The implication of Carnival theory for interpreting the use of drama pedagogy in classrooms

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Abstract

Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's Carnival theory, this article focuses on specific outcomes of a research project I undertook in Hong Kong , where drama pedagogy has been recently introduced into the official curriculum. It investigates the ways in which laughter, noise, jokes, frolic and popular literacy commonly appear in classrooms where teachers apply drama pedagogy. On considering the ways in which these phenomena remain unacknowledged and ignored by both teacher(s) and researcher(s), the author highlights the potentials of playful resistance and transgressivity afforded to students by drama pedagogy. The suggestion is that Carnival theory not only illuminates such phenomena but also challenges the emphases and assumptions of conventional epistemology and classroom discourse and offers a model to help us re-learn the unpredictability, plurality and openness to the production and distribution of knowledge that drama pedagogy can engender .

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1. Contextual features in the development of drama pedagogy in Hong Kong: A pragmatic agenda

Drama-in-Education and Process Drama were imported from the West to Hong Kong as new forms of pedagogy in the late 1990s. School teachers and drama practitioners generally employ an inclusive and hybrid approach and integrate various drama/theatre educational models, conventions, activities and elements into their classrooms and call them 'drama pedagogy'. This new pedagogy is widely portrayed as a playful, creative, activity-based and student-centred teaching method in the education reform documents (Arts Development Council, 2005; Arts Education Section of Curriculum Development Institute, 2005). It has been particularly well received by language teachers and this has launched a number of seed projects and arts partnership schemes. The study described in this paper is derived from research into a project of drama pedagogy application in Chinese language classrooms that took place in two primary schools and involved nearly 200 year-four students (Tam, 2008).

As many researches point out, Chinese language teaching and learning in Hong Kong has long been dominated by a teacher-centred, examination-oriented and text-based mode of education (Tse et al., 1995; Leung, 2003). Hu (2002) sums up these characteristics as 'Four R's and Four M's', namely '*reception, repetition, review, reproduction*' and '*meticulousity, memorisation, mental activeness and mastery*'. For that reason, Chinese language classrooms are usually serious, structured and studious spaces inundated with teacher monologue, individual work and unilateral communication. These characteristics suggest not only a behavioral and reproduction-based approach to teaching and learning but also enshrine literary canonization, monological truth and cultural totalization in the classroom. Unsurprisingly, the use of drama pedagogy brings about extensive changes to the conventional practices of Chinese language education.

Field evidence from the original study which this paper is based upon reveal that the potentials of drama pedagogy in changing conventional Chinese language classrooms are

inherent and apparent. However, these potentials are not necessarily aligned with the expectations of the teachers. Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of Dialogism (1981; 1986), I will focus in this article on the shift in power relations between the teacher and the students by analyzing their classroom communication from a multimodal perspective. I will highlight and illustrate how Carnival theory, developed from the theories of Bakhtin's Dialogism, allows for a critique of the prevailing discourse on the role and effectiveness of drama pedagogy in language education and further allows us to appreciate the subversive potential of the playfulness, plebeianism and openness of drama pedagogy.

2. Carnival theory and drama pedagogy

In 'Rabelais and His World' (1984b), Bakhtin appropriates a subversive and de-familiarised reading of carnival practices in Medieval Europe. He argues that in carnivalesque moments such as popular comic performance, and other festive rituals and activities, the everyday life of medieval man, controlled and suppressed by the state, the church and the feudal system, was temporarily suspended. Through relaxing all the cultural and social orders, conventions and hierarchies, carnival gave birth to freedom and a renewal of meaning. Bakhtin (1984a) describes how, 'a person of the Middle Ages lived, as it were, *two lives*: one was the *official* life, monolithically serious and gloomy, subjugated to a strict hierarchal order; full of terror, dogmatism, reverence, and piety; the other was the *life of the carnival square*, free and unrestricted, full of ambivalent laughter, blasphemy, the profanations of everything sacred, full of debasing and obscenities, familiar contact with everyone and everything' (p.129-30). Therefore, it is generally argued that carnival is a playful approach or a comic art form of social, political cultural protest and resistance to the serious, dogmatic and authoritarian world. To further illustrate the playful resistance of carnival, I explain its key images and activities in association with drama pedagogy below.

2.1.   Carnival images

2.1.1.   The shift of power in crowning/ decrowning and laughter

In reading the carnival rituals of mock crowning and subsequent decrowning of the carnival king, Bakhtin conceptualises crowning and decrowning as alternative strategies of resistance by which authority comes to an end and new power emerges. In drama pedagogy, the use of teacher-in-role always gives birth to such a power shift in the classroom. Together with carnival laughter, which is the laughter of the populace, it opens the way to a power shift characterised by regeneration, profanation and debasement. Moreover, the spontaneous and elemental nature of laughter is capable of defeating routine and doctrine,

as well as the seriousness and abstractness of an oppressive social world. By mocking and embarrassing them in jokes, parodies and comedies, laughter does not reproduce fear but conveys a feeling of strength (1984b, p. 95).

2.1.2.   Free and familiar contact among people

Social segregation under the feudal system forbade contact between the upper and the lower classes. Yet carnival breaks down distance and suspends social immobility and barriers. Therefore, Bakhtin compares it to a 'stage without footlights' in which everybody participates without solemnity and surveillance. Besides, there is an absence of bodily control or categorisation on the carnival stage. As he argues (1984a), 'the behaviour, gesture, and discourse of a person are freed from the authority of all hierarchical positions (social, estate, rank, age, property)…'(p.123). In view of this, the carnival participant is boundless as s/he is allowed to participate in the carnival wholly with their body, mind and feelings. The challenge for drama pedagogy is to use acting to subvert the mind-over-body hierarchy and the rational-versus-emotional dichotomy of the schooling system.

2.1.3.   Marketplace languages and genres

Carnival language disarrays and reverses the hierarchy and conventions of the languages of the preferred culture. Carnivalesque expressions are mixtures of of high and low, serious and comic, prosaic and poetic forms of speech that juxtapose jargon and the national, vernacular and living dialects. Carnivals do not endorse a single genre but legitimise curse, joke, oath, parody and profanity. As a result, carnival language is called the marketplace language because it does not belong to the palace, the church and the institution, nor does it belong to the court, official literature or the high ranked clergy (1984a; 1984b). It thus brings dissonant and multi-styled discourses into being. Similarly, drama pedagogy often treats a text, even one from the established canon, only as a pre-text (O'Neill, 1995), a stimulus, an initial frame or a prompt for activating, supporting and extending students' imagination and creation. By living through the drama world and moving in and out of it, students can actively respond to the pre-text by tapping their own reservoirs of reading, watching and playing experiences. Conceivably, when two types of language collide and mingle with each other, the official, formal and elevated language is contaminated and demystified.

Michel Foucault argues that wherever power exists, there is resistance (1978). By the same token, carnival images mark the concomitant existence of power of all kinds. Nonetheless, what makes carnival resistance subversive is the transgressive experience

entailed which transforms power through degradation, disarrangement and deconstruction. Such an approach to power is highly valued by Stuart Hall (1993) as he notes that:

> In Bakhtin's 'carnival', it is precisely the purity of this binary (high and low) distinction which is transgressed. The low invades the high, blurring the hierarchical imposition of order; creating, not simply the triumph of one aesthetic over another, but those impure and hybrid forms of the 'grotesque'; revealing the interdependency of the low on the high and vice versa, the inextricable mixed and ambivalent nature of all cultural life, the reversibility of cultural forms, symbols, language, and meaning; and exposing the arbitrary exercise of cultural power, simplification, and exclusion which are the mechanisms upon which the construction of every limit, tradition, and canonical formation, and the operation of every hierarchical principle of cultural closure, is founded (p.8).

Hall's interpretation underlines the renewal potentials of carnival resistance for bringing about polyphony that is yet cacophonous of meaning, language, knowledge and culture. At first glance, moments of carnival-like resistance could be readily identified in the classrooms observed in my study. These I identified as moments of laughter, of the boundless body, of student movement and mobility, and moments of imaginative violence.

2.2. Carnival-like resistance in the studied classrooms
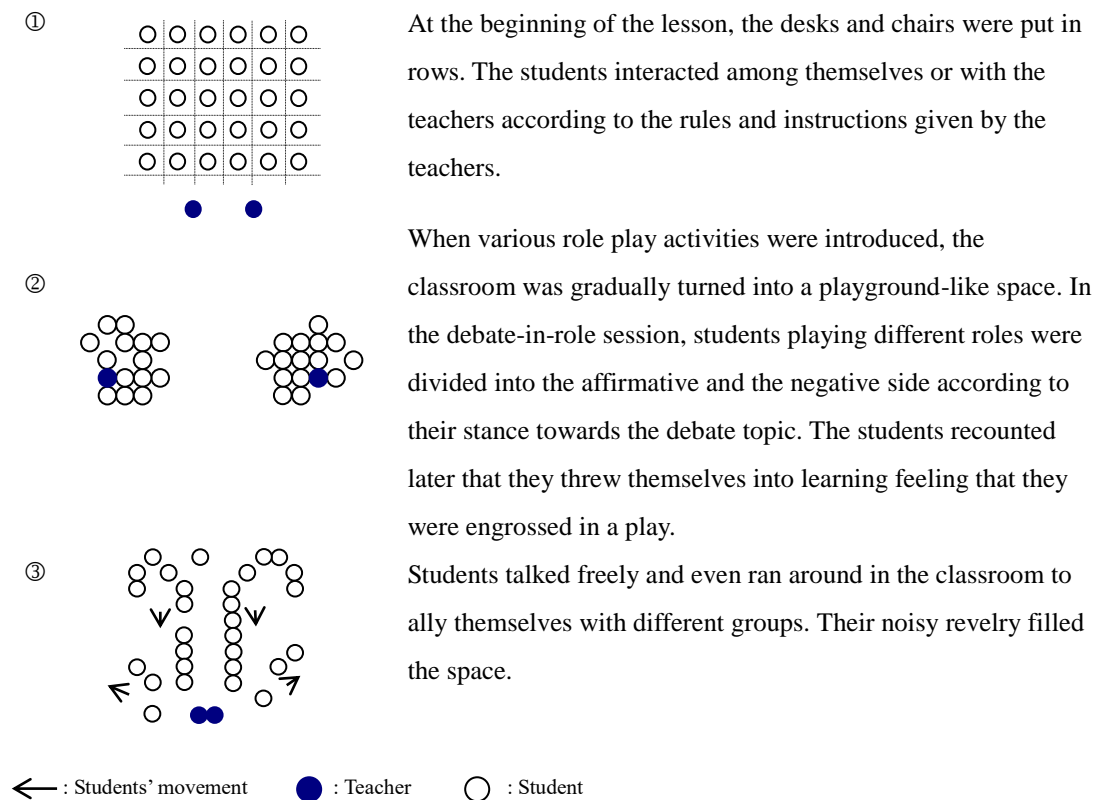
2.2.1. Students' laughter

Compared with the normal Chinese language classroom, students' laughter was heard more often in the drama classrooms. Here I generalize four occasions of laughter based on the data collected in the studies. The students broke into laughter when (i) the school teacher was acting in teacher-in-role; (ii) someone told jokes or used parody; (iii) their classmates' acting became exaggerated, senseless and caricatural; and (iv) when someone made funny errors. While these scenarios might be deemed grotesque and profane in the conventional classroom, they would be interpreted by Carnival theory as indicators of the playful resistance of the students. On one occasion, for instance, the students challenged the teacher's acting when the latter was playing the role of a controversial historical figure. One of the students talked back to the teacher in a rude manner by saying, '*It's not your business*'. Others followed suit with curses calling the teacher '*hat ji*' (meaning beggar in Cantonese), '*old dummy*' and '*bastard*'. At that point the whole class broke into ceaseless laughter. In this example the almighty teacher was profaned and his classroom authority subverted, recalling the decrowning and crowning described in Bakhtinian resistance.

2.2.2. The boundless body

The setting of the classrooms in the study was that of a typical Chinese classroom. The chairs and desks were placed in rows. Such an arrangement, however, did not totally confine the interaction of the teacher and the pupils to one-way, transmissive communication. In some cases, the students started to move and talk freely as the fictive world unfolded. Diagram 1 illustrates the movements of the students in one lesson. Their mobility increased as the drama loosened both physical and verbal sanctions, as the diagram below illustrates.

Diagram 1: Bodily movement

① At the beginning of the lesson, the desks and chairs were put in rows. The students interacted among themselves or with the teachers according to the rules and instructions given by the teachers.

② When various role play activities were introduced, the classroom was gradually turned into a playground-like space. In the debate-in-role session, students playing different roles were divided into the affirmative and the negative side according to their stance towards the debate topic. The students recounted later that they threw themselves into learning feeling that they were engrossed in a play.

③ Students talked freely and even ran around in the classroom to ally themselves with different groups. Their noisy revelry filled the space.

⟵ : Students' movement   ● : Teacher   ○ : Student

The boundless bodies of the students and their movements signify a displacement in the classroom. Playground activities came in as teaching tasks and play became blended.

2.2.3. Imaginative violence

The third example is taken from a lesson in which improvised story enactment was practised to train the students' narrative skills. The students were free to write and act out a story from un-restricted themes, content and genres. Their stories turned out to be saturated

with substandard, forbidden and aversive elements which were appropriated from the images, plots and languages of cartoonsand other popular literacies. For example 13 out of the 20 stories they wrote were about children or fictive characters. These protagonists were faced with threats of different kinds such as natural disasters, attacks by monsters, UFOs or demons. The protagonists were either struggling against the calamities or fighting hard until they were rescued by a super hero or gods from heaven. The scenes they described were full of beating, fighting, explosions, bloodshed, killing or being killed. Almost without exception, the drama took place under perilous situations of furious thunder, lightning and storm. Their improvised plots transgressed the expectation for standard, highbrow language and solemn messages that is supposed to characterise the language classroom.

3. Issues when applying Carnival theory: Reconceptualising the multi-faceted carnivalesque opened up by drama pedagogy

The various role-play activities mentioned above exhibit the openness, spontaneity, fictiveness and playfulness of drama pedagogy. These are inherent characteristics of drama and they work to impede the domination of the teacher's language, knowledge and culture. The latter gave way to those of the students'. In this regard, the subversive potentials of drama pedagogy for 'carnival-like' resistance are evident. The tools of resistance as used by the students were the very languages, knowledges and sub-cultures they possessed that they expressed in displaced representations and different styles in the drama classroom. I summarize the identifiable/identified moments of the carnivalesque in the matrix in Table 1. Rather than a check box to appropriate and attribute what happened in the study classrooms to carnival images, the matrix attempts to illustrate the fact that the carnival images were manifest in diversified, fragmented forms of representation.

Table 1: Matrix of the multi-aspects of the carnival images in the case classrooms

Dimensions		Code/ Discourse cues	Critical Features
1. Mode of representation	• Written	incomplete sentence, mispronunciation, grammatical mistake and misspelling	*Substandard*
			Excessive emotion
	• Visual		*Popular*
	• Spoken	*mangwa*, graffiti	*Multimodal*
	• Bodily •	vernacular, dialect, market place language	*Etiquette-less*
	Artifact	free contact, mass movement, laughter, noise, buzz of excitement and cheering	*Low-level*
			Hybrid
			Transformative
		Toy, prop, topsy-turvy displays of classroom	*Playful*
2. Genre	• Textual/	Advertisement, joke, rhyme, riddle, oral game,	*Heteroglossia*

Verbal	parody, narrative from animation, television, computer game,	*Clichéd* *Prohibited*
• Performative	Chinese traditional opera, popular song, dance, masquerade, burlesque, silly disguise, antic, low comedy, grotesque body, motley figures, awkward playacting, bizarre and exaggerated enactment	
3. Subject matter	Violent, senseless and other forbidden topics	

The above matrix points out that the carnivalesque of drama pedagogy exhibits manifold aspects including the verbal, visual, the textual, the bodily and the physical space. It points also to a need to look at what and how the social and power relations are structuring these manifested aspects of the carnival images.

Many scholars liken the open-ended, *laissez-faire* and student-oriented activities or pedagogies such as writing conference (Lensmire, 2000), video making (Grace & Tobin, 1997; Buckingham, 1998) and story telling (Mallan, 1999) to medieval carnival and they treat the teaching and learning practices in drama pedagogy as analogous to carnival activities. In doing so, these studies generally assume a stable and taken-for-granted relationship between the carnivalesque and the activities or pedagogies under attention. Largely based on the categorized images in Bakhtin's Rabelais, these studies extract and collate the carnival-like images identified in the pedagogical activities for immediate application. Their analyses are also mainly limited to verbal representations.

First of all, I am cautious about applying the notion of carnival resistance to drama pedagogy regardless of the pedagogical approach being used. The data collected in the study put this hypothesis in check by suggesting that the emergence of the carnival images in the case classrooms was largely contingent, unstable and fragmented. As Umberto Eco (1984) reminds us, carnival is always under the surveillance and monitoring of authority; and it can be banned and suppressed at any moment according to the will of the latter. The carnival could also be manipulated by the authorities as a tool to reinforce domination in a disguised form. In the drama classroom, the teachers' power is vital to both the emergence and the authenticity of the carnival images. The teachers are in charge of a wide range of pedagogical choices such as the choosing of the teaching materials, the arrangement of the drama and non-drama activities, the mode of communication and the maintenance of classroom order. In this way they determine what kind of language, knowledge and culture is permitted to be produced or reproduced in the course of drama pedagogy. The shift in the power relation between the teachers and the students is intricate. As I will show in the examples below, the degree of this power shift is determined largely by the kind of pedagogical approach that the teacher takes

If the teacher and the pedagogical approach constitute one critical aspect of teaching and learning in the drama classroom, the non-verbal expressions inherent to drama alert us to the student body and the other non-verbal entities/components in play. Inscribed on the students' bodies are their feelings, thinking and cultures. In this regard, Bakhtin's notion of the image system proposes a method to examine the multi-dimensional power relations of the carnival image (1984b; Kinser, 1990; Flaherly, 1986). To overcome the language-centred application of carnival theory to drama pedagogy, I propose to identify and investigate the various entities and components in its teaching and learning processes. This should avoid the suppression of the 'other' moments of carnival resistance. I would like to highlight four poles, namely the teacher, the student, the physical and the social spaces in constituting a system under which the entities and components of drama pedagogy interact, relate and forge power relations. I will then further develop a framework capable of mediating the four poles and the pedagogical components in order to interpret the necessary conditions for the emergence of carnival images in the classroom.

4.   How power relations structure the carnival images in drama pedagogy

Before looking into the pedagogical approaches of the teachers in the case studies, it should be pointed out that they were rather cautious about practising drama pedagogy. They seemed to agree along the line of the education reform about its playfulness and potential in motivating student learning, creating enjoyable learning experiences and promoting a dynamic classroom atmosphere (Arts Development Council, 2005; Arts Education Section of Curriculum Development Institute, 2005). Yet, the application of drama pedagogy in the classrooms was low and restricted. When interviewed, the teachers were frequently saying that '*the lesson shouldn't become too playful*', '*the students shouldn't play too much*'; and yet '*it's good to move a little bit*'. The teachers clearly had reservations and even apprehensions and were worried about the teaching outcomes, doubting the 'effectiveness' of the pedagogy when they found students using impoverished, facile and vulgar language in their classes. Such dissatisfaction shows that they understood and applied drama pedagogy from a perspective of officialdom, monoculturalism and elitism and this helps explain the different pedagogical approaches they used in the two examples quoted below. In using different approaches in the drama classroom, the shifts in power relations between the students and the teachers differed.

In one lesson, the teacher, Betty, conducted a role play activity in which the students were asked to write an advertisement for a product and act on it by playing a salesperson.

This teaching plan was later adopted by her colleague, Ken. Both agreed that the role play activities were helpful for improving the organised and systematic communication skills of students when writing expository writing. Despite this, very different results occurred in the two lessons due to the different degree of control they exercised over the teaching process and their differing treatment of the verbal and non-verbal representations offered by the students. Ken's aim was to teach the students to imitate a particular professional discourse, whereas Betty placed emphasis on spontaneous imagination, free expression and a creative production of the genre through learning in a playful way. This resulted in divergent carnival images and activities.

4.1. Magic torch peddlers

Betty showed her students a box which she named the 'miraculous treasure chest'. Inside were objects intended to provoke the students' imaginations. They then broke into writing groups, examined the objects in detail and improvised new ways of playing with them. The props became their toys. For example, they shook the torch and shone it in different directions. They switched it on and off and carefully explored its components. In the advertising session, the students assigned surreal functions to the torch, turning it into a 'weight-losing torch' and a 'see-through torch'. The language they used and their enactment de-stabilised the serious and rationality-based discourse of the regular classroom. The teacher and I paid particular attention to the speaking, singing and acting bodies of the students. For example, they enacted as a group of peddlers rather than professional salesmen, appropriating performance genres of different kinds such as stand-up comedy and traditional Chinese minstrel performance in their enactments. Similarly, the styles of their acting were hybrid, exaggerated borrowings from comedians they were familiar with in popular culture. As a result, not only the objects but their bodies, too, took on magical properties. Moreover the audience offered further props and cued the actors, evidence of their cognitive, bodily and emotional engagement with them. Indeed, it was the grotesque body of the actors that gave rise to the audience's playful, free and active participation, even co-creating with them in the performance. Consequently, the classroom was 'magically' transformed into a carnival square.

4.2. Product presenters

Ken chose to situate the class in the real world situation of selling. He emphasised the need for precise and specific information in copywriting. In the session of collaborative writing, he wrote the names of the objects on paper cards and delivered them to the groups. The target genre was ready-made and it dominated the writing exercise. As a result, even though

Ken's students also engaged in discussion and collaborative writing, they spent a great deal of time arguing about the logical and organized presentation of the product details.

During the role enactment, the audience was reminded to sit up straight, keep silent and pay attention. A punishment system was even applied to ensure regular classroom order was maintained. Each group was given a full score (5 marks) in the beginning to be deducted should there be discipline issues. The system was used as a threat to control classroom order and most of the students complied with it. Regarding the student performance in role play, most of the groups spoke in a hesitant and monotonous manner. Ken intervened quite often to give them hints on the volume of voice, eye contact, posture and presentation of ideas. Despite this, all the group members stood still and stiff to 'present' rather than 'enact'. Some of them merely read out what they had on the paper word by word and there was an obvious separation between actors and audience. In sum, the role play here required the students to learn by imitating and re-creating a given reality. Such a lesson objective combined with the pedagogical methods and the teacher's authority to re-produce a teacher-led learning space in the drama classroom.

The above descriptions and analyses of the two lessons illustrate that carnival resistance is a result of the interplay between the powers of the teacher and the students. The pedagogical entities including the target genre, the design of the dramatic activity, the choice of teaching aid or props, the physical space, as well as the contact, the expression and the reaction in the classroom were used in Ken's lesson to bring about a serious, formal and distant physical and social space to teach a standard professional genre. The entire process was structured in pursuit of this prescribed goal and was executed in such a way as to ensure the cooperation of the students. In contrast, the same entities worked as an integral whole in Betty's lesson and opened up a carnivalesque learning space which resisted both the prescribed genre and its (re)production. Subsequently, a breakdown of the enforcement of the habitual orders and standard classroom language was apparent. In this sense, the students in Ken's lesson were made to reproduce rather than generate knowledge whereas Betty's students drew on their own imaginations, culture and popular literacies to reformat a conventional social genre. This in turn made possible their own articulation of the learning topic - childlike, eccentric, deeply influenced by popular culture - in their vocal and bodily expressions.

Diagram 2: The interplay among four poles of practicing drama pedagogy
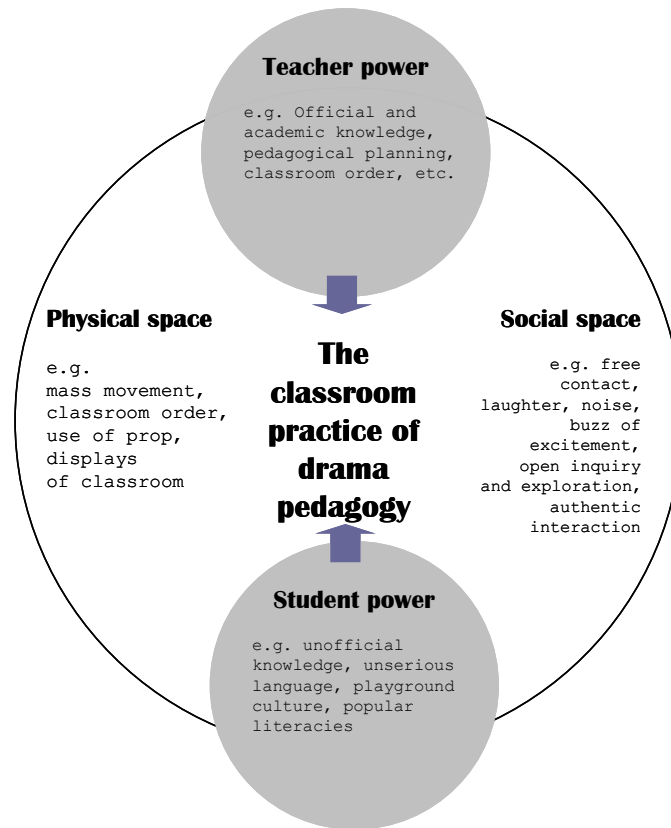
The observations from these two case classrooms reveal how the relaxation of the teacher's power can realise carnivalesque drama pedagogy. It makes student participation, their control and creation of the *classroom discourse,* as well as the *space* possible on both the discursive and the bodily level. The students' language, knowledge and culture were usually hybrids, ready to mock those of the teachers, when playful, imaginative and popular expressions were permitted.

5.   A frame for understanding the carnival resistance of drama pedagogy

In many instances, carnival images are hybrids and their emergence is fragmented, implicit and disguised. In view of this, I have generated a frame from the perspective of teaching and learning to serve as a map to help discern and examine the extent and authenticity of the carnivalesque in drama pedagogy. It also suggests that there are a myriad ways of activating the carnival system and hence of bringing a holistic change to the Chinese language classroom.

5.1.   Opening an unfinished learning space for ongoing meaning, exploring and making

A lesson using drama pedagogy is not prescribed to transmit monologic and fixed meanings; nor should it be governed by ready-made meanings and directive tenets (Burbules, 1993; Noddings, 1984). Instead, it should be an open-ended and ongoing journey: a search for, an exploration of and a process of constructing meaning. For example, the design and organisation of drama conventions should always be plastic and fluid so as to stimulate, guide and engage students to think and create (Somers, 2005). In the words of O'Neill and Lambert (1982), when students participate in drama, they 'will have to make their own relationships with the topic and articulate their own personal responses within the drama…a large proportion of the content of the lesson will be contributed by the students, it will be unpredictable' (p.20). Seen in this light, a drama lesson ejects and invalidates all ready-made answers and predetermined ways of representation. It does not mean that a total relinquishment of teacher power in the classroom. The fact is that genuine and substantial student participation is analogous to the carnival ritual of mock crowning which is the necessary condition for the decrowning of the carnival king. It is also the necessary condition for the birth of new forms of power and meaning, as well as the death of the old forms. The classroom can thus be seen as an open and unfinished space for the languages, knowledges and cultures of the teacher and the students to collide and intersect with one another, producing new, hybrid forms. The principles of teaching and learning include, very critically, that of making the familiar strange, celebrating differences and decrowning the privileged. The teacher will not proscribe taboos or indecent or senseless things - as deemed in the traditional classroom - from appearing in the class's journey. In this way, the previously-proscribed may serve as resources for the students to weave and compete with the text provided by the teacher for the benefit of generating a polyphonic and discordant meaning and classroom space.

5.2. Activating imagination and creation through drama activities

As seen from the above examples, giving opportunities to students to imagine and create is another vital condition to actualise the carnival potential of drama pedagogy. It allows students to detach themselves from the routines, constraints and norms in their everyday lives so that they can think, feel, express and create in different and even grotesque ways. Among all types of dramatic activity, acting is primarily an imaginative and creative means to attain this purpose. Acting here refers to students performing as others by taking up an *as-if* stance and putting themselves into someone else's shoes. In acting, people are able to transgress their prior experiences, worldviews and practices. As Bolton (1984) argues, acting facilitates a 'mental liberation' (p.141). Given the sanctions on the body commonly exercised in regular classrooms, I argue that the liberating power of acting is not confined

to freeing students' minds as it emancipates their bodies, too, in a carnivalistic way. Nonetheless, the acting of the students may not necessarily accommodate the needs, expectations and preferences of the teacher. This is exactly where the subversive power of acting lies. On the one hand, the hierarchy is ruptured by allowing the presence of various thinking and body types in the classroom; on the other hand, acting thwarts the teacher's attempt to compel the students to act in the preferred way for preserving the docility of their minds and bodies. Such a rupture in the teacher's power over not only the mind but also the body is part and parcel of the spirit of carnival.

5.3.   Hybridising and multiplying languages, literacies and genres

Drama pedagogy when practised in close connection with students' daily experiences, peer culture and aesthetic dispositions both resorts to and at the same time brings about a wide range of languages, literacies and genres in the classroom. Apart from the academic, official and literary forms provided by the teacher, language resources belonging to the unofficial, popular and even underprivileged emerge spontaneously in this process of teaching and learning. In this way, the unofficial genres derived from the students' playground culture, such as rhymes, riddles, jokes, oral games and banter can return to the classroom. Similarly, languages assimilated from mass media like cartoons, television, video games, and sports reports, popular songs, advertisements, slogans and catch-phrases can also become sources of subversive creation. In this way, students can be encouraged to participate in the formulation of a hybridised classroom discourse, mediating their own knowledge, experience, language, genres and styles of expression to communicate, collide and intermingle with those of the teacher.

5.4.   Valorising bodily responses

Drama pedagogy prioritises a free, open and boundless body over the docile, silenced and mindful body. The body is conceived of as ideologically inscribed and socially bonded. Students' feelings, thinking and cultures are also written on their bodies and embodied in their actions. This explains why bodily responses such as laughter, noise, the buzz of excitement and cheering displayed in the studied classrooms are considered as resistant and transgressive acts. More so, the release of students' bodies from their seats, the rarely granted persmission for free movement and contact, the topsy-turvy classroom, all celebrate the victory of the playful body of the students and their culture. Re-adjustment of the physical space in the classroom and the liberation of the disciplined body (if not the creation of the grotesque body) are essential to subverting the mind-over-body hierarchy and the rational-versus-emotional dichotomy of the schooling system.

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6. Conclusion: The implications of Carnival theory

This carnival reading of two drama classrooms does not mean that the teachers and the students were practising playful, resistant or transgressive pedagogy consciously or in a premeditated fashion. Connotatively, it emphasises that drama pedagogy is inherently practised with and towards students' language, knowledge and culture through an open, playful and imaginative approach. In this article, carnival theory has been used in a quest for an alternative understanding of the possible function of drama pedagogy. Its playfulness, openness, plebeianism and imaginativeness has been used to reconceptualise it as a resistant and transgressive pedagogic form. This interpretation has significant implications for teachers and researchers.

Drama pedagogy provides students with a context, frame, issue or role to explore, and express experience. Through vigorous interaction in and out of the fictive world, students can partake in the construction and re-construction of the classroom discourse by tapping into their own cultural and linguistic resources. This understanding of teaching and learning is shared by other drama educators who also argue that drama pedagogy is greatly different from those pedagogies rooted in the traditional paradigm of knowledge production and distribution. For example, John Somers (2005) names it as an 'alternative pedagogy'. Kathleen Gallagher (2000; 2002) draws on the perspective of critical and feminist pedagogy to revise it as a vehicle to celebrate differences, problematize normalities, blur boundaries and promote dialogue. In agreement with these observations, this study uses carnival theory to argue that the power of drama pedagogy relies on the playfulness, plebeianism and fictiveness at its heart, potentially capable of resisting the authoritarian, monolithic and exclusive modes of learning in the classroom. However, to actualise these characteristics necessitates a critical reflection first and foremost of the relation between teaching and learning rather than simply to surrender the power of the teacher. As McCarthy and Dimitriadis (2004) put it:

> The great struggle of our times is the struggle to regenerate a public sphere when the spheres of culture and education are increasingly being colonised. Such a struggle necessitates giving up something, giving up our certainties and our illusions of control over knowledge.

McCarthy and Dimitriadis's idea of the public sphere can be seen as analogous to Bakhtin's carnival square. They reiterate the point that what will be learnt and how learning takes place are no longer manipulated in the hands of the teachers. More so, they also hint at the dual task of the teacher in securing such a carnival space in the classroom. In this light, I

have proposed a framework for the necessary conditions of carnivalesque drama pedagogy. Teachers should *on the one hand*, 'unlearn' (McWilliam, 2005) and realise that drama, when appropriated as a 'pedagogy', is an interplay between the teacher, the students, the physical space and the social, logically structured in a sequence of activities, methods and procedures that have a particular social agenda behind them. *On the other hand*, it is possible to materialise the potentials for carnival by designing and practising the components of drama pedagogy through critically reflecting on the interplay of their power relations. I have proposed in this article a matrix of the components of drama pedagogy and a framework of conditions to help bring about its realisation, suggesting that we may have to *re-learn* the unpredictability, plurality and openness of the production and distribution of knowledge that such an approach can engender.

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