; and (3) create a stimulating dialogue through collaborative work and creative exploration.

Keywords: ensemble pedagogy, knowledge construction, collaborative learning, active approaches of teaching Shakespeare

Email: herlindestari@gmail.com

Introduction

In recent years, an active approach to teaching Shakespeare, developed by the Royal Shakespeare Company (2008), has been the most widespread approach used in the teaching of Shakespeare in educational settings. To teach Shakespeare actively means to treat his plays as a “script” for “play” and “experiment”, and the “learning” is facilitated by the teacher but owned by learners (Stredder, 2009, p.15). Indeed, it is about making his works accessible for learners and living his plays by imagining, acting and performing them out. Unlike some other drama pedagogies, this approach emphasizes on the values of collaboration (Neelands, 2009). The RSC’s artistic director Michael Boyd (cited in Neelands, 2009) further explains that “ensemble” is not a technique of theatre-making but rather a social philosophy. In an ensemble-based learning, all participants may share their knowledge, and their interpretations and performance of text are collaboratively created. Jonathan Neelands and Jacqui O’Hanlon (2011) address that one distinctive feature of ensemble pedagogy is a “workshop model” in which learners can feel “authentic” theatre experiences by exploring Shakespeare’s plays on their feet, literally and figuratively, as actors do in the rehearsal room (Neelands, 2009). About to teach Shakespeare for the first time, I am keen to explore how ensemble pedagogy can support learners to develop their understanding on Shakespearean texts and how they would respond to it. As a novice drama teacher, I also need to better understand the role and task of a teacher in this process. The importance of research in this area has become more apparent because although a number of studies have found that ensemble pedagogy can foster learners’ motivation, engagement and attainment (Irish, 2011; Thomson, Hall, Thomas, Jones, & Franks, 2010; Galloway & Strand, 2010; Neelands, Galloway, & Lindsay, 2009), the value of collaborative work among learners has remained mostly invisible to both teachers and scholars despite its significance in determining the quality of the learning process. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore how ensemble-based learning can enable the collaborative process of knowledge construction among learners. I explored the phenomenon through a direct teaching experience to gain some “real life” examples, in the hope of improving my understanding on

the pedagogy and using this experience to enhance my teaching practice. I hope the findings of this study, however small, can contribute knowledge to the teaching and learning of Shakespeare and to other drama classes where ensemble is taken as a focal point.

Research Context

This pilot study is part of my reflective practice (Neelands, 2006; O'Toole, 2006; Schön, 1983) because the study itself was a journey to better my teaching skills. I also applied case study to explore how participants in this study were involved in the process of joint knowledge construction because, as Yin (2009), Winston (2006) and Stake (2000) have argued, an in-depth inquiry could help me understand complex and concurrent interactions of phenomenon, events and people in the learning environment. I positioned myself as a "participant-researcher" exploring the phenomenon from both a teacher's angle and a researcher's angle, rather than examining it as an "expert" with an intention to solve problems with interventionist actions (O'Toole, 2006).

I conducted my pilot study during the summer term of 2013-2014 in a Y8 drama class of 12 to 13 years old in a secondary school in England. Although the school was graded "good" by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) — the UK national school inspectorate — the class teacher was concerned about some students, mainly the females, being reluctant to take chances in the learning process, something I also hoped could be addressed by adopting ensemble-based learning. In total there were nineteen participants with mixed abilities, consisting of 4 males and 15 females, one of whom has special education needs (SEN). Most of them spoke English as their first language, except three students who speak English as an additional language (EAL). All participants had studied and performed at least one Shakespeare's play in the previous class. In general they had positive motivation and attitude to drama. They viewed the learning experience as an opportunity to have fun, to learn about theatre making and to work together with their friends. As proved in the school's report, drama

class remained a favourite subject and had been a popular option for Y8 and Y9 students.

To explore my inquiry, I designed and facilitated six drama lessons exploring Shakespeare's *Macbeth* based on the lesson plans in *The RSC Shakespeare Toolkit for Teachers* (Royal Shakespeare Company, 2010). The friendship theme, the complexity of human dilemma and the gripping journey of the narrative were hoped to appeal to the participants' interests. The aim of this scheme was to encourage the participants to use various dramatic approaches to explore characters and motivation, themes and Shakespeare's language in *Macbeth*. The class teacher was present in all sessions to provide support with classroom management because I was new to ensemble pedagogy, and this was also my first experience of teaching Shakespeare's play. Adopting the principles of ensemble pedagogy (Neelands, 2009), I designed each lesson as an experiential workshop model to give the participants an opportunity to experiment with the script as actors and directors do. The learning tasks aimed to encourage teamwork, creativity and critical thinking. Examples of activities in this scheme included but not limited to ensemble reading, staging, *tableau*, soundscapes and group discussion. In between activities are rehearsals in which participants were encouraged to work on their feet in small groups or as a class, so they would be able to guide each other to learn. Not all activities in the original lesson plans were used due to time constraints, so I prioritised those considered as having more values to accommodate these needs. However, they were still designed as a complete, well-rounded experience. Each lesson took fifty-five minutes and started with a five-minute physical exercise as a warm-up activity that encouraged thinking about the central theme in the story. At the end of the lesson, we had a reflective discussion to share our understanding of the story and its relevance to the world we live in today and to our lives. In all lessons, desks were removed to allow rehearsal room approaches.

My research instruments were (1) video and audio recordings of the six lessons; (2) my reflective journals kept immediately after each session; (3) transcriptions of reflective discussions with the class teacher and; (4)

transcriptions of two group interviews and three individual interviews with the students using a video-stimulated recall. To get a representative of varying experiences, the group interviews were of six participants (three students in each) who had been classified by the class teacher according to their academic abilities and achievement (e.g. higher-achieving ability, average-achieving ability, and lower-achieving ability). Each interview took fifteen minutes and was semi-structured with open-ended questions, allowing the participants to express their thoughts freely while maintaining focus on the topic of the discussion (Robson, 2011, p.28). A video-stimulated recall was used to “prompt” participants to recall their thoughts and feelings about the activities (Gass & Mackey, 2000, p.17). I chose some important segments from the classroom rehearsals (e.g. ensemble reading and soundscape) and edited them into a five-minute clip, which participants were asked to comment on. The records were then transcribed verbatim.

Following O’Toole’s principle of “repeatability” (2006, p.37), I reviewed both video and audio records of the lessons weekly until I obtained a necessary level of detail before transcribing them using transcription conventions in Conversation Analysis (CA), slightly adapted from J. Maxwell Atkinson and John Heritage (1984). I employed CA to represent the contextual details of the interactions between the participants because drama largely involves not only verbal language but also paralinguistic features (e.g. gesture, tone, facial expressions and body movement) that may convey meanings but cannot be described by using a simple transcription technique (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008). Upholding research ethics, all participation in this study was on the basis of voluntary and informed consent. I assigned pseudonyms for all participants and guaranteed the class teacher and the school remain anonymous.

Ensemble as a Social and an Artistic Mode of Learning

To explore the phenomenon, I begin by drawing connections between socio-cultural theories to the construction of knowledge from Lev

Semenovich Vygotsky (1962; 1978) and principles of ensemble pedagogy by Jonathan Neelands (2009; 2010). Their tenets shape a theoretical framework of this study.

The pedagogy of ensemble proposed by Jonathan Neelands (2009) stems in the “socio constructivist” paradigm to the creation of knowledge, developed by Lev Semenovich Vygotsky (1962; 1978) who believes that all knowledge is constructed rather than directly obtained by the senses or teacher-transmitted. At the heart of it is an attempt to challenge the traditional education system and bring learners to the centre of the learning process, with the teacher serving as a facilitator to support autonomous learning. Vygotsky’s theories have certain relevant values that underpin the theoretical framework of this study. First, Vygotsky has developed the foundations for an understanding of the construction of knowledge as a social process (as cited in Mercer & Littleton, 2007). Like his predecessor Jean Piaget (1926), Vygotsky describes cognitive development as an active process. However, unlike Piaget, he regards the process as social and collective which can be carried out by individuals, pairs or larger groups (Wertsch, 1991). He further outlines that a cognitive development in an individual first appears as an “*interpsychological*” process *between* people on the social plane before it appears as an “*intrapsychological*” process *within* the *individual* (Vygotsky, 1981, p.163). In other words, it is the *social* process which later provides the foundation of knowledge construction. Second, Vygotsky acknowledges the importance of peer interactions for knowledge construction. He advocates asymmetrical collaboration between “the more” and “the less” capable learners through “Zone Proximal Development” or ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978; 1987), the band between what learners can do on their own and what they can do with help from others who are more capable. A metaphoric expression used to describe the guidance is called “scaffolding” (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976). However, scaffolding does not mean to treat “the less capable” learners as passive recipients because their active involvement is also crucial (Tharp & Gallimore, 1998; Maybin, Mercer, & Stierer, 1992). The guidance is provided rather to generate collaboration between them with knowledge that is built through negotiation. The other key idea in Vygotsky’s theories is his

emphasis on the importance of speech in “communication”, “social contact” and “influencing surrounding individuals” (Vygotsky, 1934, p.45). Hence, to a large extent we develop our thinking and understanding through dialogue with people around us. The good question now is how ensemble pedagogy can generate this learner-centred, social and dialogic learning environment to stimulate the process of knowledge construction.

Neelands (2009) argues that ensemble pedagogy can create an “open space”, a space of exploration where everybody involved in it feels safe yet at the same time encouraged to take risks and participate in the discovery and the creation of knowledge. A teacher should take risks by “dethroning” his or her power over the students by allowing them to explore multiple interpretations rather than directing them to the correct one (Neelands, 2011, p.175). Learners also have to take risks by participating in the activities. This is why *trust* is crucial to provide a supportive environment for all the participants to take part in the actions (Neelands, 2011, p.9). Through this open space, a hierarchical teacher-student interaction is circumvented thus stimulating more collaborations which can make substantial contributions to the creation of knowledge. Neelands’ theory of “open space” in this respect can be seen as analogous to Mikhail Bakhtin’s “carnival space”, which refers to a space where “the behaviour, gesture and discourse” of an individual are liberated from all hierarchical positions (as cited in Tam, 2010, pp.177-178). Both open the way to shift the power relation between the teacher and learners and reiterate the importance of learner-centred paradigm. A case study by Tam (2010) has further revealed that such openness can be achieved through playful, spontaneous, and fictional qualities of drama pedagogy. Neelands (2011) agrees and adds the other key quality in his principles of ensemble which is *collaboration*.

At a more practical level, the structures and strategies of ensemble-based learning are mainly drawn from John Dewey’s (1916) idea of “experiential learning” where learning is by discovery. Whereas traditional approaches believe that textbooks have all the answers, ensemble pedagogy encourages “hands-on” and “real life” experiences to be a rich source for a

deeper understanding. “Learning” in this sense does not mean getting the right answer but exploring multiple interpretations, problematizing concepts, and developing arguments. It encourages learners to experiment with the text and “translate” their understanding in an “embodied” way (Neelands & O’Hanlon, 2011, p.243). These strategies are derived from the RSC’s active approaches to Shakespeare (Royal Shakespeare Company, 2010), particularly rehearsal room techniques in that learners are invited to experience a Shakespearean text as actors and directors do in the rehearsal rooms. In ensemble-based learning, learners work on their feet independently, in small groups or as a class and sometimes may use scripts, props, costumes, or other audio-visual materials that can support them to make sense of the play. The drama activities basically are similar to those of the active approaches such as ensemble reading, roleplaying, still image or *tableau*, staging, improvising, and soundscape. However, the nature of the learning task emphasizes more on *collaboration* among all participants. By working in roles in ensemble drama, learners can create social imagination which later foster the creation of collaborative art. The learning is developed by imagining, thinking and acting *together* (Neelands, 2011). Through ensemble-based learning, learners can have opportunities to become “social group who co-create artistically and collaboratively” (Neelands, 2011, p.176). Central to this pedagogy is the interdependence as humans in which people work together and help each other to construct and share their knowledge.

Creating A Collaborative Space for Constructing Knowledge

Neelands and O’Hanlon (2011) advocate that an important condition to establish ensemble-based learning is an atmosphere of *trust* and *collaboration* among all participants. Once these conditions are nurtured then ensemble can be created. Throughout this study, the importance of these elements continually emerged as being of key significance to the process of knowledge construction. It became most obvious to me during the rehearsals. For example, a whole-class rehearsal using ensemble reading in the second lesson showed how this process may occur. The main aim of this lesson was

to introduce Macbeth as the main character and explore the relationship between Macbeth and his peers. After the students performed a battle scene as soldiers of Scotland and Norway, I explained that a general named Macbeth had brought Scotland to victory. Then I distributed a script spoken by a Scottish captain to King Duncan, reporting Macbeth's bravery in the battle (Appendix 1). I encouraged the students to read it aloud as we were standing in a circle. We rehearsed four times to familiarise ourselves with the language. In the first two rounds, each student read only up to the next punctuation mark, so each time there was a punctuation mark, the next student read. One student might only read one word or a couple of lines, so it would give an impression that the script is "doable". Next, they read the script together in the role of war journalist and then a captain of Scottish army. I asked them to imagine how a war journalist and a captain might be standing up and reporting the news. Most of them spontaneously responded by presenting a physicality of the characters while reading the script together. I assisted them by modelling some pronunciations a couple of times in the hope they would speak their lines more naturally. I noted in my journal entry:

Some students made a serious facial expression with their hands clenched as if holding a microphone to represent the war journalist. One student bent his knee demonstrating a captain who lost one of his legs, some showed a limp leg, while some others held their wounded stomach in pain. One student suddenly raised his hand as if holding a sword, screaming breathlessly, "Disdaining Fortune, with his brandished steel!"

From the descriptions, we can see how the fictiveness in drama encouraged the students to put themselves into someone else's shoes. Here they tried to imagine, feel, think and express themselves as others. They drew out their understanding on what they read by developing one creative image to another then "translated" their understanding into a more "tangible" form, through which knowledge got embodied (Neelands, 2009). Furthermore, it is interesting to note how their use of tone and speed changed as they "became" a different character. For example, one male student standing near

me sounded firm and rushed when reporting the news as a war journalist at an ongoing battle, yet he sounded breathless when speaking as an injured captain. His transformation demonstrated his different understandings on the dramatic circumstances. I did not correct their interpretations on the lines because I did not aim to achieve “accuracy” but rather to let them explore it, consistent with Dewey’s (1916) and Neelands’ (2009) principles of experiential learning. From this description, we can see how the activity gave opportunities to the students to imagine and create a dramatic world in their own way and even in a grotesque, carnivalistic way in Bakhtian sense. A few students would laugh along although the scene they enacted was full of a catastrophe after the war, especially when they were trying to improvise and exaggerate their acting as a wounded soldier. While this scene might be considered “too gory” in the traditional classroom, it would be valued as playful and creative qualities of the students in drama pedagogy.

Additionally, my entry describes students’ enthusiasm to explore a Shakespeare’s text through ensemble reading. This observation is supported by the students’ responses after watching a video-stimulated recall on the activity:

I think it’s fun cos you see everyone speaks different voices and they do funny things with their face and their body. [...] It’s helpful in a way, cos there’s, like, your friends also read with you so you don’t have to be afraid if you say something wrong. (Serena)

It’s like you’re thinking you’re not the only person doing it. So, you’ve got everyone else with you, so you just give it a go. (Madelyn)

I like it! You’re like with your friends so you don’t have to feel embarrassed about how you perform. It’s not like the whole class looking at you. (Franny)

The students’ experiences describe ensemble-based learning as a space where they could feel safe because they “got their friends with them”. We can see from their answers there is a strong emphasis on how this quality

of “being together” with their friends encouraged them to participate in the learning process. This finding echoes the value of ensemble-based learning as “a secure environment without ever being a comfort zone” (Streatfeild as cited in Neelands, 2010, p.140). On the one hand, it is interesting to note that the students tend to describe their experiences by using negations (e.g. [in ensemble reading] “you don’t have to be afraid”, “you’re not the only person doing it” and “it’s not like the whole class looking at you”). Their answers triggered my curiosity: Do the students imply that they usually feel afraid in drama class? In what way they would perceive other drama lessons as being “threatening”? How can “being together” in ensemble-based drama help such students to overcome this feeling and encourage them to take part in the joint process of knowledge construction? The findings emerged from the analysis on the final lesson further describe these points.

Dethroning the Teacher’s Power and Generating Collective Role

Neelands (2009) propounds that ensemble pedagogy can generate a more flexible and less hierarchal relationship between teacher and learners, echoing John Dewey’s idea of “democratic education” (1916) and Mikhail Bakhtin’s Dialogism (1981; 1986). By “dethroning” the power of the teacher, it stimulates more interactions among the people involved in it and thus eliciting more explorations on the meaning making process (Neelands & O’Hanlon, 2011). The findings emerged from the analysis on the last scheme of work illustrate how “dethroning” the teacher’s power here is important.

Through detailed reflections on the early lessons using ensemble pedagogy, I noticed that the patterns of students’ contribution to the meaning making process in this study were directly related to the degree of control that I used in the activity. The more I involved, the more the students became passive. While I thought the students might need my full guidance on the task, some students’ responses in an interview proved otherwise,

[when experienced difficulties in drama class] I prefer to ask my friends

because it's like we're in the same level. (Ruby)

I think it would be easier to talk with your friends, but if it's like really, really hard, then you could go and ask the teacher. (Rodney)

The former obviously describes the students and I were not meeting as “equals”, and the latter suggests that the role of teacher's guidance was expected to be the last resource for the students. This has made me realise the importance to shift my role from a “teacher” into a “facilitator” to open more interactions among the students so that the process of knowledge construction can be achieved. My experience by the last scheme of work below describes how this shift in teacher–student relations can create a sense of co-learning in which knowledge can be collectively constructed and shared by learners.

In the final lesson I encouraged the students to create a whole class performance to enact the murder scene of King Duncan. The aim of this lesson was to explore the offstage action implied by the script by creating soundscapes illustrating the atmosphere of the murder. To begin with, I narrated that Macbeth is about to kill King Duncan who is now staying in his castle. Then I gave them a script spoken by Lennox, describing strange events in nature that reflect the murderous night (Appendix 2). The class teacher helped me to group and assign them different roles. On their feet, twelve students working in a group of three created various soundscapes such as sounds of harsh weather and nocturnal animals as well as sounds from inside Macbeth's castle and his body. We chose one confident reader to read the script as a narrator. Two students acted out an edited version of what Macbeth and Lady Macbeth said after the murder while reading the script aloud (Appendix 3), and the other three students “became” the three witches chanting “Sleep no more, Macbeth does murder sleep”. The rehearsal sessions were divided into two stages: group rehearsal and whole class rehearsal. Each lasted for five minutes.

In this activity I played the role of a conductor who controlled volume and pace of the soundscapes. During rehearsals, I decided to take a step back and deliberately left the students on their own to create sound effects, giving more space for them to explore the script. In other words, my authority as the teacher was subverted, recalling the “dethroning” described in Neeland’s and Bakhtinian theories. I only assisted a group who struggled in making the animal sounds. For them I exaggerated a sound of howling wolves and encouraged them to mimic my voice. Then I encouraged them to “become” different animals to elaborate their sound effects. In my journal I reflected how changing my role into a facilitator, in turn, could generate more collaborative work among the students:

I’m amazed to see the students creatively experimented with their voice, making various sounds, from whistling wind to screeching owls, to distant cries of women. Others seemed enthused as they experimented with simple objects around the classroom – door, chairs and even keys! – and spontaneously used them to create sound effects to heighten the atmosphere. It was remarkable how they seemed so immersed in the imagined world.

Reflecting on this experience, it is evident that the shift in teacher–student relations through ensemble pedagogy can generate a collaborative, experiential learning (Franks, Thomson, Hall, & Jones, 2014; Enciso, Cushman, Edmiston, Post, & Berring, 2011). The above example also illustrates how the fictional element in drama encourages the students to turn not only simple objects around them but also their voice and body into magical properties. In a discussion that followed, a student shared how the whole performance helped her to imagine time of the day and mood in the story: “I could imagine a not happy place. And it was dark and scary.” After watching a clip on the rehearsal, another student further added her view:

I would not have enjoyed it if we were just reading it at our desk alone. It would be difficult because you can’t have the imagination. The sound and the performance that we created together are so powerful. When

I saw Macbeth walking towards the chamber menacingly, I knew that something wrong is going to happen that very night. (Erin)

From their answers we can draw a conclusion that unlike in a traditional script reading where learners are bounded around their desk and knowledge is “spoon-fed” by the teacher, in ensemble drama, the students are freed and could have an opportunity to try out their interpretations by working together with their peers. Instead of approaching Shakespeare’s play as an examination text, it permits learners to engage with the text artistically as theatre craftsmen do in the rehearsal room. In this way, they could learn the collaborative nature of theatre. Moreover, as drama works through the medium of role, the students could also use their imagination to construct their understanding on the dramatic situation. As described by Erin in her testimony, the students’ feelings, thinking and understanding are inscribed on their bodies and embodied in their actions (Tam, 2010). The drama is *collectively* created, resulting in a “social imagination” (Neelands, 2009). In other words, the imagination created is not a single entity but rather a shared one from which learners develop their understanding.

In this occasion I also used ensemble-based approaches to integrate students’ ideas to create a whole scene. After the group rehearsals, I asked the soundscaping groups to pause for a moment and let them hear the narration of the script. I asked them to think about when they should start the sound effects and asked the other groups to add their scene into the soundscapes. A student contributed an idea to start the soundscape before the performance began to give illustrations of the night for the audience, and another student added that the sounds of Macbeth’s heart beating should be more dominant when he was approaching King Duncan. Their ideas were added onto the performance. Observing how the students carefully listened to and elaborated each other’s ideas during the discussion, I witnessed how they demonstrated their role as “social beings who co-create artistically and collectively” to integrate their knowledge (Neelands, 2009, p.10). The knowledge in this process is thus collectively constructed and shared by learners (Neelands, 2009). A student’s comment at the final interview summarises this.

I think it's good to share ideas because when you share, you could have an idea and the other person can have an idea and you could link the two ideas together and you'll learn better. (Madelyn)

Furthermore, during the same activity there was a break-through moment when I saw Lucy, a student with SEN, eagerly participated in the rehearsal. Having autism, Lucy has difficulties in sustaining concentration through independent activity, especially reading and writing. I had observed that she often gave up easily and got frustrated. It is interesting to note that Lucy seemed to respond very well to this ensemble and could engage throughout. During the soundscape rehearsals, I grouped her with high-ability students, so they could help her when needed. I noted:

It was remarkable how Lucy worked with her partners today. I saw them trying simple objects around the classroom to create various sound effects. She was running back and forth, making sounds of footsteps and experimenting with a bundle of key chains which created similar sounds of rattling windows. Sometimes she seemed to drop some chairs repetitiously and said "it's chimney" – the line in the script saying that "chimneys were blown down". None of us could dispute that her performance was amazing.

The class teacher also noticed this change in her attitude:

I think, like many SEN students, she responds positively to a very open drama space compared to the tightly structured one which often frustrates her.

The observational data and the discussion with the class teacher suggest that ensemble-based learning can embrace learners with autistic spectrum needs due to its "openness", in a way that it presents a more welcoming environment that allows them to use more creative exploration and collaboration with their peers. As seen from this example, Lucy was able to move and experiment her ideas freely as the fictional world unfolded.

Her mobility and creativity were given a space to develop as the verbal activities become less demanding. She transgressed herself into a liberating, “boundless body”, capable of exploring and generating knowledge (Bakhtin as cited in Tam, 2010). As the class teacher suggested, this is the value that the “tightly structured” learning in the traditional classroom cannot offer. This point resonates the finding of the previous study about the inclusive power of ensemble pedagogy which acts as a bridge between children with special needs and others in their peer group (Neelands et al., 2009).

Lastly, the collaborative moment in this lesson seems to correlate with significant levels of engagement. My journal entry describes:

No students sat on the floor, refusing to participate, or a group with only one or two members working hard while the others just sit around, watching their friends. What I saw today was a class where *all* participants worked collaboratively and harmoniously towards the same goal.

Other students highlighted this point in the group interview by implying the importance of collaborative work with their peers and its impact upon their willingness to participate in the learning process. I was particularly fascinated by this student’s comment:

When we did different roles and performing different parts of the play. Everybody did something. We played it all together. Seeing your friends are with you, you can tell yourself: Just go! (Erin)

Her view further asserts that ensemble-based learning is much more than just learners working together. It is not about learners working *in* groups but rather *as* a group. In the ensemble, everybody is actively engaged in exploration, commitment and collaboration toward a shared goal to think and work together. Moreover, before the process of knowledge construction can happen, first and foremost trust in themselves and others should be nurtured through the “togetherness” in the ensemble. This, in turn, can help

them release their hesitancy to participate in the learning process, stimulating more interactions which later can contribute to the process of knowledge construction.

Ensemble as a Dialogic Space to Scaffold Knowledge

Drawing upon Vygotsky, Tharp and Gallimore (1998) argues that in classroom settings when there are more capable peers, the construction of knowledge may occur through their assistance. Mercer (1995) further outlines how this process can be guided through different kinds of dialogue among learners. He emphasises the potential of peer assistance and group work in providing scaffolded dialogue to support mutual sense making in the zone of proximal development. For the purpose of this study, it is worth exploring the ways ensemble-based learning can facilitate this process. The following extract taken from a group rehearsal in the fourth lesson between three students describes how learners can act as discourse guide in Mercer's sense (1995), in which they guide each other to scaffold their knowledge. Students named Madelyn and Bernard in this extract had been observed as "high achieving" students, while Serena had been observed as a "passive" student. The task aimed to explore Lady Macbeth's soliloquy to understand the relationships between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth and her plan to influence Macbeth (Appendix 4). Whenever the students are speaking in roles of the characters, I placed their words in inverted commas (see Appendix 5 for summary of transcription convention).

Lesson 4

Serena: ((reads from the script)) "Glamis thou art and Cawdor and shall be what thou art promised."

Madelyn: ((reads from the script)) "Yet do I fear thy nature. It is too full o'th' milk of human kindness. To catch the nearest way."

Bernard: OK.

Madelyn: I think you should say "shalt".

Serena: Oh.

Bernard: *((interrupts))* Shalt? *((to Madelyn))* Is it wrong spelling?

Madelyn : No. I think it's like shall (.) but it's Shakespeare.

Serena: Like art is are?

Madelyn : [Yeah.

Bernard: [Right. Shall we try it again?

Serena: *((laughs))*

Madelyn : OK.

Serena: *((reads from the script))* "Glamis thou art and Cowdor and shalt be what thou art promised."

Madelyn : Right. *((to Bernard))* So Macbeth what would you do?

Bernard: You come on and I'm like hallo messenger, and you bow, and I say, "Thank you"! Then you walk away.

Madelyn : OK.

((They act out the dialogue and after they have finished, Madelyn suggests an idea.))

Madelyn : Wait, I think we're Lady Macbeth. *((to Serena))* What do you think?

Serena: I think so. It's her plan after reading the letter, right?

Madelyn : Yeah. I'm pretty sure we're Lady Macbeth.

Bernard: Or one of you can be Lady Macbeth and one of you can be the messenger. And you come and you bow.

Serena: Throughout the end?

Bernard: Yes.

Madelyn : How should I move then? Should we still bow?

Bernard: Yeah. Why not? You are a lady anyway.

Madelyn : Um, OK.

Serena: I bow as well?

Bernard: Yeah. Let's try again.

((They act out the script for the second time. Then Madelyn suggests another idea.))

Madelyn : Maybe you should pause here, and here because there's comma.

Serena: I see.

Madelyn : *((reads from the script))* "Yet do I fear thy nature. It is too full o' th' milk of human kind-." I think if I'm like saying it like mocking you, you think it's better?

Bernard: Think so.

Serena: Or maybe she's angry because her husband suddenly changed his mind.

Bernard: Yeah could be. Just try again, shall we? There you go. Say it lo:::uder!

((Madelyn and Serena laugh. They act the script for the third time.))

Serena: *((reads from the script))* "Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and thy shalt be what thou art promised."

Madelyn : *((reads from the script))* "Yet, do I fear thy nature. It is too full o' th' milk of human kindness. To catch the nearest way."
((sounds firmer))

Bernard: That's better. It's not flat.

This extract demonstrates how the students with different abilities can help each other to construct their understanding of the script at hand. In this context, Madelyn is providing guidance for Serena, her "less able" peer, to improve Serena's way of reading. Seen from Vygotsky's perspective, this process represents how knowledge can be scaffold through the ZPD under the guidance of "the more able" student to "the less able". From the sequence we can see how Serena's initial "flat" speech gradually changed as she starts using "stress" and continuing contours in her final reading, representing the development of her understanding of the text. This collaboration between mixed-ability learners suggests an opportunity for mediation in the zone of proximal development that allows knowledge to be constructed.

Moreover, dialogue between the students seems to be the very essence

in this process. As seen in the sequence, the students can engage in joint thinking with each other through “talk” between them, echoing Vygotsky’s (1934) idea on the development of knowledge as a dialogic process. For example, they are actively engaged in reasoning activities as indicated by the frequent use of “I think” and “because”. Here, the students’ ideas and understanding are challenged and counter-challenged by each other. Bernard’s ideas that the lines are spoken by a messenger is challenged by Madelyn and Serena who think that it should be spoken by Lady Macbeth. Bernard’s response to combine their ideas with his ideas represents how knowledge can be “negotiable” (Barness & Todd, 1977; 1995). Regardless of whose idea is “better” or whose understanding is “correct”, the collaboration between these students shows how ensemble-based learning enables knowledge to be “validated” or made “accountable”. In it, the students have opportunities to explain and provide clear reasoning for their arguments through which their knowledge is guided to develop. The sequence also describes that the students’ contribution in the meaning making process is relatively *equal* in that everybody has a chance to contribute his or her ideas. It would be unlikely that they would be defending their opinion in a discussion with their teacher.

Furthermore, I was particularly interested to analyse Serena’s performance in this rehearsal. Serena was one of the participants in the study who has EAL. She had been observed as a “timid” student. Unless directly asked by the teacher, she would not take any initiatives to join class activities. I noted how she tended to depend on the class teacher’s support and not valuing her interpretation despite excelling in this area. Yet, my observations have discovered that Serena *only* had difficulty expressing her ideas in activities which placed her on the “limelight”. When I asked her to read a script or perform for the class, she often lowered her voice, or worse, she ended up trembling. Serena made an interesting case study for this “unique” behaviour. If she had been passive in all activities, I might have concluded that she was not motivated or did not comprehend the lessons. The group work between her, Madelyn and Bernard has revealed that Serena was actually able to communicate with other group members and even

share her fruitful interpretations freely to them who responded positively. By the end of their rehearsal, she gave a critical interpretation on the text by saying that “I think Lady Macbeth wanna make him [Macbeth] feel unmanly.” It is also evident how she constantly makes connections between the script and the previous activities, illustrating her cognitive attempt to construct her knowledge (e.g. “It’s her plan after reading the letter, right?” and “Maybe she’s angry because her husband suddenly changed his mind”). In an in-depth interview, Serena further explained this discrepancy in her performance:

When I work with a lot of people like in class or something like that, it will be really hard. I don’t really like performing in front of other people because English is not my first language, so sometimes I don’t understand a word. So I was like “what if I say it wrong?” and ‘I couldn’t do that but my friends could.

Reflected on her experience, one cannot deny that language anxiety was the main influencing factor that hindered her performance. If we refer back to her comment on ensemble reading in the previous section, we can conclude that what she needs is a more collaborative environment where she would be able to perform *with* peers and not *for* them. Serena further emphasized that sometimes even working in groups is not enough, for the quality of relationship between her and the other group members matter:

It really depends on who is like in your group. It’s not really easy if you don’t really know them or if the people you work with don’t really wanna work with you. If I’m like with my friends...just my friends, so I don’t need to worry about...I know everyone.

Her answer re-emphasizes that trust foregrounds ensemble-based learning, so it needs to be developed at the same time as we are establishing the open space. Otherwise, the process of knowledge construction can be disrupted. This finding is worth noting because it has informed me to pay more attention on group composition as they may affect the way the students

contribute to the process of knowledge construction and therefore the quality of the educational experience in class.

Conclusion

This pilot study has, I would argue, provided evidence to support and extend the significance of ensemble-based pedagogy in enabling the process of knowledge construction. First, it generates an “open space”, a safe and playful space which can foster an inclusive learning environment yet at the same time encourage learners to take risks by participating in the collaborative sense-making. Second, it shifts the role of the teacher into a facilitator who guides learners in the process of knowledge construction and allows learners to take ownership of their own learning. Third, it stimulates dialogue among learners through collaborative work, allowing knowledge to be constructed, negotiated, validated and shared. Central to the pedagogy is trust and collaboration. Besides, the findings suggest that through ensemble-based drama, learners could learn the collaborative nature of theatre, making the learning experience “authentic”. The learning itself is experiential and embodied. The other findings from the case study further indicate that ensemble-based learning can facilitate less able learners who have limited confidence and learning difficulties, while at the same time challenging the more able to be as creative as they can. The overall findings of this study are hoped to contribute to the development of understanding on ensemble pedagogy by providing some early insights about the substance of the learning the subject knowledge of Shakespeare and the role of learners’ collaboration in it.

To conclude, conducting this pilot study has given me a valuable opportunity to gain “real life” experiences with ensemble pedagogy I never used before. It has opened my eyes to a new way of teaching which is totally different from the traditional approaches I used to apply. By the end of the scheme of work, I realised that before I knew ensemble-based approaches, my previous teaching techniques might not always encourage student-centred learning. I could be quite “dominating”, thinking that as their teacher

I was obliged to explain everything to them. As a result, I unconsciously become the transmitter of knowledge in my class. Reflecting on the students' responses to this scheme, I have learned that what learners need is actually a much more open space which can give them a chance to trust and be trusted in developing their understanding and potentials. I need to put them at the heart of the process and shift my role into a facilitator to help them attain independent ownership of their knowledge. With this enriched understanding, I now feel more prepared to embark on the next journey to my future drama class.

Limitations of Study

This is a pilot study, so only a small amount of data was collected and explored. The process of knowledge construction itself depends largely on many factors such as students' gender, age, ability, motivation, attitude or their socio-cultural backgrounds. Since I only shared a brief time with the participants and had very limited access to their profiles, it would be unwise to judge how far these influencing factors can really impact on the classroom dynamics and hence on the process of knowledge construction. Nonetheless, the light of available evidence from this study would at least propose that future research is needed to further explore this phenomenon. If we all agree with Mercer (1995) that education never takes place in a social and cultural vacuum, then this issue manifestly deserves more attention.

Note

1. This article is one of the outcomes from my pilot study on *Constructing Knowledge in Ensemble-Based Learning*. I express my gratitude to my supervisor Professor Joe Winston for his generous guidance and attentiveness during this project.

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Appendix 1

Ensemble Reading: Captain (Act 1, Scene 1)

CAPTAIN

For brave Macbeth – well he deserves that name—
Disdaining Fortune, with his brandished steel
Which smoked with bloody execution,
Like valour’s minion carved out his passage
Till he faced the slave,
Till he unseamed him from the nave to th’ chops
And fixed his head upon our battlement.

Appendix 2

Soundscape: Lennox (Act 2, Scene 3)

LENNOX

The night has been unruly. Where we lay,
Our chimneys were blown down, and, as they say,
Lamentings heard i’th air; strange screams of death,
And prophesying with accents terrible
Of dire combustion and confused events
New hatched to th’woeful time: the obscure bird
Clamoured the livelong night: some say, the earth
Was feverous and did shake.

Appendix 3

Soundscape: Lady Macbeth and Macbeth (Act 2, Scene 2)

Lady Macbeth and Macbeth

MACBETH: I have done the deed. Didst thou not hear a noise?

LADY MACBETH: I heard the owl scream and the crickets cry.

Did not you speak?

MACBETH: When?

LADY MACBETH: Now.

MACBETH: As I descended?

LADY MACBETH: Ay.

MACBETH: Hark! This is a sorry sight.

LADY MACBETH: A foolish thought, to say 'a sorry sight'.

Appendix 4

Lady Macbeth's Soliloquy (Act 1, Scene 5)

Lady Macbeth

Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be

What thou art promised:

Yet do I fear thy nature:

It is too full o'the milk of human kindness

To catch the nearest way.

Appendix 5

Summary of Key Conventions

Basic Transcription Conventions in Conversation Analysis	
Symbols	Meaning
.	Falling intonation
,	Continuing contour
!	Exclamatory utterances
?	Questioning intonation
(...)	Pause of about a second
(.)	Micropause
[]	Overlap
—	Emphasis
-	Abrupt cut off
:	Sounds stretching
(***)	Inaudible, unable to transcribe
(())	Other details
↑	Prominent rising intonation
CAPS	Louder than surrounding talk
Hhh	Aspiration
→	A feature of interest

此為上文摘要中譯

共建知識：在英國中二級運用「劇場組合教育學」教授莎劇的反思實踐個案

Herlin Putri

印尼大學英文系

摘要

一直以來，大部分研究莎劇課堂教學方法均集中討論主動學習策略如何促進學生的學習動機和信心。儘管這些討論非常重要，但往往忽略了課堂上學生之間的各種互動和合作，而這些互動其實對學習過程有決定性的影響。本文旨在探討「劇場組合教育學」如何透過學生互動合作，讓他們從過程中共同建構知識。為此，我為英國一家中學的一班中二學生嘗試設計並主持了六節莎劇《馬克白》課堂作為一個先導研究。本研究以維高斯基的社會文化知識建構論，及 Jonothan Neelands 提出的「劇場組合」的原則為理論基礎，把採集得來的資料進行質性分析。初步研究結果支持早前有關「劇場組合教育學」的研究的一些論點：包括 (1) 「劇場組合教育學」可以建立一個開放、包容的學習空間來促進學生之間的互信和合作；(2) 在合作的認知過程中，學生為主，老師只是輔助學生自主學習；(3) 合作學習能啟發想像，讓各種對話得以開展。

關鍵詞：劇場組合教育學，建構知識，合作學習，以主動學習策略教授莎劇