

Contagious learning: Drama, experience and *perezhivanie*

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Abstract

The relationship between experience, emotions, cognition, and learning is of increasing interest to educators and researchers who recognise that efforts to promote student engagement and learning must take into account factors beyond the purely cognitive and instrumental. The significance of experience considered as a unity in regard to child development was discussed through the concept of *perezhivanie* decades ago in the work of Lev Vygotsky (1934). Contemporary explorations of *perezhivanie* as a concept and phenomenon may be further informed through drawing upon Dewey's work on *Art as Experience* (1934) and the concept of metaxis as understood in drama education literature. This paper will examine the special nature of arts and educational drama experiences for experiencing, realising, and expressing *perezhivanie*. It also reflects upon the role of the teacher, their own experiences of arts-inspired *perezhivanie* and the potentially contagious impact of the teacher's experiences for their students.

Keywords

Perezhivanie; experience; drama education; pedagogy; Vygotsky; Dewey; metaxis

Perezhivanie, experience and learning

The concept of *perezhivanie* is intriguing for educators as it raises questions about the totality of the lived experiences of students within our classrooms and how these experiences might be cultivated for the most meaningful forms of learning. Within this article we are also inspired by the work of Mahn and John-Steiner and their search for theoretical frameworks and “a model for teachers who instill confidence in their students by offering caring support” (Mahn & John-Steiner, 2002, p. 46). Mahn and John-Steiner’s work is informed by Vygotsky’s writings and an appreciation of the affective, cognitive, and relational dimensions of learning. They identify how the interactions between teachers and their students are intense creative collaborations that involve reciprocal emotional support and ideally “supported by the gift of confidence” (p. 48). The social and transactional nature of experience is further elaborated upon by Roth and Jornet (2014) when they say, “experience is not something that belongs to or is had by individuals but rather denotes transactions in and across space and time within irreducible person-in-setting units” (p. 106). Therefore, the *perezhivanie* of the individual needs to be considered in relation to the collective and relational.

The theoretical conceptualisation of *perezhivanie* has generated much interest, particularly through engagement with the concept as located in the work of Vygotsky (1934). It is acknowledged that there is no direct translation for *perezhivanie* in English, but it is generally interpreted as meaning “lived experience”, or an “emotional lived experience” (Blunden, 2010; Ferholt 2015; Michell, 2015). It is also used to describe the sense of having “lived through” a challenging, significant, or difficult experience. Conceptually the term is important for crystallising the dynamic of experience, which incorporates internal and external characteristics, the cognitive and affective, the individual and the social. It is also acknowledged that Vygotsky’s engagement with *perezhivanie*, while present with some early concerns in his work with experience through the *Psychology of Art* (Vygotsky, 1971), was only revisited later in his career. At this time, he was exploring *perezhivanie* as a concept, recognising the importance of emotions and volition to human learning and development (González Rey, 2009; Smagorinsky, 2011) and also borrowing from Stanislavski’s use of the term (Michell, 2015). Therefore, his project is viewed as incomplete, and *perezhivanie* is one major concept that remains the subject of ongoing theoretical discussion and research investigation.

For those who are concerned with the structuring and design of learning, *perezhivanie* becomes important when we think about “growth” and transformative types of learning and how these may be cultivated. If we are concerned for the type of learning where students come to know and to care deeply about the world and themselves, and have agency in their lives and futures, then the nature of learning “experiences” are of prime importance. Consideration is also extended beyond more typical learning objectives (and cognitive concepts) to embrace the *emotional* and *expressive* qualities that may be evoked as well. Therefore, the selectivity and design aspects of the environment and the qualities of such demand close attention. Vygotsky recognised the role of constitutional characteristics in determining a child’s attitudes towards an experience within the 1934 paper “The problem of the environment” when he says:

It is not essential for us to know what the child’s constitutional characteristics are like *per se*, but what is important for us to find out is which of these constitutional characteristics have played a decisive role in determining the child’s relationship to a given situation. And in another situation, different constitutional characteristics may well have played a role.

In this way the emotional experience [*perezživanie*] also helps us select those characteristics which played a role in determining the attitude to the given situation. (Vygotsky, 1934/1994, p. 342, italics from published text)

It may be argued, therefore, that the role of the teacher or educator is not a neutral one with regards to these learning environments and the shaping of the situation, which may subsequently impact upon the child's attitude and constitutional characteristics. Teachers are curators and designers of learning environments, shaping the prism and constitutional characteristics of the possible *perezživanie*. The curatorial process is crucial to the role of the teacher as a more knowledgeable other operating within a Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978). We acknowledge the different interpretations of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and how it has been conceptualised in operational terms (Chaiklin, 2003; Daniels, 2008). Key features of the ZPD that we are working with include recognising the role of the more knowledgeable other as an expert guide or mentor, a responsive player actively engaged in collaborative learning processes. They structure problem-solving experiences through which participants may experience what is "proximal" in their development, achieving more than they might do so independently and autonomously. This space of experience is one where students learn through experimentation, problem solving and interactions within the environment. It becomes clear that to cultivate meaningful learning experiences it is important to understand both teacher and students' attitudes, motivations, and perceptions (or constitutional characteristics) but also how the teacher might select and shape elements that constitute the experience (and impact on the social situation of development). This may involve curating experiences that are within the arts and creative education realm. A key argument presented in this article is that these types of experiences, enabled and expressed through the arts, can enable certain types of *perezživanie* and these can open up opportunities for learning and transformation.

To further understand the nature of experience and the role that the arts can play in *perezživanie*, the work of John Dewey is particularly insightful. As Blunden has also claimed, Dewey's work highlights the way that some experiences achieve a sense of significance beyond the everyday and become "an experience" (2010). Writing in 1934, at a similar time to Vygotsky, in *Art as Experience* (1934), Dewey describes experience more generally as the process of living, which involves humans in interaction with environments. His argument is that through art creation processes individuals may have "an" experience, which achieves a sense of consummation and significance, a unity and integration:

Experience occurs continuously, because the interaction of live creature and environing conditions is involved in the very process of living. ... Oftentimes, however, the experience had is inchoate. Things are experienced but not in such a way that they are composed into *an* experience.

.... In contrast with such experience, we have *an* experience when the material experienced runs its course to fulfilment. Then, and then only is it integrated within and demarcated in the general stream of experience from other experiences...Such an experience is a whole and carries with it its own individualizing quality and self-sufficiency. (Dewey, 1934, pp. 36-37)

Not all experiences become "an" experience: some "lived through" experiences may be transformative, and these might assume significance over time, through reflective and interpretive processes.

Before progressing it is important to consider the different notions of experience and *perezživanie*. This discussion acknowledges the ongoing difficulties with translations of *perezživanie* from the Russian language but also the translation of Dewey's work (or book title) from English to Russian. At the *Perezživanie* Symposium convened at Monash University in 2015, Nikolai Veresov noted that in Russian the title of Dewey's book *Art as Experience* has been translated using the word *opyt*, not *perezživanie*. The question was raised regarding whether Dewey was in fact talking about similar types of experience as Vygotsky. It was suggested that the word *opyt* implies an experience that is in the past or is like the "accumulated body of experience" (see Meshcheryakov, in Blunden, 2010). It was pointed out that Vygotsky's use of *perezživanie* does not necessarily embrace an extended reflective concept of experience. However, there are two points to be made in response to these arguments. Firstly, it could be argued that perhaps the Russian translation of Dewey's book title may not be entirely appropriate as what Dewey was discussing certainly embraces "lived through" experiences. A key point of Dewey's book is that art is not about the objects and products but about the lived, active process, and consummated experience. Secondly while the reflective, interpretive integration of experience may not be explicit in Vygotsky's later work in "The problem of the environment" (1934/1994), earlier work by Vygotsky on defectology suggests the importance the interpretive, and the processing of past experiences to envisioning future actions. This was highlighted in Levykh's doctoral work as follows:

Reflecting on emotional experiences is vitally important because it might lead to the following realization... Although these emotional experiences are what one remembers, it is the realization that these experiences are in the past that makes one's emotional experiences future-oriented. "All individual psychological phenomena and processes must be understood not [only] in connection with the past, but with an orientation toward the future" (Vygotsky, 1929/1993, p. 101). [Levykh, 2008, p. 76]

The immediate experience has significance in itself, however there is also a provisionality about it. Reflection may be engaged in after the event, as the experience is interpreted, made sense of, and alternatives considered (González Rey, 2009). This reflection may heighten the significance of an episode in itself or may inform further activity that may extend upon or reinterpret that prior. So the conception of *perezživanie* we are working with likewise embraces such "in the moment" and "outside the moment" experience, as connected to those past and those oriented towards the future. The diverse characteristics and components of experience and reflection exist within a unity that is both discrete to each experience but also extends the singular to become something transformative. This was described by Dewey as follows:

In art as an experience, actuality and possibility or ideality, the new and the old, objective material and personal response, the individual and the universal, surface and depth, sense and meaning, are integrated in an experience in which they are all transfigured from the significance that belongs to them when isolated in reflection. (Dewey, 1934, p. 309)

Perezživanie may be considered as a significant, transforming experience, and also a theoretical concept. Practical exploration and research category might fruitfully investigate not only the constitutional elements, personality, and social situation of development but explore the significance and impact of *perezživanie*, and curation of such, for teacher and for their students.

Perezhivanie and art

In relation to art and *perezhivanie*, art-making offers specific opportunities for *perezhivanie* that can be important for human development and learning. *Perezhivanie* is not confined to the artistic experience, however various art forms and artistic processes can enable humans (including children) to encapsulate and shape the experience and enable it to be shared within social and cultural spheres. An experience might be particularly significant and meaningful for a person and it may be deeply felt. However, through the arts they may be able to make further sense of it, and make meaning through expression in aesthetic form. Through art-making the emotions and ideas are not just “experienced” but selected, shaped, externalised and communicated socially, often in material form. These are often called expressive forms or art forms including painting, sculpture, dance, theatre, music, film, and so on. Within and across art forms there are many more specific forms and genres, with their realising drawing upon a range of materials, techniques, and practices. The qualities and combinations of such can be shaped to communicate specific intents, ideas, and feelings. The ideas and feelings then no longer exist only within subjects’ minds: they are externalised, shaped, transformed, and may be shared with others. This externalisation of emotion and social power of the arts for enabling humans to share emotional aspects of existence was something Vygotsky likewise recognised, saying:

Art is the social technique of emotion, a tool of society which brings the most intimate and personal aspects of our being into the circle of social life. (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 249)

The art-making experience therefore becomes a mediated, expressive, and reflective process whereby experience is crystallised and emotions externalised in different and productive ways.

In educational contexts these understandings highlight the importance of ensuring students have opportunities to explore the nature and qualities of different art forms and creative processes. This can include ensuring children have time to experiment and explore their own feelings and emotions through various art forms, as well as exploring how other people have expressed ideas and emotions in other times and various forms. These learning experiences all become crucial for ensuring children have access to the full range of experience, of *perezhivanie*, development, and learning. Having the capacity and confidence to use these expressive modes is important for all children, but as active leaders and co-players in learning “experiences”, it is also important for all teachers as well. The teacher’s confidence, their capacity and experience, can have a powerful impact upon their ability to confidently lead, guide, support, or facilitate the expressive experiences of their students.

There are many ways that educators may enrich children’s learning “experiences” and potential for *perezhivanie* but one artform that offers specific possibilities is that of drama. Therefore for the next section of this paper we look at the ways that drama processes expand the potential for *perezhivanie*.

Perezhivanie and metaxis in drama

Within his early and late work, Vygotsky recognised the important role that the arts, and drama in particular, can play in cultivating creativity and imagination. In “Imagination and creativity in childhood” (1930/2004) he specifically discussed the creative nature of dramatic activity and the special qualities of improvised drama created by children:

drama, which is based on actions, and, furthermore, actions to be performed by the child himself, is the form of creativity that most closely, actively, and directly corresponds to actual experiences ... Thus the dramatic form expresses with greatest clarity the full cycle of imagination. (Vygotsky, 1930/2004, p. 70)

When children themselves are involved in creating the drama, Vygotsky believed the work had similar characteristics as children's play. These experiences enabled learning involving imagination but simultaneously connected to the concrete and real world. In relation to experience and *perezhivanie*, drama experiences offer a special kind of "living through" and "experience" because they use lifelike situations and issues which participants may have an actual experience of, without having to live with the consequences of real world actions. Drama operates in what Heathcote (1984) called a "no penalty" zone, where participants can test out experiences but do not have to live with the actual consequences. Participants may also adopt different perspectives and attitudes; emotions are engaged and participants may come to "feel" differently about things through the experience. While the context and role are fictional, the emotions someone feels may be "real" while also being distanced from the real. This is something Vygotsky noted in his discussion of art and imagination (Vygotsky, 1930/2004). Dramatic experience may therefore enable a wider range of constitutional characteristics to be explored, with experiences being curated and enacted within structured and co-constructed learning contexts.

The possibilities for *perezhivanie* through drama learning can be enhanced through pedagogical processes characteristic of educational drama or process drama. Process drama is a form of improvisational drama pioneered by practitioners and theorists such as Dorothy Heathcote (Wagner, 1976), Gavin Bolton (1984), Cecily O'Neill (1995), John O'Toole (1992), and so forth. This type of drama is characterised by co-constructed learning experiences, but generally guided by a leader who may create and negotiate certain parameters and contexts for a group to work within. The teacher or leader may select mediating materials to situate the framing such as a storybook, a historical incident, documentary reports, and so on. Throughout the process, participants are often involved in roleplay and creative problem-solving tasks, developing and sharing dramatic action. Participants may temporarily take on fictional roles and use different dramatic conventions to explore and express ideas and emotions. This work can occur in a single session or a series of linked sessions and often the outcome of the process is not known or pre-determined. The participants shape and help create a realm of creative inquiry and collaborative imagining, and what they do helps determine what experience and meaning-making emerges.

The notion of *form* is significant in shaping the experience. Drama is experience that is selected, sequenced, shaped, and presented through enacted dramatic form. In the "form" of process drama, the participant generally takes on a role, which suggests possibilities for entering a fictional situation. The type of situation or role selected may help offer layers of protection, and different degrees of emotional intensity, from being a first-person participant within an event, to that of recorder or more distant critic.

To further understand possibilities for *perezhivanie*, learning, and development, the concept of metaxis may contribute to understanding how new and significant meaning making occurs through drama. This concept may further complement discussions about double subjectivity in relation to *perezhivanie* and play (Fleer, 2015), recognising the development and shifts in learning that can occur through these experiences. The word *metaxis* is arguably derived from a Greek word, however Allern (2001) suggests it would more likely (and accurately) be *metaxy*, with both terms

being used to describe the condition of in-between-ness that is a structural characteristic of the human condition. In drama education it has become an important concept used to describe a state of double subjectivity and simultaneously belonging in two worlds (the real world and that of the drama). Boal describes metaxis as:

the state of belonging completely and simultaneously to two different, autonomous worlds: the image of reality and the reality of the image. The participant shares and belongs to these two autonomous worlds; their reality and the image of their reality, which she herself has created. (Boal, 1995, p. 43)

The explicit link between the concept of metaxis as used in drama, to Vygotsky's work can be traced back to the work of drama education scholar Gavin Bolton (1986) and his discussion of "dual affect" which is attributed to Vygotsky. He says "two orders of experiencing stimulate what Vygotsky terms 'dual affect', emotional responses which may contradict each other" (Bolton, 1986, p. 122). The reference to this term in Vygotsky's work is to be found in the paper "Play and its role in the mental development of the child" (1933/1966) where he discussed the idea of a "dual affective plan". In the text it famously says: "thus, in play a situation is created in which, as Nohl puts it, a *dual affective* plan occurs. For example, the child weeps in play as a patient, but revels as a player" (Vygotsky, 1933/1966, p. 11). So Vygotsky himself actually credits Nohl, but still uses the term to describe a process whereby through play situations, the child may then carry out a rule of inner self-restraint and self-determination which may be beyond or contradict what they may do in real life. Bolton and others have therefore argued that likewise in drama there is often a duality of role as well as affect engaged through drama work and roleplay. The notion of "Vygotsky's dual-affect" (while perhaps not accurately ascribed to Vygotsky) has become a foundational underpinning for the concept of metaxis since Bolton, and referenced in other drama education publications (O'Connor, 2013; O'Toole, 1992).

The particular qualities of the dramatic situation lie also in how they allow subjects to encounter and experience emotions in different ways. Bolton explains that the dramatic frame may both protect participants *from*, but also protect them *into* emotional experience:

One way is to say that when we involve ourselves in games, rituals and the arts, we are protected from distressing emotional reactions by the modifying adjustments of the practical world i.e. 'It's not for real', the other way is to say that we are protected into significant emotions that practical living never allows us to express. The explanations may not be as mutually exclusive as they first appear. That we simultaneously hold both worlds in our consciousness does have a modifying influence, that we are released from practical considerations may indeed have a liberating influence (Bolton, 1986, p. 123).

Bolton further points out that there is a diverse array of choices available to the drama teacher or leader in selecting different dramatic roles, but also the frame of the situation (e.g., taking on role as a reporter of a violent incident provides greater distance and protection than taking on role as the victim of the incident). Choices can then be made regarding setting up dramatic roles and frames with degrees of distance and projection used to protect students or reduce the intensity of "raw" emotion:

What gives drama education its richness and variety is the wide range of degrees of projection available. It seems to be the case that where projection is minimal the emotional

engagement can be more volatile compared with the more contained emotion of a highly projected form. (Bolton, 1986, p. 130).

The drama experience may therefore cultivate specific forms of *perezhivanie*, featuring dual subjectivity and the state of metaxis, opening up zones of experience, but also expression that they may not otherwise have. The emotions felt may be real, but they are not just “expressed”, but shaped by the frame and the form. Strange to say perhaps, but emotions may be “felt” even more deeply because the situation is not real. Furthermore, the pertinence of this type of work to learning arises when understandings from the world of the drama may affect and impact on perspectives in the real world as well. In some cases what has been experienced, felt and thought about through a dramatic experience may impact on the participant’s attitudes and perspectives within their life roles as well. This can lead to potentially transformative learning and development.

If we recognise that the classroom space is, as Mahn and John-Steiner (2002) suggest, one of joint activity and creative collaboration, then there is value to be found in considering how the teacher as well as their students may benefit from sharing these drama and arts-enabled *perezhivanie* experiences. In the following case study, the *perezhivanie* for a teacher and one of their students is therefore examined. This work emerges from research concerned with experiences and opportunities for learning arising from a drama and arts-based project that targeted early childhood teachers.

The Open Storybox experience and teacher learning

The Open Story Box project¹ is a professional learning program for early childhood practitioners. The intent was to design and implement a creative learning model that uses arts-based inquiry processes to support literacy and arts-based learning for children in the early years. The project includes professional learning workshops with early childhood educators, supported by providing each with resources in a “storybox” including selected children’s literature. As well as a picture book, the storybox includes informational texts, selected finger puppets, props, poems, music, and a teacher booklet including a set of sample lesson plans. Teachers are then encouraged to use and adapt the resources to their own sites and students. A community of practice is created as participants share their site’s learning through accessing online collaboration sites and videoconferences over a period of about six weeks.

For the pilot project, approximately 35 teachers/educators across a range of sites in Queensland and New South Wales were recruited through an expression of interest. Participants included those from metropolitan/regional centres, large/small schools and centres, experienced/newly graduated teachers. Teachers and educators were also invited to participate in a related evaluation and research program. Teachers self-nominated to be involved in such and the process included gaining the permission of their School Principal or Centre Director. Research ethics approval was sought, with the study approved via university research ethics protocols (Ref: H14/06-134). Consent for student participation and documentation was sought from parent/caregivers via the teacher participants.

The research program sought to investigate the following questions: “What is the nature of *perezhivanie*, experience, and learning for the teachers, and in turn for their students emerging from the arts-based learning processes?” and “What factors appear to be significant in contributing to learning, development and transformation?” Throughout the project, data was gathered through

two survey tools used with the teachers, an evaluation form on the day of the professional development workshop, an online survey at the end of the project, and recordings of four videoconference sessions with teachers. The documentation and reporting of student learning relied on what the teachers were able to record and identify, and their voluntary sharing of documentation and learning stories recorded in their classrooms. These types of documentation were therefore an extension of their normal teaching practice. This was encouraged through project having a particular focus on the Reggio Emilia Approach practice of documentation and documentation walls (Bryant & Gallen, 2003; Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 2012).

As part of the program, teachers experienced a full-day workshop, where they were participants in drama and arts-based experiences that centred on the selected picture book for the project. The text chosen was *The Long Way Home* by Emily Rodda and Danny Snell. The story follows the journey of a young sugar glider Bright, as she is blown far away from her home one windy day. With the help of various animal helpers and using a number of significant landmarks she arrives home just in time for Christmas.

The type of learning model promoted through the program was that of process drama whereby the teacher becomes a co-creator and co-player within structured, but open-ended learning experiences. They may co-create play environments and fictional storyspaces to situate children's own dramatic play, but also enter and lead episodes as well. The teacher is therefore an active participant, but also shares and passes over control as well:

In both the building of fictional contexts and the scaffolding of children to build dramatic worlds, the teacher can move from teacher-in-role to teacher as co-player. When this occurs, the experience of co-player is enhanced by the shared understanding of the dramatic world that has been created by the drama experience (Dunn, 2003, pp. 127-128)

This shift in positioning of the teacher to active participant and co-player can be quite difficult for some teachers as noted by Dunn. Flear and Peers (2012; Flear 2015) have likewise noted that many Australian early childhood teachers show great reluctance to become actively involved in children's imaginary play, subscribing to a philosophy of child-centred and child-led play. It could be argued however that such an approach often limits the scope of the teacher's potential for enabling *perezhivanie*, and perhaps limiting opportunities for *perezhivanie* themselves.

In reviewing the data from across the workshop evaluation and survey, a key finding that was supported was the importance of teachers having had the "lived experiences" themselves. Teachers enjoyed the opportunity to "play" themselves, to take on role through working with the puppets and to explore environments through the creative framing. This was especially so when teachers were able to experience a process they could use with their own students (see Figure 1 for images of teacher experiences).



Figure 1: Teachers working dramatically and outside with finger puppets

The findings also highlighted the importance of having a shared experience and being provided with a package of physical, material resources. These could be seen to provide a set of common tools and pivots for facilitating work across a series of adjacent or contiguous zones of proximal development. This first zone involved the teacher working with the project facilitators and other teachers with a focus on the teacher's experience and learning. The second involved the teacher working with their own students. The "storybox" experience and materials assumed a key role in connecting the two zones of experience, providing a set of boundary crossing materials.

What is of relevance to this article is that for some participants the overall experience became a particularly significant one. This was largely flagged to the researchers through the teachers' willingness to participate in the online sessions and share what was happening on their site. While there were four teachers who engaged in this level of committed activity, the following vignettes will focus on one teacher participant, and then on the subsequent significant experiences for one of her students. This provides an interesting insight into the possible contiguous and contagious nature of *perezhivanie* enabled through the arts-based learning.

Teacher experience and *perezhivanie*

Kathryn (the second author) is an early childhood teacher. She has been teaching in schools and an early learning centre for the past seven years after completing her teaching degree as a mature-aged student. Prior to this project, she did not have a lot of experience in drama based learning, but often used storytelling and puppets within her classroom and was very committed to enquiry and play-based learning. She attended the professional learning program with another colleague from her site and was an enthusiastic participant in the subsequent online collaboration and communication. Throughout the process, Kathryn applied or translated learning experiences from the professional learning program into her own context, and it can be argued that the experiences for her were not only significant but also transformative.

Over a period of weeks after the professional learning day, Kathryn began to use some of the strategies she had experienced as she sought to find ways to introduce them in ways that were relevant to her students and their context. Some of the specific strategies she drew upon were drama conventions such as creating animal shapes in pairs, mirror movement in the style of selected animals, and so on. She also worked on creating a "storyworld²" and documenting it,

applying and extending upon strategies she had experienced herself on the professional learning day.

Day 1

There has been much thought and reflection about how to launch this project with my class. After my first few days back with the class I decided there were a couple of opportunities to develop a starting point. Behind the scenes throughout week one I began introducing some drama conventions: children going in role as an animal character from our story, making our partner into an animal from the story, as well as using animal movements for our transitions. (Reflective Diary, July 2014)

Day 2

This morning I introduced the puppets to the early children who were all keen to begin acting out the story. We needed to go off and find some green material and some blue material and a tree branch for Bright to land in. We made a list of all the characters and the children chose which animal they wanted to be.

After morning tea we gathered together and I showed the children the map of the route Bright and his friends took to get home. We decided together that there were three props that were really the standouts. A tree, a lighthouse and a river. The children chose which group they wanted to be in and we set about creating ... The children suggested we needed to get some blue paper for the river. They chose light blue, dark blue, and some green. We decided we would like to collage the river and they began ripping the paper into small pieces. (Reflective Diary, July 2014)

What was evident during these early phases was that the significance of her experiences, and her *perezhivanie*, grew as she tested out strategies in the classroom, and experienced some success and a growing sense of confidence. The response from her students was very positive and this along with the validation she received from the community of other professionals heightened the significance of the experience and learning. Furthermore, she was reconnecting and reflecting upon past experience and this contributed to the sense of having “an” experience:

I am finding this whole journey very inspiring and I am learning a lot and remembering old and new ideas that I haven't tried for a while. (Newsletter 1, content contribution)

Her journey of exploration and discovery continued to develop across the course of the following six weeks. What was interesting to observe in terms of her work with story and drama was her shift in experimenting with dramatic role and co-construction with the children. She began to take on roles and create episodes with and alongside the children, extending her work with puppets, and even at one stage adapting a bunny suit to become a mother sugar glider. What was clearly evident in her final feedback was the transformative nature of the experiences for her in terms of emotional and cognitive engagement and development, a heightened sense of confidence in the use of these drama and arts-based strategies, and also in herself as an educator.

The project has given me the confidence to pursue my passion for literature and story telling and continue to develop my love of using puppets to tell stories.

I have gained confidence to expose my children to more drama activities incorporated in our program and more confidence in going with the children's take on the story. ... I've learnt to extend a story rather than just use it as a reading experience.

In terms of the *perezhivanie* through art for herself, what was evident was her growing development of a language for naming and describing some strategies she was using. Furthermore, she expanded her pedagogical toolkit, especially in regards to stepping “inside” the story with the children. This was particularly completed through the artistic forms of drama—taking on roles and extending the scope of learning experiences for children through drama, roleplay, and storytelling. The experience certainly constituted a form of *perezhivanie* for Kathryn, which assumed greater significance in terms of her work and life. She has said of this time “for me that experience was transformative, it changed my life”. Since the conclusion of the project, Kathryn has enrolled in research higher degree studies and is engaging in a Masters of Education by Research. She is particularly keen to further explore the possibilities for learning enabled through drama and storytelling and considering the role and impact of the teacher’s role.

While her experience of *perezhivanie* is an important story in itself, what is of great interest is the recognition of how her experience and gift of confidence did not play out in isolation. With the site of her activity being the classroom, what is important to examine is the impact of her experience upon those that she worked with, especially her students, as signalled by this comment in her feedback evaluation:

Story telling and puppetry have become a spontaneous and regular feature of our classroom and children have become confident and competent storytellers, in particular with the engagement of our Autistic student.

Student learning and *perezhivanie*: J’s learning story

J was a four-year-old boy who had been diagnosed as having features consistent with an Autism Spectrum Disorder. Typically, J was unable to connect to learning experiences without adult support. In the classroom prior to this project, it was generally a challenge for J to interact with other children in play experiences. J loved animals and his world of communication was based around his profound knowledge of whichever animal he was focused on at the time. This would change periodically, but whatever animal it was, he would fixate on it, carry it around, and all conversations and interactions would be based around this animal, for example, a whale, a rhinoceros, kangaroo, and so on.

Over the scope of several weeks, a physical storyworld was created in the classroom (featuring key landscape features created by children based on those the book) and this was maintained and extended upon. At various times throughout the day children could play and engage within the space, sometimes within structured learning experiences and sometimes during unstructured playtime. What was significant over the course of the project was how J adopted a section of the storyworld space as his own. He would populate it with various puppets and other animal figurines and use them to tell stories, many based on the selected text and extending upon it. He would also take on roles as the animals, and this was facilitated through the puppets, figurines, and animal masks. Other children respected this space as “his” space but were also invited to play

alongside J within it. The following learning story, written by Kathryn after the event, captured one of the significant experiences that occurred and seeds of possible *perezhivanie*.

Today I put out the finger puppets to see if anyone was interested in acting out the story. Six girls came over and organised roles. They asked me to be the narrator and our story began. Not long into it, the wallaby puppet broke. J was over in another corner of the room playing with the animals. He came over to us carrying a kangaroo/ wallaby figurine. "Oh I see, there's a wallaby. Hey sugar glider here. Bright I'm right over here. There's your family". As J moves into the space where the family tree is he repeats, "Excuse me Bright. I'm over here. Here's your family. Fly now!"

Some children had had enough and left the area, but two girls stayed and continued to retell the story with J. One said, "Let's do the story and you put the family in the tree". (Learning story, 15 August, 2014)

What this learning story described was a significant experience for J. Through curated learning experiences introduced through the story, the dramatic framing, and the tools and artefacts of the puppets, he was provided with some new means for experience. He was able to use them to negotiate his way into new social situations and these crossed over both the fictional dramatic frame but also into the "real" classroom frame. This was not an isolated incident and signaled the establishment of a zone of experience that J continued to inhabit, explore, learn, and express within. As time went on J made connections to other children through using dramatic roles, storytelling, and puppet shows. The children learnt that J would always be in the story in role as whatever animal he brought with him. He also voluntarily joined in group drama and roleplay experiences, once he knew he would be able to take on an animal role (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: J voluntarily participating within a group roleplay experience

A key shift, in terms of the impact of experience working with drama, related to shifts in his engagement, but also the expression of his learning within a social sphere. Previous to this project, he would always recite facts about the animals he was interested in at the time. Conversations were not reciprocal, but rather a relaying of facts. However, during the drama and storytelling he would take on a role as a character and roleplay rather than recite facts. He also began to have more social interactions; connections with a core group of girls in particular, who were patient with him and also happy to follow his lead.

These experiences could be argued to represent *perezživanie* for J through which he was able to access new zones of experience, which extended his learning and development. The introduction of dramatic and fictional framing provided him with a means for sharing his learning in ways that were more socially acceptable and productive for him and facilitated his entry into ongoing social relationships within the classroom context. The use of artefacts such as finger puppets, figurines, and masks operated as boundary objects that stimulated and facilitated his activity within and across frames (fictional and real) and we can see features of metaxis with learning crossing the boundaries between the dramatic play and “real” life. Contagious learning could also be seen at play, stemming from the *perezživanie* of the teacher, their subsequent curation of, and interaction within learning experiences, which further stimulated the *perezživanie* of the student enabled through art (in particular, drama and dramatic play).

Conclusions

An examination of the concept of *perezživanie* in educational contexts highlights the opportunities available to educators in designing and interacting within learning experiences to cultivate transformative learning, not only for their students but also themselves. This paper also draws on Dewey’s work to acknowledge the special qualities of art-making processes to enable subjects to have *an* experience, living through something of significance, shaped through form. It has also been argued that the artform of drama can provide a means for opening up different zones for experience and affective learning. The fictional framing of drama offers both layers of protection but also opportunities to “feel” things outside the scope of everyday experience.

The case study presented suggests that, in educational contexts, it is important to consider the experiences and *perezživanie* of educators themselves and how they shape and design the environment the scope for experiences for their students. With respect to learning, development, and the possibilities for students to have *an* experience, there are many decisions that can be made and these include the teacher stepping inside the creative world and interacting within it alongside their students. Educators play important roles as guides and participants within experiences which students live through, may be challenged by, and gain new insights from. Educators need to consider their own experiences and confidence as well, recognising the contagious nature of their own *perezživanie* and impact on children’s experience and learning within their classrooms. The gift of confidence for the teacher is also a gift of confidence to their students, enabling them and their students to explore and express their feelings and ideas through the rich expressive means available to us as humans.

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² We use the term “storyworld” as it references the “playworlds” work of Linqvist (1995), Ferholt (2015), and others, but with a more specific focus on creating and inhabiting the world of a story or book, but also with supporting children’s capacity to explore and create their own stories as well.

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