

Learning to Write Critically: Drama as Pedagogy and the Implications for Cultural Criticism*

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Abstract

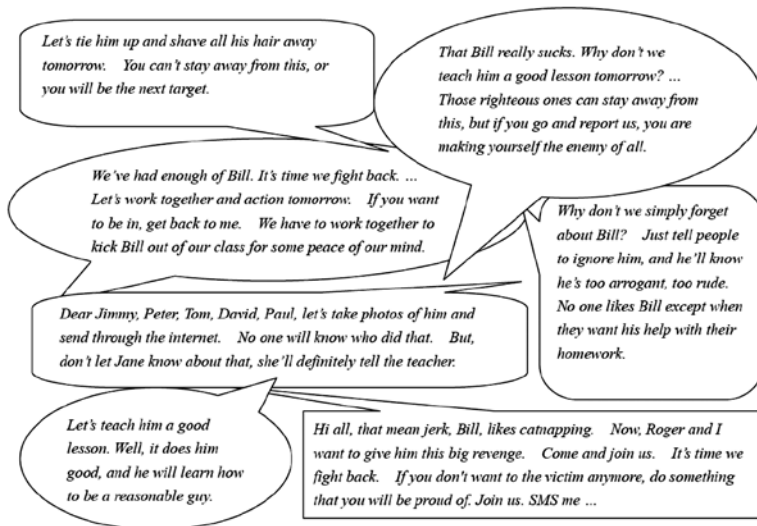
This paper analyzes the role and use of drama in engaging students with the *work* of cultural criticism, as it is practised in the educational settings of critical writing under the Liberal Studies curriculum within Hong Kong senior secondary schools. Drawing on action research conducted at the site of a local secondary school, we explore the pedagogic potentials of dramatic intervention for the exercise of cultural analysis and critical writing in class, and examine students' dialogic thinking, engagement and communication among themselves, and with their target readers outside of the classroom. By mediating the process of critical composition we review the multiple dimensions and uses of criticism in the pedagogic space opened for and through writing. At the end of this experimental study on the work of drama in cultural criticism as writing, we discuss the implications such pedagogy may have for critical writing education at schools.

Keywords: Drama as Pedagogy and Engagement, Cultural Criticism as Writing, Education and Cultural Studies, Action Research for Liberal Studies, Student Learning

* The paper was first presented at World Conference 2009 on Drama and Education in Chinese Communities: 'Embarking on a 3D Journey: Search Diversely, Think Discreetly, Use Distinctively', December 19-21, 2009, Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts, Hong Kong.

A Dramatic Moment

A class of 14 Secondary 6 Liberal Studies elective students is working in their homeroom, racing against time to scribble ideas on their pieces of paper. They are sitting back to back in groups of about five at the rear of the room in the space made available by pushing together the last three rows of desks and chairs. Students are working in role in a process drama, each of them is making an effort to ‘type out’ an (imagined) email message to rally support from other classmates for bullying attempts upon Bill Craddock, a boy of more or less their age. Minutes later, email messages, SMS ‘went flying’ (i.e. read aloud) one after the other, mobilizing support from the classmates:



(Translated from written Cantonese)

What was described above was an episode of the process drama, *The Bully Asleep*, generated in an action research study that investigates: *How can dramatic intervention enhance students' critical thinking and writing through multiple perspectives?* The action research involved two school teachers of Liberal Studies and the university research team (thereafter, the research team) led by Stephen Chan¹, a university professor of cultural writing, and Muriel Law, a trained drama facilitator, planning and implementing together a series of six 80-min lessons, three of which included the planned process drama. The process drama experience of school bullying has been placed side by side with

the understanding of a real-life case of cyberbullying that was circulating on the local internet at the moment of time. Data was collected to understand the impact of these lessons on student's writing and critical thinking.

The process drama was launched by a poem by John Walsh (1985) about the boy, Bill Craddock, who is found sound asleep during an afternoon class. As he sleeps, his classmates plan a series of bullying acts. For the purpose of exploring the issue of school bullying, the students have been enrolled as Bill's classmates, to explore their ambiguous relations and to present scenes that suggest reasons why Bill was the focus of those bullying attempts. Later, they discover that he was, in fact the bully and that those bullying attempts were in fact acts of retaliation. At this moment in the drama described above, however, the students are engaged in writing email/SMS messages to mobilize support for the acts of revenge, followed by an out-of-role task analyzing the text/email/Facebook messages sent out to other classmates and friends plotting against Bill. Later, during the reflective section of the lesson, the students go out of role and analyze the values and beliefs included in these messages and discuss the possible reasons for these.

The Research Context, Methodology and Perspectives

This lesson plan and the action research was part of a larger research project supported by a research grant² at Lingnan University, Hong Kong. The larger project studies how drama as pedagogy supports students' writing to explore social issues and enables them to write from role perspectives of others. It also explores how dramatic activities can help students to 'imagine a reader' for inner dialogues and debate in the process of composing critical writings. Research was conducted at two sites, a local school Secondary 6 Liberal Studies (S6 LS) classroom and the undergraduate Cultural Criticism course in the interdisciplinary field of Cultural Studies we teach at Lingnan University. These projects were developed side by side using collaborative action research and in-depth case study method respectively. While the in-depth case study of selected undergraduates in the Cultural Criticism course examines critically the role of educational drama as a tool for cultural analysis and for individual inquiry through cultural criticism as a mode of writing, the action research study in the S6 classroom identifies, in collaboration with school teachers, the specific pedagogic problems of writing education and locates areas of improvement. In this paper, we will discuss the

action research findings at the S6 LS classroom and analyze the role and use of drama in engaging students with the *work* of cultural criticism, as it is practised in the educational settings of critical writing under the local school LS curriculum.

The action research at the S6 LS classroom is ‘experimentalist’ in nature in two senses. Both the school teachers and the research team members aim at improving practice, solving practical problems encountered in the particular pedagogic contexts as well as acquiring knowledge that facilitates this improvement (McKernan, 1996; McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 1999; Hui & Pang, 2011). Unlike such educational contexts as the UK, USA and Australia, where drama is integrated with the school curriculum either as a subject or pedagogy, in Hong Kong schools the use of drama remains largely outside of the formal curriculum, though efforts were made to include it in some language classrooms and/or as other learning experiences. As such, the research work at the S6 LS classroom can best be conceived as an experiment to test the possible interface between drama and critical or cultural writing in the Hong Kong school curriculum, informed by planning though remaining “fluid and dynamic” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, p.12) within the context of the research. It would also provide input for the new senior secondary Liberal Studies (NSSLS), a core school subject inception in September 2009 to run parallel to the S6 LS for two years before the latter was phased out in September 2012.

Hence, as an experimental project the action research could constitute an initial response to the changing context of critical writing education in local schools under the onset of the new six-year secondary curriculum since 2009, where the NSSLS subject marks a first major pedagogic space in the integrative learning of critical thinking for our young generations. The latter is expected to evolve programmatically through an *educational platform* where criticism as a form of public discourse can develop (CDC, 2002, 2007). This emergent curricular and pedagogic development echoes well for us the integration of criticism as a mode of cultural writing emphasized in the interdisciplinary academic programmes of Cultural Studies (cf. course syllabus of Practicum in Cultural Criticism at Lingnan University, 2009). Research efforts and scholarly interests, however, remain sporadic both in investigating the form of publicly-oriented critical discourse through the LS/cultural writing curriculum, and in the shaping of this evolving subject area within the interdisciplinary field of Cultural Studies in contemporary

education.

For Cultural Studies, criticism in its *public* mode links the discovery and expression of the self to the critical understanding of the social and the collective, in which any individual is situated and conditioned to grow. Our previous research in the undergraduate course has revealed that drama can be an effective pre-writing strategy in immersing participants in everyday experience and preparing students to handle the use of point of view in cultural writing for a public audience (Law, 2008). In the realm of education and cultural studies at Lingnan University, intensive engagement with curricular reforms are made alongside school-based action research and case study work which aimed to analyze the dynamics in curriculum reform and implementation at the school (Hui & Chan, 2006; Chan & Law, 2011; Hui & Pang, 2011). Pedagogy is taken as the process of engagement associated specifically with Raymond Williams' work on adult education, where 'official learning' was challenged and learning agenda was redefined by the adult learners (Williams, 2007; Hall, 2002). In the institutional space that contemporary Cultural Studies occupies, the interface between education and cultural studies allows the design and practice of alternative curriculum to inform pragmatic work in critical pedagogy at both the secondary and the tertiary level (Chan 2004, 2008; Chan & Hui, 2008).

Drama and Cultural Writing: The Interface

Within such perspectives, we hoped that the action research study at the S6 LS writing classroom we launched would help us understand better the function, role and value of educational drama in engaging students with the work of cultural criticism, as it is practised under the new school context for the learning of critical writing.

Research on drama and writing has recognized that educational drama provides context and stimulations effective for writing among both younger students and adolescents (Neelands, Booth & Ziegler, 1993; Schneider & Jackson, 2000; Wagner, 2001; Schneider, 2003; Crumpler, 2005; Cremin, Gouch, Blakemore, Goff & Macdonald, 2006). Within both kindergarten and elementary classrooms, students write imaginatively, functionally and authentically for their imagined writers from perspectives within the dramatic frames using both fictional and non-fictional forms of writing, such

as diaries, notes, newspaper columns and letters (Schneider & Jackson, 2000; Wagner, 2001). At these sites drama work contextualizes the act of writing; offers opportunities for young students to access networks of cultural resources for their composition; and enhances students' empathy and understanding, thus effecting personal and reflective writing (Neelands et al, 1993; Crumpler, 2005; Cremin et al, 2006). Studies also indicate the needs for writing teachers to extend the use of drama to “impersonal genres of writing” (Neelands et al, 1993, p.30), and to formulate writing instructions that follow the learners' interests and their idiosyncratic writing styles rather than adhering to a prescribed writing programme (Schneider, 2003; Cremin et al, 2006).

Though significant in findings and implications, these empirical studies do not always shed light on the needs of secondary students and adult writer-learners in the area of critical writing where the target reader is often a part of the ‘unknown public’. As Britton and his colleagues argue in their research for School Council, UK (1975), “The [writing] development of the pupil may be seen in terms of the move from ‘the internalized other’ (the teacher) to ‘the generalized other’ (the writer’s unknown public)” (School Council, 1975, pp.64-5). In contrast to speaking where the context of situation is displayed before the speaker and his audience, Britton and his colleagues see the demand for the learner-writer to develop a sense of audience, and to “*represent to himself* a context of situation, and this includes his readers” (original emphasis, School Council, 1975, p.61). This is particularly relevant to the work of writing in the Hong Kong school context, where teaching and learning in both the English and Chinese languages are mainly tied to literacy development in general and formulaic writing in particular, structured by the needs for assessment, accuracy and the mastery of language skills. Hence, the learner-writers tend to construct texts that often lack a sense of audience with whom to develop a dialogue in a real-world context. Students find it hard to take hold effectively of the address of public criticism both as an analytic mode and as a dialogic mode of cultural critique as reflected in the subject of LS (Hui, 2007). Similarly, at the university level, undergraduates brought with them their own past experiences with writing from the secondary school days (mostly negative in so far as writing in English is concerned) to the Cultural Criticism course we teach in the Cultural Studies programme. Thus, at the school level, concerns for the need of analytic writing are commonly shared in the LS school subject, arguably the counterpart of cultural criticism at the undergraduate level.

The university-school action research we initiated therefore sought to add to this field of inquiry the application of drama as pedagogy of criticism, focusing on the interactive play between drama and writing in the S6 LS classroom. It aimed to develop through the educational practice an alternative framework for improving the pedagogy of writing and shaping up the multi-layered instructional contexts in the classroom.

The Research Design and Process

The action research process included defining the problems, assessing the needs of the S6 students in the area of writing, identifying the specific point of research intervention, and developing a plan of action. Data were collected through analyzing students' written assignments and tests, teachers and researchers' participant and non-participant observations during lessons, post-lesson evaluations, and end-of-research student focus groups. Interactions between workshop participants and facilitator(s) were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Needs assessment and planning began with meeting the participating school teachers, Mr. Ken and Ms. Wincy³. The school they serve at is a network school in our previous school-based projects for curriculum reform and development and is renowned in its school district for its good intake of junior secondary students and a high university admission rate for the senior students. With the school history in offering both the junior curriculum and the senior LS curriculum, Mr. Ken and Ms. Wincy also played major roles in the school supporting network for their fellow LS teachers in other schools.

At the initial meetings, Mr. Ken made it very clear that 'practical issues' including examination needs and assessment criteria matter for him, but past experiences had shown that drilling for examinations could only bring students a passing grade. He and his colleagues began to explore ways to move students beyond that level of performance. As such, writing in this S6 LS curriculum concerns the development of students' capacity to think, and for this reason, they structured in ample class time for the discussion of current issues. Mr. Ken observed that most students preferred in-class discussion to putting ideas down onto paper after it. Ms. Wincy took students' reluctance to write as an indicator of students' lack of competence in disentangling and making sense of the diverse lines of thought triggered in the classroom when they were to formulate their own

points of view in the individual writing task about the issues discussed.

Our lesson observation at the planning stage revealed for us that the instructional context in this specific classroom privileged oral communication of ideas and a detached treatment of the issues under discussion. The teachers would facilitate the group discussion, and the embedded learning and thinking process, from a neutral, almost outsider's perspective, thus they would be more than ready to embrace any instantaneous feedback and responses raised, to predict patterns in students' attempted analysis, and to conclude arguments out of the classroom "debates". In turn, students' performance must be accordingly shaped. Take their work in a data-based writing assignment about media malpractice as an example. This shows that students in general would demonstrate their ability to write from a blanket perspective, i.e. they managed to respond to the given data using some commonly accepted points of view (e.g. in naming the problems of media reporting). They were, however, much weaker in arguing their case with individualized perspective, as for instance, in explaining why they think media regulation is desirable (or otherwise). Not only were their concerns and arguments briefly mentioned, but there was also a common lack of connection between the various points of view discussed in class and the ones they considered their own. The teachers would require them to produce written prose using conventional sentence connectors and formulaic patterns such as 'First, ...' 'Next ...', 'I agree with the writer to a large/some extent ...', as well as argumentation language structured with balanced pros and cons positions. Students told us in the focus group interviews that such writing conventions are specific to LS when compared to other subjects in the arts stream (e.g. Chinese History, and Chinese Language & Culture). They admitted that writings in LS allow them to think in multiple perspectives, meaning they were now trained to do "writing with a balanced account of the pros and cons positions on an issue". At the same time, they also pointed out that thinking through the issue at hand, as well as organizing their thinking and thoughts, are precisely where the challenge in handling writings for LS lies.

Pedagogically, Mr. Ken and his colleagues took no direct measures to develop students' writing strategies in the expression of feelings, viewpoints and thoughts in the S6 LS classroom. Instead, measures such as using the concept map tool, bringing in quality newspaper editorials, or showcasing sample work from peers were commonly used to help students organize thoughts, inspire success, and provide incentive to

write. Mr. Ken expressed doubts about whether the ability to write could be taught and wondered instead if it just came naturally alongside with students' development in meta-cognition skills. According to this perspective then, writing serves to demonstrate how well (or poor) students think in the specific S6 LS classroom.

Dramatic Intervention in the Process of Composing

At the end of this planning phase, the research question was set: *How can dramatic intervention enhance students' critical thinking and writing through multiple perspectives?* A decision was reached for us to spend six 80-minute sessions on the topic, 'Cyberbullying', under the unit of 'Human Relationships'. Three of these sessions would be structured around a process drama about a school bully facilitated by Muriel, while the other three would be facilitated by Ms. Wincy. The pedagogic plan was implemented during three consecutive weeks in May 2009, and was followed by two student focus group interviews and a final evaluation meeting.

John Walsh's (1985) poem *The Bully Asleep* forms the "preliminary frame" (O'Neill, 1995, p.19) to initiate students into dramatic action. Process drama was chosen as the form, anticipating that by working in multiple roles around the protagonist, Bill Craddock, students would benefit thematically from the role perspectives and, hence, from the diverse opportunities for exploring cyberbullying in the multiple perspectives embedded. The plan included two 80-minute drama sequences and a third 80-minute session reflecting on the issue of bullying and cyberbullying through Bill's story. In the first drama sequence, students were enrolled as Bill's classmates who were tempted to bully him. That gave us the dramatic moment and sequence introduced at the beginning of this paper. In the second sequence, students were enrolled as Bill's teacher meeting Bill's mother (teacher in role) to unfold the domestic context of Bill as a bully. Writing opportunities included writing in the role of the returned bullies, and out of the role as themselves to analyze the relations between the fictional school bullying issue with a real-world cyberbullying case.

Evaluation of the pedagogic plan in action was done after each lesson. In the evaluation after the second drama sequence, both the teachers and the research team found that students had difficulties linking up the dramatic exploration with the

cyberbullying case. The 3rd dramatic sequence was then fine-tuned to have students enroled as themselves, the S6 LS students researching the issue of cyberbullying, through the process of raising questions about ‘bullying’ in general and ‘school bullying’ in particular. The purpose was to single out students’ questions/queries/problems from inside the dramatic event. Such a class context and experience would allow students to be drawn into “a questioning mood” with respect to the topic of bullying, thus beginning to question on their own initiatives and with some depth the “lived” reality of bullying, in the way that a phenomenological researcher would do (van Manen, 1990, p.44). The work of cultural criticism may begin to take place for the students through the mode of dramatic intervention.

Research Findings and Analysis

Dialogic Thinking, Engagement and Communication

Research findings show that the process drama physicalized and visualized the context of bullying for the students. Students gained understanding of the bullying issue by experiencing it from inside the event as well as analyzing it from various (detached and dramatized) points of view. Tess, one of the participating students, said,

I began thinking about questions, like ‘Why is he so inclined to violence?’
I began to set myself lots of questions to think about ... wondering why he behaved this and that way. It helps me to answer questions later on
(translated from oral Cantonese, student focus group (SFG)).

For Tess, drama “makes things concrete for us to think from the situation of the characters, [and] helps us to analyze whether Bill is a bully or a victim” (translated from written Chinese, Tess’ Writing Assignment 2). Reflection of the issue at hand is further enhanced when there are incongruous perspectives between the dramatized role(s) and the self, as revealed in the case of Olivia. Olivia considered herself not the type of person who would take revenge; but drama work here gave her the opportunity “to try different ways of thinking” when she was enroled, for instance, as the more radical character Jimmy and she “had to identify with Jimmy and think in his way” (translated from oral Cantonese, SFG).

The pedagogy of drama intervened in the process of composing through engaging the learner-writers in (inner) dialogues between the writer self and the self in role(s). Heidi said, “The [*Bully Asleep*] drama allows the ‘me’ inside the drama to think in a certain way, then you can immediately know what the feeling and thoughts of the one involved in the dramatic event” (translated from oral Cantonese, SFG). Miriam echoed her in a similar way, “What I wrote has covered more ... Having played a role, there is like another self, which you can then combine with what your own self is like” (translated from oral Cantonese, SFG).

Students’ engagement with the role offers opportunities for them to think and act in ways that suit the fictitious role (Vygotsky, 1976; Morgan & Saxton, 1987). In the case of the school bully process drama, the dramatic intervention allowed the learner-writers to identify with the characters and their situation from ‘inside’ the drama, and observe and analyze the sensation from ‘outside’ the dramatic context, thus opening up possibilities for the students to see things from different perspectives. As far as writing is concerned, the drama experience makes available at the students’ disposal a source of multiple perspectives, which may capitalize on the gap between the acted-out role(s) and the self in-role (as in Olivia’s experience), or offer alternatives to the writer self and the self-in-roles (as in Miriam’s and Heidi’s cases).

In process drama, dialogic thinking operates through the gap between the fictional and the real world, out of which Vygotsky (1976) has coined the “dual affect”, to suggest that ‘the child weeps in play as a patient, but revels as a player’ (p.549). This dialogic space in the dramatic world is also a “shared space” where the real and the fictional blend (Crumpler, 2005, p.358), and where participants inside it experience “doubled reality” happening in both the imagined and the everyday world (Edmiston, 2003, p.223). In the section below, we shall see how the dramatic world that offers such alternative perspectives functions as shared spaces where the real and the fictional blend, and discuss how it provides a “catalyst” (Crumpler, 2005, p.358) for the learner-writers to “contextualize” their writing (School Council, 1975, p.86).

Contextualizing for Critical Writing

Dramatic exploration offers students in the classroom informed experiential

perspectives of the others when writing on the questions, “Is Bill a victim or a bully to you?” and “Have you met someone like Bill in your school or everyday life?” All the students wrote that they considered Bill as both a bully at school and a victim of his social context. Clearly, all these students drew input from and made reference to their collective role in the second drama sequence as Bill’s teacher meeting his mother (played by the teacher-in-role). When it comes to their own example of a bully from their school or everyday life, students draw connections to the dramatic input somewhat differently (See excerpts of some students’ work on Q.1, Appendix 1). While Tess’ writing considers the urge of “taking revenge” as a common cause of bullying, for Heidi and Charles the connection between their examples and the fiction lies in the changing socio-economic context which the parents and the bully shared. Both Heidi and Charles pointed out that acts of bullying have, in fact, manifested the presence of a victim behind those acts. These brief thoughts and thinking inspired by the dramatic intervention have complicated the simplistic media representation of bullies and victims and moralistic reprimand of the bullied that most students were initially exposed to, and could well be further developed into individualized perspectives and approaches to investigating the issue of school bullying around them.

When they were asked to write with the question, “Have the dramatic activities given you any thoughts and insights into Christina Chan⁴ as a case of cyberbullying?”, connecting the dramatic exploration to a real-life incident, students demonstrated varying abilities to particularize the dramatic experience as well as to generalize upon the experiences (See excerpts of some student work on Q.2, Appendix 1). Many analyzed the commonalities and specificities of the two texts across a number of aspects. Some suggested that the nature of both bullying and cyberbullying has to do with the bullies’ resistance to new possibilities (Charles) or their rule-breaking behaviour (Olivia). Some were able to distinguish the specificity of Christina as a case of cyberbullying: the prevalence of a greater number of bystanders in cyberbullying (Heidi), and cyberspace as a platform for mobilizing support to bullying acts (Tess); others pointed out that ‘being different’ is the commonality shared by Christina and Bill (Felicity, Lucia). There is also the rare case when a student’s view (Ricky) would focus on the particulars of the specific experiences concerned, rather than contemplating about the nature of the two cases.

The students were then prompted by the writing task we assigned to go into a

process of contextualization, with which they “take what fragments [that] interest [them] ... , reject the rest maybe, [and] build new connexions or [them]selves between and around the fragments”, (School Council, 1975, p.86). While the writing task would give the writers the intention and purpose to contextualize, Crumpler (2005) has reminded us that here the drama plays a crucial role in providing a lens of the fictional to view the real in the composing process. The students’ writing across the real and the fictional has demonstrated that the dramatically shared space is where students and teachers can meet and make meaning out of play, and where students are able to work with the “catalyst” provided to represent themselves “a context of situation” to write with (School Council, 1975, p.61). This marks a crucial step in the development of the writer’s sense of audience/readership as the shaping of a dialogic text through writing.

The Multi-layered Instructional Context

In the very last session of the action research experiment, the students took their real-life role as an S6 LS students writing questions and queries with the issue of bullying and cyberbullying (See Appendix 2 for the list of questions/queries students wrote). Through the act of questioning, students were engaged in tasks of perceiving, comparing, aggregating, ordering and finding connections in the data – their understanding of experiences of the bullying in the dramatic world – through the process of formulating questions. Questions and queries collected about Bill and his situation reveal students’ interests in understanding more about the desires, wishes and hopes of the bully, and the lived experiences of Bill as a son, a student and a bully. The list of queries or questions about ‘school bullying’ has unsettled the commonly held notion of ‘school bullying’, and prompted further inquiry about the role of bystander (the teacher authority in the case of *The Bully Asleep* drama), a role often overlooked in the discussion of school bullying, be it in the cyber space or on location. The statements that complete the sentence beginning with “Bullying is” cover various aspects of the bullying phenomenon ranging from what the bully and the victim do and experience to the impact of bullying, the nature and ways power is misused.

The whole act of “questioning” became acts of thinking and conceptualizing the dramatic experiences of bullying. In the evaluation meeting that followed, Mr. Ken admitted that he was impressed:

Getting students to pose or formulate questions helped consolidate the whole thing; to allow them to examine the whole issue for themselves and with more depth. I see that happening. In fact, if they take one question from those questions they formulated here, that would make a very interesting IES topic⁵ (translated from oral Cantonese, 5th evaluation meeting with teachers).

The school teachers also observed that through drama as pedagogy, students' initiative to write critically had emerged and developed. Mr. Ken remarked that his students were now more attentive to the process of composing their critical writing, noting that they had grown more conscious of their own writing process as the research experiment proceeded. He said that they were more capable of saying what it meant to be able to write and understand an issue from multiple perspectives.

Criticalness in thinking through the issue of bullying was enhanced through the multi-layered instructional context of the teaching and learning to write. In totality, the *Bully Asleep* process drama, the use of questions as a form of thinking and inquiry, and the design of writing assignments constituted such multi-layered instructional context.

Concluding Remarks

This university-school action research was an intervention aimed at better understanding the process of teaching students to write critically. The action research at the designated S6 LS classroom focused on the interactive play between drama and writing mediated through a process drama. Drama in education offers the site of investigation of the human condition and the issue at hand where the learner-writers are engaged in analyzing and understanding the context they now find themselves in. It allows students to imagine 'the dramatic other and their perspectives' and to dialogue with their own (other) selves when exploring the issues critically in the process of composing an engaged piece of writing.

The potential writers make use of available cultural resources in the process of negotiating with diverse clusters of significant stories in the composition of ideas into texts (Crumpler, 2005, School Council, 1975). The S6 LS students are the case in point. They made active use of the experiential (feeling) and the analytical (thinking) available

to them through the dual affect offered by the dramatic intervention in the shaping of their critical imagination and writing. Dramatic contextualization and the ‘inside-the-event’ investigation offer opportunities for the students to explore the issue of cyberbullying and develop the potential to formulate individualized perspective over the understanding of the real case of cyberbullying through the fictional one. While ‘representing’ themselves in a context of bullying, the learner-writers are engaging themselves in similar acts of developing a sense of audience for themselves in the process of composing.

The drama operates as a shared space where the real and the imagined worlds blend for maximum educational benefits, and where participants are led through dramatic input and participation into other places, spaces and times. It offers unusual learning opportunities for students to extend their concepts of self to incorporate the viewpoints of others, through the imagined roles in the dramatized environment. In such praxis, we have come to believe that writing can effectively be conceived as a meaning-making process, and composing as “dramatic textual events” (Crumpler, 2005, p.362) where participants – students as well as teachers - meet and make meaning out of the drama work in the shared pedagogic space. It has turned the dramatic context into an issue for investigation and distinguished this dramatic investigation from simple role-playing activities.

The multi-layered instructional contexts at classroom level opens up possibilities for analyzing an experience or a phenomenon and for unsettling simplistic ways of understanding the experience or phenomenon in question, and defies detached analysis and group discussion. It also opens up the pedagogic space to shape up students’ critical imagination and the process of writing.

Implications for Cultural Criticism as Writing

Dramatic explorations have generated and shaped diverse critical angles and perspectives on students’ received ways of thinking, which are the crucial instruments in the kind of critical cultural writing we help them to learn. For the LS students, the integrated pedagogic approach that combined educational drama and classroom questioning shaped up the multi-layered pedagogic contexts for them to better appreciate and analyze an experience or a phenomenon beyond the simplistic level.

If education is liberating, it must be sustainable too. And if cultural criticism as a mode of writing is a crucial and effective part of our educational work in self-critique and social transformation; then, through writing, students will strive to set free their mind, set straight their viewpoint, and set down their critical stance in discourse. Thus conceived, criticism works both as an analytic discourse and a dialogic mode of cultural communication with the public.

Notes

- 1 Apart from the names of the research team members, all other names in this paper are fictitious to maintain confidentiality.
- 2 The research project is entitled, 'A Critical Study of the Role of Educational Drama in the Teaching of Cultural Criticism' led by Stephen Chan with the support of a research grant from Lingnan University between February and September 2009.
- 3 Mr. Ken is a senior teacher chairing the LS subject panel and Ms. Wincy is a more junior teacher teaching the S6 LS curriculum for the first time that school year. They are both involved in projects of offering professional support in junior secondary LS curricular development to fellow school teachers in their school network.
- 4 Christina Chan was born in Hong Kong and was a postgraduate student in a local university at the time of this research. She was known to the public waving the flag of Tibet during the 2008 Beijing Olympic Torch Relay in Hong Kong in May the same year. At first, it was her act of showing seeming support to the independence of Tibet that drew media attention and criticism. Later it was she herself that drew people's interest. Her personal life and photos were revealed, uploaded and circulated on the Internet, followed by social bashing. Thus considered, the school teachers would like to study it as a case for understanding cyberbullying in the designated LS classroom.
- 5 IES is short for Independent Enquiry Study, an integral part of the LS curriculum. All students doing the LS subject are required to conduct an IES in the form of an individual, 'self-directed' issue-based, problem-solving inquiry into the human world and the human conditions.

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Appendix 1

Excerpts from Students' Writing Assignments

Writing Topics:

Q.1: Is Bill a victim or a bully to you? Have you met someone like Bill in your school or everyday life?

Tess: There was this classmate who has always been a loner, and he reported to the teacher a group of classmates who copied one another's assignment. These classmates were angry and badmouthed him on the online chatroom, placed rubbish onto his drawer ... (translated from written Chinese, Tess' Writing Assignment 2)

Heidi: I once had a friend like Bill. His parents didn't care about him much and he bullied others for attention. He was in fact the victim in his family and that turned him into the bully in his own world. (translated from written Chinese, Heidi's Writing Assignment 2)

Charles: I met a classmate like Bill in my primary school. He always scolded and bullied others. Later, someone told us that his parents were so busy working that they didn't have time for him and he just messed around and willfully bullied others (translated from written Chinese, Charles' Writing Assignment 2)

Q.2: Have the dramatic activities given you any thoughts and insights into Christina Chan as a case of cyberbullying?

Charles: The dramatic activities let me understand more of the reason why Christina Chan has been attacked by so many on the net. I think that's because of the stubbornness of the bullies. Bill's classmates didn't bother to understand what makes Bill a bully. They cared only about taking revenge because they could only see themselves as victims of Bill's bullying acts. In Chan's case, her support for the independence of Tibet may have gone against many other people's position. This has resulted in her being maliciously attack on the net in the form of 'public trial'. To put simply, insisting on one's own opinion without listening could cause bullying (translated from written Chinese, Charles' Writing Assignment 2).

Olivia: ... The dramatic activities let me understand that the whole thing about

Christina Chan is not a matter of right or wrong, but matters of perspectives. The whole thing changes with changing positions. Others may see Chan wrong, but from Chan's position, what she was doing was simply raising the flag, and hoping to raise people's awareness that we have to fight for independence and human rights. We should not simply follow rules laid down by others and consider those who break the rules as mischievous (translated from written Chinese, Olivia's Writing Assignment 2).

Heidi: In the drama, we took on roles and were inside the situation of the characters. That allows us to understand how they think and feel, and to see things from their eyes When thinking about Christina Chan's case, we can take on the role of the victim, and can understand how she may feel and what difficulties she may face. Though Chan hasn't done anything wrong, she's got scornful remarks. Nobody's prepared to help out or they simply turn a blind eye of what's happening to Chan (translated from written Chinese, Heidi's Writing Assignment 2).

Tess: ... From the dramatic activities, I understand that there are always two sides to one thing. I know what is like to bully and be bullied. Others thought that Christina Chan stirred things up. They don't like her way of protest so they bully her on online platforms using assaulting languages, causing her distress. Such cyberbullying is like the revenge that Bill's classmates have launched against Bill, taking things out on him (translated from written Chinese, Tess' Writing Assignment 2)

Felicity: In the dramatic activities, we had been in roles of the bullies, bullying the single-handed. That's very much like the case of Christina Chan. Chan's got a small number of supporters, but a great number of people who go against her on the net. There could be even more bystanders who didn't really take part in the bully but 'watch the show'. It places Chan in a disadvantaged position (translated from written Chinese, Felicity's Writing Assignment 2).

Lucia: Christina Chan's a cyberbullying case. It shares a lot in common with a school bullying. Chan's somewhat the 'odd men out', for many. What she did was considered 'radical' and because of that it has caused discontent and malicious attacks on the cyberspace like revealing her privacy and threatening her online. I think cyberbullying could go crazier than school bullying as we got to know the bully face-to-face in school bullying, but the bully on the net stays

anonymous, with no name and no face for us to identify. Anyone who simply adds a line of attack can join in the bully. We can never know who those people are. This makes bullies on the net even more powerful in victimizing others (translated from written Chinese, Lucia's Writing Assignment 2).

Ricky: The dramatic activities in class require that we take on different roles to imagine and take action inside the drama. It helps me understand the feeling of Bill and of those around Bill. ... But it could only help me understand Christina Chan's case a little bit because they are distinct cases. Chan has always been on her own with little support, but Bill's the bully who always gets the upper hand. During lessons, we all have been the victims of Bill's bully, but we haven't experienced Chan nor people around Chan in class. So the dramatic activities don't help me much understand Chan's case (translated from written Chinese, Ricky's Writing Assignment 2).

Appendix 2

Students' Questions and Queries after The Bully Asleep Process Drama

'Bullying' is ...	About 'School Bullying', my questions or queries are ...	About Bill, my questions or queries are ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making things hurtful for others • Revealing others' privacy/photos at will • Making fun of others' physical appearance • Using violence • Making hurtful remarks/acts • Causing others distress • Threatening others • Attempting to hurt • Making it hard for the victim to fight back • Being psychologically abusive • Hurting people physically, psychologically or verbally • About personal judgment or discontent • About conflicts from two parties • Found in real life and on the internet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why won't the victims ask for help from teachers/friends/classmates? • How much help can teachers/classmates offer? • Why didn't teacher stop bullying from happening? • Why didn't the bystanders take part in bullying? • Are bystanders bullies? • How is school bullying defined? • Is doing harm within just one day also considered bullying? • Is harm caused out of fits of temper considered bullying? • Is school bullying always about the majority hurting the minority? • How about bullying attempts outside the school campus, are they still considered school bullying? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What has Bill got from bullying, power, not feeling lonely anymore? • Can he feel relieved after the bullying acts? Will he feel guilty? • Why didn't Bill's mother help him with his psychological problem? • How come Bill's mother find Bill no problems? • How good is Bill's relations with his father? What impact does Bill's father having to leave home and work else have on Bill? • What frustrations has Bill ever had when he was small? • Why didn't Bill seek help? • Has Bill got friends outside this school? • Why would changing to a new school have such great impact onto Bill? • Did Bill bully others ever since he changed to this new school? Has anyone in this school ever cared about Bill? • Did Bill talk about school bullying with anyone else? • Did Bill bully schoolmates only?

(Translated from written Chinese)

此為上文摘要中譯

學習批判地書寫：戲劇作為教學法 及其對文化評論的啟示

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摘要

本文旨在分析教育戲劇於香港高中通識教育科的書寫中的角色和作用。高中通識教育科課程的書寫性質與文化評論相近，兩者皆涉及文化分析、評論和書寫。本文就筆者於香港一所中學以戲劇進行的行動研究所得，探討戲劇對引發學生對話式思考、投入同儕之間的交流及與其教室外的目標讀者之間的溝通等各方面的潛力。研究亦檢視戲劇在寫作思維過程中為評論書寫所開拓的教學空間和可能性。本文末段將討論戲劇對批判寫作教育的啟示。

關鍵詞：戲劇作為教育學和參與、文化評論作為書寫、教育和文化研究、通識教育和行動研究、學生學習