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# Playing for Real: Drama in Colombian Schools

Gene Díaz and Zayda Sierra

## Introduction and Context

Colombia is a country of many faces. Caught in a struggle for power and territory, many diverse groups, among them the more than 80 native indigenous groups, the African descendants of the coastal regions, the descendants of the European colonists, and the different mixtures of all, vie for positions of equity and for voices in critical decisions. Amidst a civil war which has endured more than 40 years by many counts, they suffer together the loss of freedom and the confusion of a society caught in an internal imbalance of ideologies and actions, a society of displaced persons and misplaced peace. The guerrilla groups, the paramilitary, and the government forces each claim to offer the people of this country different scenarios and possibilities for relief from the dire consequences of violence, unemployment and extreme poverty, while at the same time creating a culture of conflict, aggression and fear.

## Where are the Children in this Culture of Conflict?

Estimates of the number of children who bear arms for the different warring factions other than the army range from 5,000 to 17,000, many of them taken from their homes and indoctrinated against their will. At the same time that these children play the real game of war with sometimes fatal consequences, other children play at school, in their communities and in their homes. What are the social realities that these children experience and, given the chance, how would they depict the different aspects of their lives if they were asked to play for real, to play as if they were depicting their own lives, or their lives as they would want them to be? How do their distinct cultural origins (Afro, Native, Mestizo, Rural, Urban) impact these realities? These were questions asked by a Colombian research team, DIVERSER, during a two year study of seven schools and their communities in the northwest region of Colombia [1]. In this article, we will share an innovative arts-based research process that democratizes and enriches the processes of knowing educational contexts and practices; which is at the same time a pedagogical process that teachers use in classrooms to better understand the lives and needs of their students, and to design more culturally relevant curriculum. We include here the origins and processes of dramatic play, and present some concepts and conclusions that emerged from the communities of study. Based in concerns of a lack of coherence between school culture (e.g., curriculum content, pedagogy and instructional practices) and children's sociocultural realities in Colombia, this project was an effort to create educational processes that offer teachers a better understanding of their students' perceptions and feelings about

their world everyday lives. Teachers from different cultural settings were invited to participate in an arts-based, interactive research project in order to help facilitate students' representations and interpretations of their family, school, and community's realities through dramatic play. In addition to the traditional qualitative strategies of participant-observation, interviews and life histories, teachers were also introduced to artistic and dramatic play strategies as other ways to hear children's voices, and as an active learning process that stimulates cognitive, creative, and social development. After analyzing the depicted realities that the children acted out about their schools, their families and their communities, the teachers, as co-researchers, participated in developing curricula more relevant to students' cultural contexts and more sensitive to their needs. The main goal in this inquiry process was to improve our understanding, as teachers and teacher educators, of the meaning of cultural pluralism, and to develop educational programs that address the diversity of the student populations in Colombian schools.

Developing an understanding of cultural phenomena through symbolic systems such as art and play requires an interpretive process based in hermeneutics, since the subjective experiences that shape these activities cannot be treated as objective data; on the contrary, our understanding of the world in which we live derives from our own tacit and subjective knowing of this experience. Qualitative research methods from a critical postmodern perspective are grounded in the idea that reality is socially constructed, which means that we are both subject and actors at the same time. This knowing, then, requires a method of acting in the world that is wide-awake, conscious and at the same time generative of new realities, new possibilities (Sierra & Romero, 2002).

In this article we will introduce the research processes and discuss the use of dramatic play in inquiry and pedagogical practices, and include a brief discussion of the results of the study.

## **The Construction of Reality as Process**

The research questions that guided the inquiry were the following:

1. How do students age 10 to 11 represent and interpret their family realities and their school environments within their different cultural contexts, and in accordance with the dimensions of gender, ethnic and social class, through dramatic play?
2. What meaning can we make of the different symbolic representations that boys and girls develop within dramatic play activities around ethnic and social class?
3. What are the implications for the pedagogical processes of school and extracurricular activities that teachers can derive from the artistic representations and

interpretations that their students construct in dramatic play? What impact can this knowledge have in the development of educational policies?

After presenting an outline of the research project to directors and teachers of different educational centers, seven educational institutions in the northwestern region of Colombia were selected using the following criteria:

1. The history, traditions and ethnic or social composition of their students offered cultural diversity among the participating institutions.
2. At least one of the teachers in the institution would be familiar with the development of children's expressive play and art activities, and manifest interest in leading formative processes in his or her school and region.
3. The directors manifested an interest in the proposal and offered support in time and space for its development.

The selection of students was based on availability and willingness to participate. In some cases, the teachers made the selection in accordance with criteria determined by them by the conditions at the site. The small number of students, 7 boys and 7 girls per site, provided for detailed observation of the process of their interactions during dramatic play and follow-up observations at their homes. The selection of pre-adolescents was based in the understanding that at this age: (1) many of the traditions, beliefs and cultural practices of their community have been incorporated, (2) they have acquired the use of a communication tool such as writing, and (3) they possess thinking strategies that allow them to participate in reflective discussions.

## **Phases of the Project**

Phase I: DRAMATIC PLAY: A WINDOW INTO THE WORLD WE LIVE IN. Beginning with play activities (nursery rhymes and songs, traditional games and theater) that facilitate interaction among children, students dramatized stories around themes such as: "free topic", "family", "school", "the world that surrounds us". They also made drawings, wrote narratives or commentaries about the experience. One year.

Phase II: DRAMATIC PLAY: A WINDOW INTO A POSSIBLE WORLD. An exploration of how we would want the world to be (our family, our school, our surroundings) through dramatic play and other activities such as drawings, narratives, and interviews. Teachers formulated pedagogical proposals based in the analysis and interpretation of the contents of their students' creations. One year.

Phase III: REPRESENTATION AND COMMUNICATION. Evaluation and systematization analysis of the experience. Following the write-up of the research for Colciencias the process has been shared in national and international forums with educational researchers interested in imaginative inquiry and arts-based research. One year (and on-going).

We began this inquiry during the first year of 2000, with four week-long seminar-workshops with the teachers every six weeks. In each meeting theoretical and practical elements of qualitative research, dramatic play and other artistic activities were discussed and practiced. The workshops with the students were two hours weekly, emphasizing dramatic play and discussions, drawings and narratives that included reflections on what happened in every workshop.

The teachers used videos, audiocassettes and photographs to record the activities of their meetings with the students. As well, the teachers and students were encouraged to keep their own field journals dairies, enriched with drawings, with which to construct a portfolio for each community. The teachers cooperated with the university research team in the transcription, analysis and interpretation of the data in order to develop pedagogical proposals based in the data analysis.

### **Dramatic Play as Pedagogy and Inquiry**

Different scholars have offered definitions for dramatic play that, although they use different words, all convey similar meaning. dramatic play is the simulative and nonliterate behavior children use to transform the identities of objects, actions, and people (Pellegrini, 1985). Through pretending, children transform the here and now, the you and me, and the this or that, as they creatively construct potential for action that these components of a situation may have (Garvey, 1990). In dramatic play an object is used as if it were another, one person behaves as if she were another, and immediate time and place are treated as if they were otherwise and elsewhere.

Although scholars agree on how dramatic play is defined, theorists do not agree about how the role of dramatic play in children's development should be interpreted. Freud, Piaget, and Vygotsky represent the major differences in the interpretation of play in the lives of children. Even though their interpretations differ, each has greatly influenced understanding of play and has contributed to current thinking about the different levels of development in children's play and the possible educational approaches that might be taken by teachers.

Freud's psychoanalytical theory of play is exemplified in his famous observation of the toddler who, in the absence of his mother, flung all the little things on which he could lay his hands into the corner of his room or under his bed (Herron & Sutton Smith,

1985; Singer, 1973). Thus, this interpretation of play emphasizes how children use it to overcome anxieties or to compensate for things that are absent (Watson, 1994). In *The Poet and Daydreaming*, Freud (1908/1958) explained child's play as the first trace of imaginative activity:

Every child at play behaves like an imaginative writer, in that he creates a world of his own or, more truly, he rearranges the things of his world and orders it in a new way that pleases him better. It would be incorrect to think that he does not take this world seriously; on the contrary, he takes his play very seriously and expends a great deal of emotion on it. (p. 45)

Dramatic play also appears to offer children a unique opportunity to apply knowledge and increase their understanding of known realities at the moment of creating their play-stories. At the same time that children expand their knowledge of reality, they also face fears of those things that they cannot rationally understand or are beyond their personal control. Vygotsky described this as the dynamic interplay of emotional and cognitive elements that develops during play.

Dramatic play is not an ultimate escape from, but a bridge to reality. According to Koste (1978) one of play's functions is to allow children to explore those situations that generate strong feelings in humans. These feelings may concern events like death, birth, or mating where strong emotions like loss, separation, pride, identity, love, celebration, and joy emerge. "The experiencing and expressing of the whole spectrum of human passions is one essential aspect of the all-encompassing purpose of play: to master reality" (Vygotsky, 1933/1976, p. 93).

Because knowledge is not a static phenomenon, but goes from initial impressions toward deeper understandings, dramatic play can also be considered a valuable learning tool. Through their play, children explore and test hypotheses they have formed about the social world. In addition, with the help of their teachers, they can explore new hypothesis, challenge previous assumptions, and expand their inquiry by further investigating those topics or themes that interest them. The link between cognitive and creative development emerges through dramatic play. Children expand their inquiry on certain themes, elaborate from previous ideas, or create alternative realities (Sierra, 1998).

In his book *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood*, Piaget (1946/1962) criticized previous efforts aimed at cataloging and classifying children's playful activities by the content and the function of a game or its origin. These classifications, he believed, were dependent on preconceived interpretations that failed to account for the structures or the degree of mental complexity presented by each game. Piaget differentiated among the play activities that children engaged in as exercise-games,

symbolic play, and games with rules. These play categories corresponded to his sensorimotor, pre-operational and operational periods of child development.

Vygotsky (1933/1976) viewed play as an adaptive mechanism promoting cognitive growth and language acquisition: “It seems to me that from the point of view of development, play is not the predominant form of activity, but is, in a certain sense, the leading source of development in pre-school years” (p.537) According to Smolucha (1992), Vygotsky also connected children's play with adult creative activity. She summarized these connections as they appear in his theory of creative imagination as follows:

1. Imagination develops out of children's play.
2. Imagination becomes a higher mental function and, as such, is a consciously directed thought process.
3. In adolescence, creative imagination is characterized by the collaboration of imagination and thinking in concepts.
4. The collaboration between imagination and thinking in concepts matures in the artistic and scientific creativity of adulthood. (p. 50)

In addition to describing and analyzing its internal components and dynamics, a holistic comprehension of dramatic play requires making sense of its possible meanings. Interdisciplinary efforts based in psychology, linguistics, sociology, and anthropology enhance comprehension of this activity. As a very complex human activity, dramatic play's interpretation is not complete if it is only approached from one of these disciplines in isolation. Pretend play is a process that displays and contributes to emotional and cognitive growth, uses different means of communication (gestures, oral, written), and involves both the individual and the group. Because of its literary, dramatic, and aesthetic components, dramatic play also has implications for artists, especially drama specialists or professionals in theater (Sierra, 1998)

Norman Denzin suggests that we recognize any text as “a complex interpretive document involving the writer's attempts to articulate some set of understandings about a particular situation, cultural form, or social process” (1997, p. 235). This suggestion leads us to the notion that children's scripts or stories created through dramatic play should be considered as similar to the text produced by a writer: a poem, an ethnographic report, a film, a piece of journalism, or a performance work. Thus, children's way of portraying characters, their actions and their relations through dramatic play could be understood as an expression of their interpretive practice: “the

constellation of procedures, conditions, and resources through which reality is apprehended, understood, organized, and represented in the course of everyday life” (Gubrium, in Sierra, 1998).

At the same time, the reading or interpretation that the teacher or the researcher gives to children’s dramatic play also needs to be recognized as a second form of the text. The text does not have a privileged or correct form of reading since it involves the reader’s own practices, institutional structures, and ideology. That is, the interpreter brings to the child’s play her perceptions that are based on her own experiences and efforts to construct meaning.

Here in resides the core of the crisis of representation and legitimization that currently affects social inquiry: “how to represent and interpret, with some degree of certainty the multiple meanings that circulate in an ethnographic text,” and “how to judge an interpretation, when all external criteria, or foundational criteria have been challenged”(Denzin, 1997, p. 234).

## **Reflexivity And Dialogue In The Interpretive Process**

The call for a continuous process of reflexivity and dialogue as a way to construct meaning through an interpretation of children’s social realities presents the greatest challenge and the greatest potential for pedagogical change. Since the questions and methods of understanding human processes are themselves culturally and historically situated, explanations or interpretations cannot be considered to be pure knowledge, or even claims to truth. Instead, in order to gain an understanding of the research endeavor and of the social phenomenon of learning, we as researchers and teachers need to examine our own roles in the inquiry and teaching processes and those of the institutions in which these activities occur.

This reflexivity requires the process of thinking through and with others. This means that “the process of representing goes hand in hand with a process of portraying one’s self as part of the process, thereby encouraging an open-ended self-reflexive dialogic turn of mind” (Shweder, 1992). Thus, reflexivity and dialogue are two faces of the same interpretive coin, and self-reflection develops in the interplay of the self and the other –in the dialogue of the I and Thou. The discovery of the self occurs through dialogue and relationship; “the individual learns of both self and other through a process of interrelating” (p. 134). Comprehension, Denzin adds, is made possible when two speakers enter into a dialogic relationship with one another. “An outside observer has no place in this dialogue. Only by entering into the dialogue can understanding be gained” (1997, p. 38). For example, teachers and researchers differed on many occasions regarding how to interpret the play-stories that were being developed by the participants. However, through our conversations, reflections



with the students, and other inquiries, it was possible to go beyond our initial perceptions and explore other possible meanings of the scenes represented by the participants. Thus, the interpretation of children's dramatic play requires a continuous process of dialogue and reflection with one's self, the participants, and other sources that can contribute to our ability to transcend first impressions in order to reach deeper understandings.

## **The Opposition Between Work And Play In Western Culture**

The history of the origin of schools in Western society reveals that a large segment of the population has traditionally been trained to provide the labor force, while another smaller segment has been prepared to assume roles of power and leadership. Through schooling, conventional values are used to maintain social divisions as well as the dominance of one social group over the other (Baudelot & Establet, 1976). One of these traditional values is expressed in the role of work and play for different segments of society. The practice and enjoyment of activities associated with "high" culture such as the arts, theater, music, and literature are acceptable cultural capital for the privileged segment of society. In contrast, time dedicated to play and enjoyment among the working class is judged as laziness and is considered to be the cause of their being in poverty (Lamont & Lareau, 1988). In the past, children of the lower and working class had to work; their play was embedded in their work. Thus, play was typically characterized in opposition to work, as not being serious, but imitative and irrational and the characterization of work was as rational, calculated and predictable. The implication was that work was good and play was bad or, at best, questionable (Sierra, 1998). During the Colonial period, seventeenth-century Protestant New Englanders condemned play as selfish, irrational, irresponsible, and inimical to the development of salvation and a work ethic. From this perspective, "play was understood to be unreal, a pale imitation of reality, inferior as a way of knowing, trivial, useful only insofar as it contributed to the cultivation of rationality, order, regularity, hierarchy" (Finkelstein, 1987, p.17-22). The Spaniards and the Catholic Church brought similar ideas to Latin America. Both Protestant and Catholic traditions had in common the control of leisure and play as a way to dominate common people:

The serious aspects of class culture are official and authoritarian; they are always combined with violence, prohibitions, limitations, and always contain an element of fear and intimidation....Laughter, on the contrary, overcomes fear, for it knows no inhibitions, no limitations. Its idiom is never used by violence and authority [Bakhtin cited in Kellner, 1988, p. 13].

At the beginning of this century during the so-called progressive era, the United States saw the emergence of two distinct forms of school play for two distinct laboring groups. The children of the upper middle-class were commonly invited to play freely and independently. The children of laboring families in the cities, on the other hand, were exposed to physical and mental regulation on playgrounds and in classrooms, the better to prepare them for the drudgery of unskilled labor in factory and on the assembly line. (Finkelstein, 1987) This Rousseauian vision of child-centered education had some impact in the private nursery schools of Europe and later in the burgeoning Montessori movement. But this vision had little effect on the mainstream of schools. “Student initiated activity had little part in the school curriculum. Work was what life was all about. Play detracted from work and did not fit into this essentialist philosophy of education” (Glickman, 1984, p. 262). Different efforts to introduce play into school activities were reversed during the 1980s with the conservative “back to the basics” movement definitively work-oriented and characterized by the preponderance of teacher direction and student passivity (Sierra, 1998).

### **The Misconception Of Play As Entertainment**

Play, as producer of meaning, has become confused with games and pastime, a passive consumption of the entertainment industry, a momentary alleviation from the hard conditions of life. This misapprehension of play as entertainment and passive consumption has become an additional obstacle for the advocates of play. Thus, another obstacle to including play in school life has been its confusion with mere entertainment, a distraction from the “real” and “serious” learning process.

Progressive education’s efforts to include play in the curriculum has been considered “an excuse for laziness, laissez-faire procedures, and even anarchy” (Gardner, 1991, p. 189). Thus, it is important to make the distinction between play and entertainment. As the US became more industrialized during the beginning of the 19th century and production developed as the criteria for civic action, play was seen as essentially unproductive, leisure, recreation, or sport. Between 1920 and 1950 children’s play at school gradually became more and more supervised, regulated, and domesticated, leading eventually to the commercialization of play as we now know it (Finkelstein, 1987; Sierra, 1998).

Dramatic play’s acceptance as a fundamental factor in children’s cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development has been a major event in contemporary psychological and educational research. However, misconceptions about its apparent decline as children grow, the cultural opposition between play and schoolwork, and the misapprehension of play as entertainment have a negative effect on older children’s use of dramatic play to express themselves. A main difficulty for those who advocate the inclusion of dramatic play in elementary and secondary schools results

from a social prejudice that play and arts advocates are uninterested in serious learning. On the contrary, what advocates of play and other art forms suggest is that schools need to become places where children can fully develop their potentialities. If play and art contribute to cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development, why would they be separated or absent from curricula? Why not find new alternatives for offering dramatic play and the arts in schools? (Sierra, 1998) Vygotsky If I'm a young person, living in a ghetto amidst poverty and violence, how can I relate to the kind of teaching that takes place in school? Why make an attempt to relate to this teaching? How might I be able to imagine a time when I can experience something different, something possible where, just for a moment my life might be transformed by seeing something other than what I know at that time? Adrienne Rich in *Arts of the Possible* (2001) writes of the importance of freedom in the activity of creative expression, and the need for freedom to imagine things otherwise:

Most, if not all, human lives are full of fantasy – passive day-dreaming which need not be acted on. But to write poetry or fiction, or even to think well, is not to fantasize, or to put fantasies on paper. For a poem to coalesce, for a character or an action to take shape, there has to be an imaginative transformation of reality which is in no way passive. And a certain freedom of the mind is needed – freedom to press on, to enter the currents of your thought like a glider pilot, knowing that your motion can be sustained, that the buoyancy of your attention will not be suddenly snatched away. Moreover, if the imagination is to transcend and transform experience it has to question, to challenge, to conceive of alternatives, perhaps to the very life you are living at that moment. You have to be free to play around with the notion that day might be night, love might be hate; nothing can be too sacred for the imagination to turn into its opposite or to call experimentally by another name. (pp. 20-21)

Interpreting play in the context of possibilities might lead to changes in the way we think about our students in schools.

## **Implications For Teachers**

Dramatic play can be a versatile tool for enhancing children's learning in different subject areas learning. Besides its potential as a learning tool, dramatic play offers teachers a unique opportunity to learn more about their students. With this knowledge teachers can and to design educational experiences relevant to their students' needs. Understanding the different levels of interaction in play helps teachers to know when to encourage students with more or less leadership ability and when to intervene when some students try to dominate the development of the play. The emergence of conflicts should not be avoided or perceived as negative. Instead, teachers should view conflicts as opportunities for students to rehearse their ability to negotiate ideas. Teachers can serve as mediators rather than impose their authority

on students to solve a problems on those occasions when students are unable to reach a solution by themselves (Sierra, 1998). The role of teachers during the dramatic play experience is of vital importance. They need to be prepared to raise questions and to challenge assumptions when oppressive relations or cultural stereotypes emerge in the students' play stories. For example, they can offer much needed guidance when children attempt to solve problems by violent means or by imposing gender or racial prejudices. As teachers use dramatic play in their classrooms, they should remain sensitive to the quality of the relationship they establish with the children. The responsibility to create a comfortable environment wherein children can engage in dramatic play rests with the teacher. That is, the dramatic play facilitators or teachers need to be sensitive to children's creations; to be imaginative and creative in suggesting proposals for dramatic play; to be ready to discern and assess differences in individual and group behaviors; and to have the ability to interpret the content that emerges from the play-stories. Training in creative dramatics and children's theatre should include strategies to improve teachers' sensibility and competencies needed to interpret dramatic play (Sierra, 1998).

### **Restructuring Relationships Between Teachers and Researchers**

Arts-based qualitative inquiry from a critical perspective, and critical pedagogy, both involve the participation of teachers and students as collaborators in which an engagement with the process of interpretation demands recognition of how our own perspectives and experiences might interfere with the effort to construct meaning and knowledge. This means that we must include dialogue as a fundamental component of the interpretive process (Denzin, 1997). Dialogue is at the center of the pedagogical process developed by critical educator Paolo Friere, a dynamic process guided by the promotion of communication between teachers and students (Ghiso, 1997). Dialogue is an expression of history and a condition for the development of a humane culture, and as such it is the basis for human knowing and action. The dialogue that was developed between the researchers, teachers and students was based in dramatic play. Examples of creative analytic practice are those which "...connect rather than separate the researcher and the researched; which encourage a plurality of voices and narratives; which affirm a commitment to interactivity that is egalitarian and non-exploitive; and which promote reflexivity as a strategy shared by all participants in the research process" (Jipson, 1997). These same characteristics form a democratic pedagogy in which students and teachers engage in authentic learning experiences together. Through a recognition of the many voices and many faces that our students bring to the process of schooling we acknowledge the need to engage in instructional practices that offer them diverse opportunities for communication and expression. An engagement with the arts, such as dramatic play activities, requires reflection and leads to self-awareness as the many voices each struggle to find their place and their space as they connect with others.

## Reality or Exaggeration?

Notwithstanding the profound change Colombian society has experienced with the entrance of women into the work place and public activities, the referent of the patriarchal cultural system still prevails in the selection of roles in dramatic play by the various groups of participants. In the dramatic play workshops with the teachers themselves, the cultural vision of the patriarchal family also predominated. The masculine personalities were characterized in the majority of the participating communities with the exception of Catrú reservation, as apparent saviors in situations of domestic conflict (a monk, a police inspector, a preacher), and at the family level, the non-participation of the men in domestic activities, having a “girlfriend” and an excess of drinking predominated. At a young age, it appears that boys and girls have internalized very well the code of honor of the patriarchal regime described by Gutiérrez de Pineda (1989): “This cultural system controls and sanctions whatever conduct that escapes its precepts. [To] the subordinated and totally loyal woman, her ethical escape is sanctioned to the maximum, at the same time granting the prerogative and allowing erotic-affective escapes to the male, [to whom] the right is given for [other] women to supplant the erotic impetus that cannot be satisfied in the normal conjugal life, more disposed to procreation than to pleasure.” (p. 14)

Boys and girls from different contexts signaled that what they represented concerning the family are “things that happen”. A disquieting topic to consider is if the dramatic play scenarios about the “ordinary” simply entertain, or if there is some superficial criticism of the situations that they present. The doubt remains whether the mere representation of family situations by means of dramatic play is sufficient for one to take into consideration the causes and consequences of the problems presented here. Even if children do not verbally articulate questions regarding roles that have been determined by the culture, and think the problems tackled are unjust and oppressive, there is now an indication of the suspicion of non-conformism. The proposal of dramatic play is enriched if it is included as part of a pedagogical program involving critical reflection and the analysis of diverse situations. Children need access to group discussions of women and feminist perspectives about inequality in the relations between men and women. A gender pedagogy should include, in addition to discussions about the necessity of opening the field of action by and for women – fields - fields that have been open exclusively to male influence -, an – an acknowledgment of the roles of women and an expansion of the concept of domesticity, one that visualizes male participation in this area of life.

The idea that “The school is the home and the school is the whole environment that surrounds us,” expressed by the Emberá (the Native participants), paves the way for the postmodern constructivist and ecological approach that recognizes in the feminist field of action, elements of a new agenda for the relationship between the social and

the natural world. To Shea (1998), the emphasis of postmodern criticism in subverting the agenda of this illustration does not allow consideration of the power and language of other more transformational, visionary and futuristic agendas, especially those preoccupied with trying to help us see our human and natural relationships within more holistic, dynamic, and dialogistic frameworks.

As we consider ways that teaching children in the US and Colombia might lead us to more holistic, transformative, and aesthetic experiences for teachers and students, it is our responsibility to include arts-based practices in both teaching and research. If we arouse students to questioning and making choices by engaging them in the arts, they will discover that learning is really the process of creating; creating new ideas, new knowledge, new choices. Learning, like art, requires thoughtful choices, difficult decisions, and an acceptance of the consequences of these choices (Diaz, 2004).

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(1) This three year project (2000-2002), *The Representation of Social Reality through Dramatic Play by Boys and Girls from Diverse Cultural Contexts* (La Representación de la Realidad Social a través del Juego Dramático en Niños y Niñas de Diverso Contexto Cultural) was funded by the Colombian Ministry of Culture and the Colombian National Institute of Sciences (COLCIENCIAS). We thank co-researchers: Alba Lucía Rojas, Angélica Serna, Beatriz Vélez, Gabriel Murillo, Luz Angélica Romero and the students, teachers, and schools who participated in this project

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