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Drama-in-Education for Understanding

an Investigation from the Perspective of Cultural Psychology of Semiotic Mediation

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Published in:
Human Arenas

DOI (link to publication from Publisher):
[10.1007/s42087-020-00157-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s42087-020-00157-z)

Publication date:
2022

Document Version
Accepted author manuscript, peer reviewed version

[Link to publication from Aalborg University](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Xu, S., & Tateo, L. (2022). Drama-in-Education for Understanding: an Investigation from the Perspective of Cultural Psychology of Semiotic Mediation. *Human Arenas*, 5, 389-406. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42087-020-00157-z>

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Human Arenas

Drama-in-Education for understanding: An investigation from the perspective of cultural psychology of semiotic mediation

--Manuscript Draft--

Manuscript Number:	HUAR-D-20-00091R1	
Full Title:	Drama-in-Education for understanding: An investigation from the perspective of cultural psychology of semiotic mediation	
Article Type:	Regular Article	
Funding Information:	China Scholarship Council (201808310229)	Miss Shuangshuang Xu
Abstract:	<p>Drama in education (DiE) is a lively and productive area of art entering into education. This article tries to establish dialogues between DiE and psychology by revisiting the phenomenological world opened by DiE from the theoretical lens of cultural psychology of semiotic mediation. First, we propose to distinguish three main approaches in DiE towards production of new understandings and conceptualize them into different models of meaning making processes from the lens of cultural psychology. Based on the three approaches, we will theorize participants' experience in DiE into three layers: the layer of everyday, dramatic and existential. Each layer of experience contains unique potential to produce signs from different generalization process and the three approaches can be mapped out on different interacting zones between layers. To illuminate the theoretical discussion, the case study of a DiE workshop " The green child " is used to investigate the characteristics of its artistic form and structure, in launching participants into travelling among the three layers of experiences and in facilitating different levels of affective generalization for aesthetic experience to emerge.</p>	
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Order of Authors Secondary Information:		
Author Comments:	This article is for the special section of "Schooling Drama and Dramatizing School"	
Response to Reviewers:	Thanks so much for the two reviewers' careful reading and constructive advices! We have integrated reviewers' suggestions and marked them in red in our revision.	

Drama-in-Education for understanding: An investigation from the perspective of cultural psychology of semiotic mediation

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Abstract Drama in education (DiE) is a lively and productive area of art entering into education. This article tries to establish dialogues between DiE and psychology by revisiting the phenomenological world opened by DiE from the theoretical lens of cultural psychology of semiotic mediation. First, we propose to distinguish three main approaches in DiE towards production of new understandings and conceptualize them into different models of meaning making processes from the lens of cultural psychology. Based on the three approaches, we will theorize participants' experience in DiE into three layers: the layer of everyday, dramatic and existential. Each layer of experience contains unique potential to produce signs from different generalization process and the three approaches can be mapped out on different interacting zones between layers. To illuminate the theoretical discussion, the case study of a DiE workshop "*The green child*" is used to investigate the characteristics of its artistic form and structure, in launching participants into travelling among the three layers of experiences and in facilitating different levels of affective generalization for aesthetic experience to emerge.

Keywords: Drama in education, Cultural psychology, Semiotic mediation, existential affectivity, affective generalization

Introduction

The main characteristic of Drama in Education

Drama in Education (DiE) emerges as an interdisciplinary area between drama and education. DiE generally refers to using art of drama to support and facilitate learning in a collective educational context. Along the history of drama's entry into educational areas, different values as been emphasized: speech training, language learning, classroom liberalization, physical training and personal development (Bolton, 2007). In this article, we are interested to discuss the ways DiE contributes to the development of new understandings in children. For this sake, we start from Heggstad (2019) definition of DiE, which highlights essential characteristics:

“an art subject for co-creative experience and learning. Through body and voice, fantasy and imagination, we are identifying with portrayed characters and situations and are learning and expressing ourselves in new ways. We alternate between spontaneity and structure. We are

1 creating and transforming form and structure and reflecting on play events and play actions
2
3 both within and outside the play.” (p. 2)
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5 According to this definition, DiE is a co-creative and co-constructive learning process between participants
6 and teacher, distinct from children’s spontaneous dramatic play. Differently from theatre performance, DiE
7 works with little requirements on props, costumes or stage setting. Teachers mainly use their body and voice
8 to transform the everyday space into a drama world, relying on the power of fantasy and imagination. DiE
9 proceeds through interaction between spontaneity and structure. There are no given scripts to follow and
10 interaction and improvisation are gradually cultivated. Teachers design DiE workshops in several sessions to
11 engage participants and may change the activity plan flexibly to fit students’ needs and interests. Beside
12 immersive experience, participants’ reflection from the drama activities is emphasized both inside and
13 outside the drama world. By cultivating complex forms of relation between developing subjects and the
14 world through facilitating innovative experience and reflection in the imaginary world, DiE can work as a
15 powerful mediating instrument for individuals’ development.
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26 *The emerge of new understandings* 27

28 New understanding and awareness emerge as a generalizing process from phenomenological experiences. As
29 Tateo (2019) has put out, generalization is an abstractive, reflective and also creative act, which transforms
30 phenomenological experiences and establishes innovative relations between components, achieving a higher
31 level of awareness and abstraction. This process is mediated by signs, which are also the interface between
32 the personal and the collective production of meanings. By introducing the concept of sign mediation into a
33 phenomenological framework, we claim that a deeper understanding of participants’ meaning-making
34 process in DiE activities is possible. Cultural psychology of semiotic mediation investigates the process of
35 sign construction and transformation in psychological processes (Valsiner, 2007). Signs are generalized from
36 phenomenological experiences, and it enables human beings to distance and transcend the *here-and-now*
37 situated context by subjective meaning making process. The focus is on the micro-genetic constructive
38 process of the novelty through creation and use of signs (Valsiner, 2007). Semiotic mediation occurs both at
39 the interpersonal level (how the developing individual is guided in his activity within cultural setting) and the
40 intrapersonal level (how hierarchy of sign mediation is produced for developing individual to relate to and
41 regulate himself). Such a theoretical framework makes it possible to catch and analyze the complex dynamic
42 process of individuals developing new understanding as signs from engaging in guided collective activity
43 with rich sign systems in DiE workshop.
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56 This article starts from identifying three different directions in DiE practice towards generalizing new
57 understandings, all of which aim to create gaps to facilitate participants’ innovative meaning making
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1 processes: framing and perspective shifting; distancing and estrangement; brotherhood and existential
2 affectivity. We summarize the first and second approaches from previous literatures and propose that there
3 should be a third approach based on Heathcote's work on "brotherhood", which can be further investigated
4 and developed to trigger deep existential aesthetic experience. The lens of cultural psychology of semiotic
5 mediation enables us to model the general process of sign production and mediation for emergence of new
6 understandings in different approaches. From distinguishing the three approaches, we will then make a
7 further step and conceptualize participants' experience in DiE workshops into three layers: the everyday,
8 dramatic and existential. Signs with different generalizing process from cultural psychology are adopted to
9 investigate the unique potentials of each layers in constructing signs for new understanding. Mapping out the
10 three approaches onto different interacting zone of the layers also helps us to better understand the
11 underlying mechanism of each approach. In the last part, we will analyze a DiE workshop - *The green*
12 *children*- to investigate its unique form and structure in launching participants to travel among all the three
13 layers of experience and in facilitating various affective generalization processes. The area of DiE has huge
14 educational and artistic potential and we defend that introducing the lens of cultural psychology of semiotic
15 mediation can be productive for advancing theoretical generalization in both areas.
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29 **Three paths towards emergence of new understanding in DiE**

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31 DiE devotes itself to connecting concrete drama practice with generality and universality, and works for a
32 deep change on participants' awareness and understanding from vivid experience in drama activities. An
33 investigation of DiE's rich tradition leads us to identify three different approaches towards new
34 understanding and awareness: 1) the approach of framing and perspective shifting; 2) the approach of
35 distancing and estrangement; 3) the approach of brotherhood and existential affectivity. The first and second
36 approach has been well articulated in previous literature and we propose that there should be a third approach
37 which hasn't been cultivated and received enough attention in the present area but can be further developed
38 from Heathcote's work on brotherhood to trigger participants' deep affective existential experience. All these
39 three approaches are based on the participants' experience in drama world rather than on metaphysics.
40 Practitioners work on participants' attraction, interest, attention, concern and care, to explore effective ways
41 of transforming and generalizing drama experiences into innovative understandings.
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53 *1st approach: framing and perspective shifting*

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55 This approach focuses on shifting participants' positions, perspectives and attitudes by structuring different
56 roles in drama world. Frame is the key concept of this approach, which originally comes from Goffman's
57 work on frame and framings (Goffman, 1974). Frame is functionally conceptualized as "the perspective from
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1 which people coming to enter the event” to provide tension and meaning (Heathcote, 1984, p.163).
2 Following the concept of framing, roles with particular attitudes rather than characters with specific
3 psychological traits or personal histories are emphasized, which constitutes potential tension and
4 contradiction for innovation to emerge. Carroll (1986) distinguished different role frames by the degree of
5 roles’ distance from the current event (Fig. 1): 1) participants as being directly in the event; 2) guide as
6 showing how it was; 3) demonstrator as re-enacting the event; 4) authority as being responsible in the event;
7 5) recorder as being interested in the event; 6) reporter as telling the event; 7) researcher as needing to know
8 of the event; 8) critic as interpreting the event; 9) artist as transforming the event. The drama event is
9 refracted and lived through in different role frames with various emotional and reflective intensity (Davis,
10 2015). From the frame of participants to artists, distance with the current event and also protection for the
11 participants is enlarged. Shifts among role frames enable the emergence of “meta-experience”: experience
12 derived in one frame can be raw material for another frame working at a different distancing level
13 (Smagorinsky, 2011, p.337). In this way, participants’ awareness will be sharpened, as they learn to play
14 with role frames and be more consciousness about the constructive connection between frame and
15 experience.
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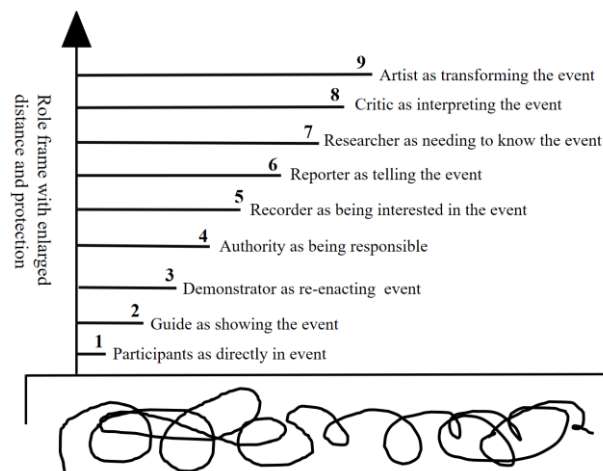


Fig. 1 Carroll's role frame distanced from the dramatic event

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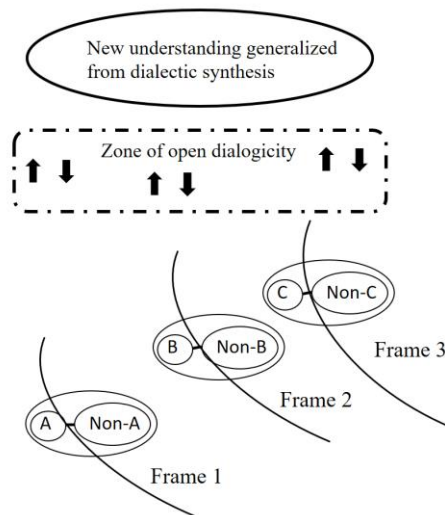


Fig. 2 Model 1- Hierarchy of dialectic synthesis in different role frames

Stepping into roles with various frame distance in dramatic time can create a dialogical and open zone for potential emergence of new understanding and awareness, which is modeled in Fig.2. This approach can be simplified into three steps: position in frame A- position in frame non A- dialogical internalization (Nielsen & Hustvedt, 2017). The contradiction between A and non-A at the same level of role distancing constituted a contracting but inclusive relationship in the same system, which enables a double negation of dialectical synthesis (Mihalits & Valsiner, 2020). For example, a child can take roles of the both sides of the story to arrive at a synthesis understanding. Bolton (1984) has pointed out that possible synthesis for new generalization in DiE cannot work without an interaction between the actual and the fictious: “Participants and percipients engage with what is going on by holding two worlds in mind at the same time, an interplay between the actual and the fictious (p.141)”. Holding the two worlds at the same time is crucial for the third step of dialogical internalization (the second negation), which works to distance and reflect on the different and even contracting experiences and make meaning to fill the gap opened by transition between different frames.

Along this approach of shifting frames and perspectives, there is a risk of reducing a complex issue into a binary opposition of A and non-A. Nielsen & Hustvedt (2017) proposed a four-step operational sequencing to replace the original three steps by introducing second-order perspectives and an examination of the framing of the DiE workshop itself, which constitutes the potential multilayers in model 1. In their workshop *Fertility Miracles* (Nielsen & Hustvedt, 2017), participants are framed from perspectives with different systems: the family system, the health system, the media system etc. The workshop deviser is also interviewed in the drama session of TV debate to discuss her perception and understanding on the target issue. In this way, the dialogical zone is constituted by three levels of framing: a horizon level of A and non-A directly involved in the drama event, a vertical level of distanced role frames mapped on different systems

1 with possible contradictions (e.g. the two sides in a debate) and last, a disclosure and reflection about the
2 whole frame and structure of the workshop devising.
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7 *2nd approach: distancing and estrangement*
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10 Although the importance of holding both the real and fictitious world is emphasized in the first approach, it is
11 in the second approach that DiE practitioners find out how to enable participants to keep a conscious and
12 aware state while being immersed in the drama activities. The key concept in this approach is *distancing*.
13 Distancing is also referred to in the first approach as the distance of roles with the current dramatic event,
14 which mainly functions as a device for protection and perspective shifting among roles. The concept of
15 distancing in the second approach focuses on the distance between subjective participants and their
16 immersive experience in the dramatic time and is most closely related to Brecht's work on
17 *verfremdung*(estrangement) (Brecht, 2015).
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24 Influenced by Marxism, Brecht focuses on the transformation from drama experience to action in real world
25 and emphasizes that drama and theatre should help people to understand and intervene the realistic social life
26 the same as what we do with the natural world (Ding, 2015). Brecht's effort is not to trigger audience's
27 emotional resonance with actors' performance, but to keep audience surprised and reflective without being
28 totally absorbed and constrained by the atmosphere and angle of the stage (Brecht, 2015). This approach
29 aims to turn the theatre into a space facilitating people to focus back on intervention of the real life, rather
30 than a space producing delusions. If the first approach can be summarized as triggering participants'
31 intensive experience in role frames, Brecht would instead remind his audience to always pay attention to the
32 frames. In his analysis of the aesthetic use of form and patterns in Chinese drama, we can clearly notice his
33 aesthetic pursuit different from emotional immersion (Brecht, 2015). As Ding (2015) has pointed out in his
34 introduction of Brecht's work, characters' emotional states are performed through forms and patterns in
35 Chinese drama and the creation of simple but precise forms and patterns requires actors to be equipped with
36 sharp observing skills and rich knowledge about social life and human experience. Ding (2015) gives us an
37 example of how an actor can use simple and repetitive dancing movement, on a stage without complex
38 objects and scenery setting, to accurately represent a character boating in a river running sometimes slowly
39 and sometimes fast. By using forms and patterns, actors create a distancing space between themselves and
40 the characters, which in return distances the audiences from the actors and the characters. Thus, the
41 audiences are able to make double observations: observing the character through patterns and observing how
42 the actor uses patterns to represent the character. The audience regard actors as social observers and as a
43 result, they can themselves firmly hold a position of observing and reflecting the drama event.
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1 Following the tradition of Brecht, Eriksson (2011) closely examined one of Heathcote's works and
2 discovered a series of delicate devices to reach the effect of distancing: play within a play, signification,
3 exhortation to see, temporality shift, poetic distortion, commentary breaks, stylization, symbolic props,
4 rituals and discussion. For example, stylization is to "signify and demonstrate patterns in a simple and
5 straightforward way" which is carefully chosen and prepared rather than realistic reproduction or acting with
6 intensive emotion (p. 114). We can use the term "*zone of potential estrangement*" proposed by Tateo (2019)
7 to theorize the process of new understanding being generalized in this approach. In his analysis of
8 Caravaggio's art, Tateo revealed the art of generalization as "creating a specimen of human experience by
9 abductive generalization" (p. 150), which can facilitate better understanding and reflection about everyday
10 experience. The specimen demonstrated by artists emerges from abductive generalization, rather than
11 inductive generalization. Thus, it is a creative and transformative process enabling to open a potential
12 estrangement zone to create distance from everyday life. In this light, we can say that the Brechtian approach
13 devotes itself to creating the zone of potential estrangement mainly in the play. As shown in figure 3, Model
14 2, distancing devices function with delicate language use and form designing in each of the episode. By
15 constant interaction and transition between conscious reflection and unconscious immersion into dramatic
16 time, new perception and awareness are able to emerge from the DiE experience.
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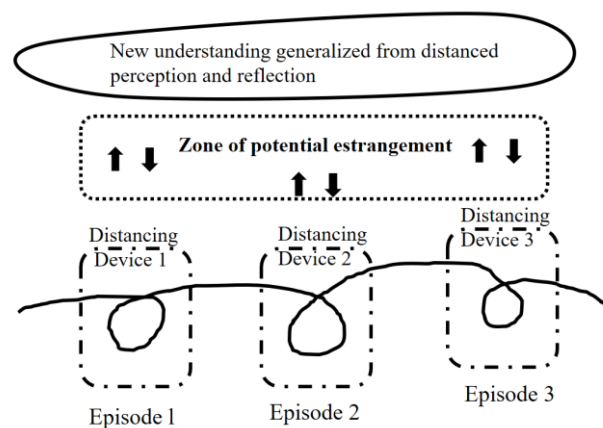


Fig. 3 Model 2- Distancing and zone of potential estrangement

51 However, the *zone of potential estrangement* differs from Brecht's technique in the fact that abductive
52 generalization is not merely a cognitive act. In the case of Caravaggio's art, for instance, the value of the
53 method was to condensate into a single specimen (for instance one of his famous live figures) the whole of
54 the essence of the human affective condition in relation to the religious metaphysics (Tateo, 2019). In other
55 words, generalization was a totality of cognitive, affective and moral dimension representing the universal
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1 human condition. This leads to the third perspective in DiE, which focuses on the affective experience of
2 brotherhood.
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7 *3rd approach: brotherhood and existential affectivity*
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10 The third approach facilitates new understanding through generalizing from particular to universal in poetic
11 and aesthetic moments during DiE activities. Different from Brecht's way of creating a zone of estrangement
12 in art for participants' cognitive enjoyment of understanding the realistic world, this approach firmly roots
13 generalization in sensuous affective experiences. The key concept in this approach is "brotherhood" from
14 Heathcote's work:
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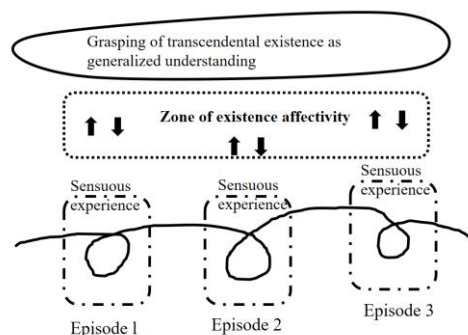
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19 "When the Apollo astronauts sit in their small travelling world ready to blast off for outer space, they,
20 too, belong to many different brotherhoods. They are of the brotherhood of all those who have the
21 courage, of all those who fear, of all those who must not turn back, of all those who may not return, of all
22 those who understand tools- which takes us through all time since the Stone Age. They are of the
23 brotherhood of all those who will venture, of all those who carry their houses with them." (Wagner,
24 1976, p. 46)
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29 **By the code of brotherhood, the child can relate and resonate with the drama world by putting himself into**
30 **the imaginary world without being rolled over by the roles.** Heathcote used expressions of "we are in the
31 brotherhood of all those who." mainly to help teachers to enter into the richness of human life, find
32 materials for their class and establish common grounds between children's subjective worlds and various
33 fictional worlds. **As Wagner (1976) has pointed out, there may be different directions to develop brotherhood**
34 **and identifying a particular potential brotherhood is to anchor a specific type of tension: ". in any given**
35 **moment you are in touch with not just one, but many different brotherhoods. For example, when you are**
36 **washing dishes, you are in the brotherhood of all those who cleanse, which puts you in touch with a primitive**
37 **Maori washing gourds, a soldier cleaning his gun, or a priest performing a ritual baptism (p.46)".** We will
38 also argue that in her use of brotherhood there hides a unique direction towards generating new
39 understanding in DiE. Here we introduce a concept of "existential affectivity (生存情感 in Chinese)" in
40 Defeng Wang's thinking of art's philosophy to better grasp the secrete power underlying brotherhoods.
41 Wang (2005) proposed an ontological way to understand affectivity in aesthetic experience- existential
42 affectivity:
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54 "Existential affectivity occurs in real life, but points to "transcendental existence" higher above real life. [.]
55 Transcendental existence, refers to "existence" which is transcendental of specific sensuous beings, such
56 as destiny, love, friendship, catastrophe, happiness, good and evil, etc. Grasping of transcendental existence
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1 is sensuous, not conceptual cognition. But it points to imperceptible things, although it doesn't belong to
2 concepts. Thus, we can actually call it "super-sensible in sensibility" (p. 47, translated by the authors)"
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5 The concept of "transcendental existence" is in accordance with Heathcote's thinking of universal as "the
6 ultimate meanings that seems to matter to human beings, without which a person is a barren of satisfaction
7 and of growing points" (Wagner, 1976, p. 96). However, Heathcote doesn't firmly plant the grasping of
8 transcendental existence in participants' sensuous and affective experiences. She sometimes uses questions
9 and organizes discussions out of play to help participants to reflect the universal aspect of drama experience.
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11 In Wang's thinking, it is always an affective grasping rather than rational understanding. In brotherhood, the
12 child is able to affectively grasp the same core existential experience of the role of the astronauts, the
13 courageous, the frightened, and the exploring ones: a man with limitation faced with the unlimited unknown
14 world. By entering the zone of existential affectivity through sensuous roles, images and figures in drama
15 participants can enter into the underlying existential world (Fig. 4, Model 3); grasp transcendental existence;
16 empathize with different episodes and stories; and reconstruct their meaning making process. By entering the
17 zone of existence affectivity, specific feeling of brotherhood transforms into aesthetics. By discovering the
18 transcendental existence in our own sensuous affectivity, we are free from the burden of the object and able
19 to be quiet and moved at the same time (Wang, 2005)
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44 Fig. 4 Model 3- Sensuous experience, existential affectivity and transcendental existence
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49 The three approaches indicate three different paths to generalize new understanding from drama experience.
50 The first approach emphasizes the role frame with different positions, attitudes and perspectives, which
51 constitutes a dialogical open space for the emergence of dialectic synthesis of generalized understanding.
52 The second approach adopts Brecht's work on distancing and estrangement to shake and sharpen
53 participants' perception and awareness of the drama events, which enables participants to have a cognitive
54 understanding of the social world. The third approach roots itself in the code of brotherhood and puts efforts
55 in empowering the participants to enter into the zone of existence affectivity to have an affective grasping of
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1 transcendental existence in aesthetic experiences. These approaches are often interweaving with each other
2 in DiE workshop practice. Their use varies according to the issue and the developmental stage of
3 participants. In the next section, we will map the three approaches onto three different layers of experiences
4 in DiE workshop. Different approaches function at different experience layers, and participants are guided
5 and facilitated to travel among the three layers to generalize new meanings from the workshop.
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10 11 12 **Three layers of experience in DiE: the everyday, dramatic and existential** 13

14 DiE workshops usually start with participants entering an empty room. Participants go through a process of
15 being launched and transformed from an everyday situation to new imaginary situations by the drama
16 activities. In this part, we propose to distinguish three different layers of experience in DiE workshops based
17 on our analysis of the three approaches: the everyday layer, the dramatic layer and the existential layer. The
18 three approaches mentioned above construct their educational and aesthetic potential on different interacting
19 zone of the layers, which opens different gaps for participants' subjective and innovative meaning making
20 process.
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30 *Everyday and dramatic layer* 31

32 The layers of everyday and dramatic are the most obvious ones in DiE workshop. Participants come into the
33 empty drama room with different needs, thoughts and emotional states from their daily life. The aim of the
34 workshop is to transform them from an everyday state into the fictitious drama world effectively. There are
35 different ways to realize the launching process. For example, O'Neill (1995) emphasized the importance of
36 choosing a pre-text, e.g. myth, legend and folktale, which indicates firm relationships to potential action by
37 "establishing location, atmosphere, roles, and situations" at first moments (p .22). The layer of dramatic
38 experience is activated in the drama world, which is a "self-contained imaginative universe." (O'Neill, 1995,
39 p .45) The drama world exists and unfolds in participants' imagination, and it is co-constructed by the
40 teacher and participants: The teacher employs multi-modal sign systems for participants to make meaning -
41 including facial expressions, gestures, movements, words, objects, lights and music - that covers all the three
42 dimensions of signs - iconic, indexical and symbolic. The key element in meaning making process in DiE is
43 action. The drama world exists in participants' imagination and there is no direct and firm relations between
44 objects and their meaning. Meaning of objects evolves flexibly along with roles' actions in the immediate
45 and constantly changing context.
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56 We find it important to identify the signs used in DiE into two basic categories, which relate to two different
57 processes of generalization proposed by Valsiner's (2007) cultural psychology of semiotic mediation. Point-
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1 like signs are generalized from *schematization*: the process of categorization from undifferentiated flow of
2 experience towards the categorical ascription. Field-like signs are generalized from *pleromatization*: involves
3 the affective expansion of my feeling towards a generalized atmosphere that can be labeled as a general field
4 of meaning (e.g. love, spirituality, nostalgia, freedom, etc.). A point-like sign presents something else
5 specifically, and the generalizing process of schematization is to reduce the original phenomena into more or
6 less homogeneous categories. In a DiE session of collective drawing, participants name things and add them
7 into a drawing to co-construct a context. A field-like sign has instead the capability to create an affective
8 field of meaning and, by the process of pleromatization, the original complexity is preserved and transformed
9 into a complex field. For instance, DiE can use game, music and light to anchor the emotional dynamic of
10 the story and create a strong atmosphere. Pleromatization represents the hunch through which my personal
11 affective relating to the situation can be interpreted as universal human affective experience (Valsiner,
12 2020a)

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14 In DiE workshops, point-like signs and field-like signs can interweave, feed into and transform into each
15 other. For example, an object as prop can be used and referred to in words as point-like sign. As its meaning
16 expands along with participants' action in role, it reveals itself as a key object preserving essential affective
17 connection between drama characters and their existential world. In this way, it turns from point-like sign to
18 field-like sign and through the rich material characteristics of the object, participants perceive hope and fear,
19 joy and desperation, freedom and destiny at the same time by entering into the existential world affectively
20 and imaginatively behind the object. In the last session of group discussion, the object can be further
21 interpreted and abstracted as a symbol for a key concept like "freedom", which goes back from a field-like
22 sign to a hyper-concentrated point-like sign.

23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 *Existential layer in light of Heidegger's work*

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42 We have discussed the power of Heathcote's "brotherhood code" into "existential affectivity" in which the
43 "transcendental existence" is sensuously grasped. For example, a child can be interested and devoted to a
44 workshop on astronauts, as she relates to it through her own experience of the family's first moving during
45 her early childhood. These two remote experiences can resonate with each other, as they share the same core
46 of existential experience: facing and falling into infinite unknown in irreversible time. The child enters into
47 the workshop, connects with her subjective experiences and, by working from inside the workshop, she has
48 the opportunity to better understand both the dramatic story and her own experience. This idea can be easily
49 interpreted and practiced from a meta-physical perspective, as a teacher can preset a universal value and
50 cover it with a sensuous form of stories and figures. However, the meta-physical conceptualization cannot
51 explain how and why a workshop can deeply influence a child if it really works. Grasping of transcendental
52 existence in existential affectivity happens in aesthetic appreciation of artwork. Here we introduce Heidegger
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1 (2002)'s thinking of artwork as human's earth and world to re-interpret Wang's idea of "existential
2 affectivity" and "transcendental existence" to carefully avoid falling too quickly into a meta-physical
3 understanding of the existential experience.
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6 "The stone is world-less. Similarly, plants and animals have no world; they belong, rather, to the hidden
7 throng of an environment into which they have been put. The peasant woman, by contrast, possesses a
8 world, since she stays in the openness of beings. (p. 23)"
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10 "On and in the earth, historical man finds his dwelling in the world (p. 24)."

11 "The earth cannot do without the openness of world if it is to appear in the liberating surge of its self-
12 closedness. World, on the other hand, cannot float away from the earth if, as the prevailing breadth and
13 path of all essential destiny, it is to ground itself on something decisive (p. 27)"
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18 Heidegger used a relationship between earth and world to think about human's existence in nature and his
19 grasping and understanding of his own existence. In his own existence, humans encounter and grasp the
20 Being of beings and construct a humanized world: his dwelling in the world. The earth, which is silent and
21 self-closed, appears itself with human nature by entering into the existential world based on human's
22 grasping. Artwork is "setting up world and setting forth earth" (Heidegger, 2002, p. 27). In this setting, the
23 Being of beings is lightened up from a covering state primarily by the artwork. Heidegger refers to this
24 lightning as the aesthetic power of artwork. Taking Heidegger's famous analysis of Van Gogh's painting of a
25 peasant woman's shoes as an example:
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31 "From out of the dark opening of the well-worn insides of the shoes the toil of the worker's tread stares
32 forth. In the crudely solid heaviness of the shoes accumulates the tenacity of the slow trudge through the
33 far-stretching and ever-uniform furrows of the field swept by a raw wind. On the leather lies the dampness
34 and richness of the soil. Under the soles slides the loneliness of the field-path as evening falls. The shoes
35 vibrate with the silent call of the earth, its silent gift of the ripening grain, its unexplained self-refusal in
36 the wintry field. This equipment is pervaded by uncomplaining worry as to the certainty of bread, wordless
37 joy at having once more withstood want, trembling before the impending birth, and shivering at the
38 surrounding menace of death. This equipment belongs to the earth and finds protection in the world of the
39 peasant woman. From out of this protected belonging the equipment itself rises to its resting-within-itself.
40 (p. 14)"
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48 The aesthetic grasping starts always from perception of the materialistic depiction of the artwork: the dark
49 opening, the insides, the solid heaviness, the soil on the leather. From the artist's work, imagination
50 motivated by affectivity lead us to see and feel the vivid life of the peasant woman with all of her existential
51 efforts of establishing a world based on earth: the call of the earth, her uncomplaining worry and wordless
52 joy, her trembling and shivering. Heidegger used the expression of "world" to represent human's essential
53 being in the nature and his active construction under his grasping of his own existence. Thus, the world is
54 humanized nature, home of human on earth. Heidegger (2002) revealed the aesthetics of artwork as the
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1 artwork successfully grasps the shining from “self-concealing being becomes illuminated”, which is the
2 happening of truth:
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5 “Truth happens in van Gogh’s painting. That does not mean that something present is
6 correctly portrayed; it means, rather, that in the manifestation of the equipmental being of the
7 shoe-equipment, that which is as a whole- world and earth in their counterplay-achieves
8 unconcealment (p. 32)”
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12 Back to Van Gogh’s painting, not only the real existence of the shoes as object are revealed from being
13 covered by daily use, but also the whole world of peasant woman is lightened up. The shoes emerge from
14 this world and hold itself in this world. Thus, aesthetic experience is theorized as transcending directly
15 perceived forms and contents and grasp human’s existential world and its earth. The long-lasting fight
16 between world and earth preserves itself in the artwork as transcendental existence. This grasping presents
17 still in images and figures under the constructing power of imagination in existential affectivity. In this way,
18 aesthetic experience achieves super-sensibility while always stays in sensuous experience (Wang, 2005).
19 Valsiner (2007) proposed the concept of “hyper-generalized sign” as a major innovation by the legacy of
20 cultural psychology of semiotic mediation, which can be adopted here to understand the characteristics of
21 this grasping as a generalized sign. The hyper-generalized sign is conceptualized for analyzing the mediating
22 function of “real-life experience as complex signs (p. 51)” in psychological processes, which is fussy but
23 overwhelming in affectivity, e.g. the beer for Germans, rice for Japanese and summer night for Finns. From
24 this lens, it can be said that in hyper-generalized affective field-like sign lives a specific existential
25 affectivity, which is specific but maybe also shares some commence in different cultures.
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39 The three approaches work at different layers of experience (Fig 5). The first approach to role frames and
40 perspective shifting mainly work on the dramatic layer. Workshops under this approach focus on inviting
41 participants to identify with roles with different and even contradicting positions and attitudes on different
42 systematic levels, which opens up a dialogical open space for inner dialogues and reflection between the real
43 and fictious worlds to emerge. The second approach of distancing and estrangement primarily focuses on the
44 real world. The dramatic layer of experience is to polish and represent reality of everyday layer to sharpen
45 participants’ perception and facilitate their understanding, reflection and motivation to intervene the real
46 world. The third approach aims at the layer of existential experiences by going through the first and second
47 layer to arrive at aesthetic appreciation, which in turn reconstructs participants’ interpretation and perception
48 at the first and second layer.
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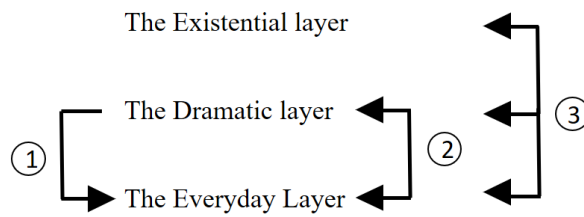


Fig 5. Mapping DiE approaches on layers of experience

The three approaches also have their own challenges and limitations. The approach of frame and perspective shifting has the risk of participants venting themselves in roles and lacking reflectivity. Also, the role frames are set by teachers, which may be criticized as teachers imposing their own ideas to participants. The second approach poses requirements on participants' developmental level as it roots itself in rational meaning making process in front of the gap opened by distancing and estrangement. The approach of brotherhood and existential affectivity is the hardest one to achieve but has the potential of persisting a long-term influence. In the aesthetic experience, participants can grasp transcendental existence in a subjectively sensuous and thus authentic way- in their own existential affectivity. As Wang (2005) has pointed out, we can also observe this grasping of existential affectivity in young children's repeating requirements of adults reading stories like *Little Red Riding Hood*. Children get most frightened and excited when it comes to the part of *Little Red Riding Hood* wandering in the forest while the big wolf coming behind, as they intuitively grasp the existential affectivity of being gone and infused with the unlimited non-existence.

While phenomenologically the approach is suspicious to the role of language in the affective relating to the world, cultural psychology of semiotic dynamics theorizes the role of signs mediation in meaning making emerging from the affective relating of the subject with the world: an affective semiosis (Tateo, 2018). Sign mediation is what makes possible the *transition* and the *relation* between levels of experience (see Fig. 6). The concept of sign as complex function overcomes the limits of the focus on verbal production. Sign is every multi-modal element that can be produced and interpreted in communication and are necessary to the process of generalization as they allow the transition from a level to the other both through *schematization* and *pleromatization*.

Travelling between layers of experience: an analysis of DiE workshop

So far, we have identified and mapped three different approaches in DiE on different layers of experience to generalize new understandings from drama activities. This part will use a DiE workshop to investigate how the structure of activity segments empowers participants to travel between the layers of everyday, dramatic and existential. As case study, we used Kari Mjaaland Heggstad (2019)'s DiE workshop "*The green*

1 *children*” in her book “7 paths to drama” (pp.273-283). *The green children* is based on an old Britain story of
2 two children with green skin and strange language being found in a village and starting a new life in the
3 village. The theme of this workshop is difference and inclusion. In our analysis, we would first map the
4 structure of the workshop on the three layers of experiences. Then we would try to theoretically
5 conceptualize the process of sign production and mediation along participants’ trajectory of travelling among
6 the layers.
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10 *Mapping the workshop structure on three layers of experiences*

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14 In “*The green children*” workshop, Heggstad used seven segments to open up the story before entering into
15 the core conflict: meeting between the two green children and the village. The aim of the seven segments, for
16 the teacher, is to co-construct and maintain a powerful drama world with participants, which will serve as a
17 firm ground for participants to make understandings and decisions from within the drama world. The seven
18 segments are listed below:
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25 **1-Introduction:** Teacher uses a map from the middle ages and invites participants to explore. Teacher
26 introduces the poor village and the tough condition for making a well. Discussion out of role with the group
27 about the time and people’s values, hopes, and fears.
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31 **2-Farmers gathering by well:** Teacher-in-role as leader in the village for building a well. She starts from
32 giving a speech to the farmers about the hopes, struggles and now the good result: a well has been built and
33 about to use!
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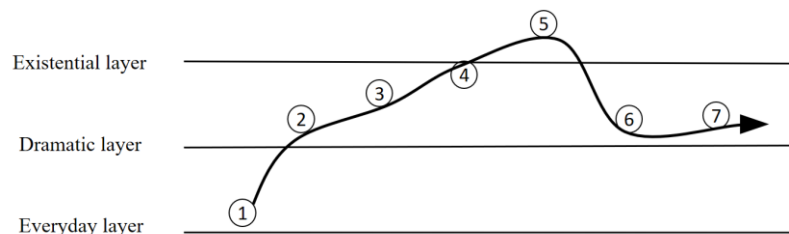
37 **3- Tableau: working on building the well:** Teacher facilitating participant’s imagination on “memories”
38 of the building process with concrete details and inviting them to put themselves with roles in the work
39 image by walking slowly into the image
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43 **4- Tableau: The last moment:** Teacher-in-role narrates about the hard work and refers to vivid details of
44 everybody’s efforts. Inviting all the participants to create a tableau of the last building moment of being
45 exhausted and happy at the same time.
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48 **5- Ritual: sharing the first drop of water:** Everyone sits in a circle. A **bowl** with water is sent around,
49 starting from teacher.
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52 **6- Introducing a problem:** The well is too small and water is not enough. The work leader facilitates a
53 discussion on each families’ needs. The leader implies the amount of water needed for an adult and a child,
54 and requests the oldest villager to record how much water is needed for each family.
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1 **7- Sharing the water:** The oldest inquiries each family's needs. The teacher takes a scarf on and steps into
2 role of an old midwife living alone and sits in the circle to be inquired. She insists that she needs much more
3 water (she found and hid the two children). It becomes suspicious and tense. Then, the truth is told.
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Fig. 6 Mapping DiE segments onto the three layers

The seven segments can be mapped onto the three layers as shown in Fig 6. The first segment of introduction works without roles as it is about discussing around the map of the village: its poor surroundings and potential difficulty to obtain water. On the basis of a cognitive understanding of the village from segment 1, the 2nd, 3th and 4th segments continue by working on transforming the real actual time and space into a dramatic world with concrete roles, imaginary details and potential relations. In this transformation of the dramatic world, the setting and situation of the story is established: a community living in a poor condition, faced with hard tasks, and finally overcoming the task by hard work and cooperation. The emotional strength from 2nd to 4th segment at the dramatic layer increases and polishes itself to prepare for the ritual of 5th segment. The ritual is an artistic transforming of participants' affectivity and experience of living through in the dramatic layer to the layer of the existential. The symbolic prop used in the ritual is vital: a big ceramic bowl with nearly no decoration, which serves as a gateway to the existential world of the village.

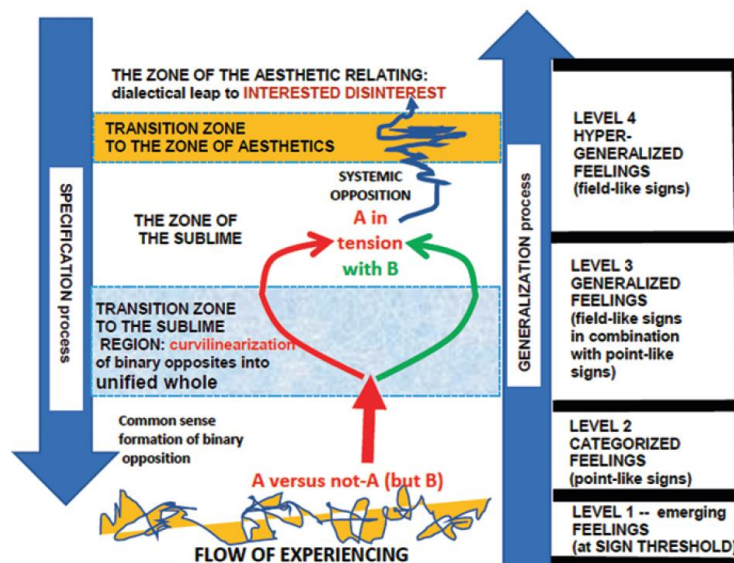
As details matter for Van Gogh's painting work, the shape, material and feature of the symbolic prop also makes a great significance for the effect of DiE workshop. They constitute material qualities of the bowl as sign. In Heggstad's workshop, a bowl is carefully selected to be the focus of the ritual: to be watched, touched and imagined by the participants. Once entering into the existential layer, participants is able to imaginatively see the whole world constructed by the human villagers behind the bowl. From the specific concrete bowl, the transcendental existence is grasped in participants' affectivity: the striving of the old village and the freedom and enjoyment they have gained from their cooperative hard work. The ritual object of the bowl functions from a point-like sign to a field-like sign, and triggers participants' thinking and imagination, in which the existential being of the world is uncovered and grasped. In this grasping, participants affectively experience the transcendental valuable being of "struggle", "cooperation" and "freedom". The 6th and 7th segment come back from the existential layer to the dramatic layer and start to

work on a specific problem of “a man in a mess” in the drama world. By affectively realizing villagers’ existential world, their hopes and wishes, happiness and disasters, participants will no longer deal with the problem and conflict only in the dramatic layer. Rather, they will root their understanding and judgements deeply in their grasping of the existential world of the village.

Travelling between layers: constructing semiotic hierarchy towards hyper-generalized affective field

Existential affectivity as hyper-generalized affective field-like signs can emerge in semiotic hierarchy under DiE structure which enables participants’ travelling between layers of everyday, dramatic and existential layers. Adopting the lens of cultural psychology of semiotic mediation enables us to understand sensuality and affectivity on the basis of semiotic mediation: “sensuality is the general and constant relating with the world through affective creation of meaningfulness in one’s life” (Valsiner, 2020a, p. viii).

Valsiner (2020a) distinguished three different stages in human beings’ affective relation with the world, throughout the generalization processes: the mundane, the sublime and the aesthetic. The sublime domain functions as a meeting zone of the tension between *mundanization* (making signs to organize daily reality) and *aesthetization* (interested disinterest). In the domain of the sublime, human beings become desirous to relate with the object with a psychological distance from the mundane. In parallel with the three stages, Valsiner (2020a) also conceptualized four different levels of generalization in the dynamic process of human beings travelling from the zone of the mundane to the sublime and eventually to the aesthetics: emerging feelings at sign threshold, categorized feelings as point-like signs, generalized feelings as field-like signs in combination with point-like signs and hyper-generalized feelings as filed-like signs (Fig. 6).



1 Fig 6. Coordination between generalization and specification in aesthetic discourse (Valsiner, 2020a, p.10)
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6 The transition from the mundane to the sublime is located at the level 3. At level 3, the field-like signs and
7 point-like signs emerge from two different meaning construction process: *schematization* and
8 *pleromatization* (Valsiner, 2020a). These two meaning-construction processes feed into each other to make
9 the zone of the sublime and the aesthetics. Level 4 enables the transition from the zone of sublime to the
10 aesthetic. The concept of “hyper-generalized field-type signs” is the most important sign for conceptualizing
11 aesthetic process, which emerges out of everyday life experience (Valsiner, 2007, p.51).
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16 An analysis of the design and structure of “*The green children*” offers a good opportunity to closely examine
17 the function of level 3 and level 4 in empowering aesthetic experience at the existential layer. From our
18 previous analysis, we propose two main findings: 1) double function of generalized feeling in level 3:
19 restraining a fall back to level 2 and level 1 in the zone of mundane in actual world, and at the same time
20 facilitating transformation to the zone of aesthetic in existential world; 2) a function of reconstruction from
21 hyper-generalized feelings in level 4 . We will go back to analyze the 7 segments of “*The green children*” to
22 make a detailed explanation of the two findings.
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29 Double function of generalized feeling in level 3. By analyzing the structure of the workshop, one can see
30 that from 1st to 4th segment, participants’ dynamic psychological processes is able to go through level 1, 2
31 and to level 3. In the 2nd, 3rd and 4th segments, teacher takes a role of leader and addresses directly to
32 participants as villagers. The language used by the teacher-in-role functions as a powerful distancing device
33 to lead the participants from the actual world to the dramatic world, which is completed with the function of
34 participants’ sympathy under brotherhood code and active narrative evocation. As participants live through
35 the three segments with their own brotherhood experiences, the tense of emotion and the power of
36 imagination constructing concrete figures and images increase (creating the two tableaux). As participants
37 transit from the everyday layer to the dramatic layer, they go through from working mainly cognitively to
38 mainly affectively and imaginatively. Their sensual perception of signs also changes from being separated
39 and scattered to being holistic and focusing on the whole atmosphere. The complexity of signs adopted to
40 express their perception also increase: from words to gesture and action and finally to group tableau. The 5th
41 segment is a ritual enactment, which is crucial for transition from the dramatic layer to the existential layer.
42 In the ritual, teacher-in-role symbolically expresses herself in multi-modes: her calming and satisfying smile,
43 her slow but firm movements, her joyful and encouraging eye contact with participants, which enables
44 interaction between point-like signs and field-like sign, e.g. participants may perceive the whole atmosphere
45 and summarizes it as “serious” or “holy”. The interaction between the two kinds of signs firmly hold
46 participants in the dramatic layer, which cuts down the return to the zone of mundane and provides
47 possibilities for a further entry into the existential layer.
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1 A function of reconstruction from hyper-generalized feelings in level 4. In the session of ritual enactment,
2 participants are possible to enter into the aesthetic experience at the existential layer. At the existential layer,
3 the creative constructing power of participants' imagination enables participants to transcend the specific
4 content and form of the workshop and grasp the existential world opened up in the workshop: the striving of
5 the old village and the freedom they have gained from their cooperative hard work. As Wang (2005) has
6 pointed out, there is a process of re-construction of perceptual wholeness in participants' aesthetic
7 experience. Once entering into the existential layer, participants would stand firmly and explore in the
8 existential world and re-makes meaning of each part and each sign of the workshop from their exploring,
9 grasping and understanding of this world: the well, the tools they use in their imaginary work, the being of
10 the whole village. It influences not only their decisions and judgements in the following two segments, but
11 also creates new way of their feeling, perception and understanding of their life worlds.
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22 **General conclusion**

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25 As one of the efforts of art entering into the educational area, DiE can influence individual's development by
26 migrating affectivity, configuring and reconfiguring perceptions to generalize innovative meanings for
27 individual's relating with the world. The relationship between drama and psychology can be best described in
28 Vygotsky's use of "perezhivanie": qualitative transformation of higher psychological functions develops from
29 individuals' dramatic life-changing episodes (Blunden, 2016). DiE workshops has the potential to facilitate
30 perezhivanie for developing subjects by its artistic power to engage participants to affectively and reflectively
31 live through the three layers of everyday, dramatic and existential experiences. It condenses everyday life in
32 the form of "a man in a mess", which preserves all the conflicts, contradictions and ambiguity from developing
33 subjects' navigation in the cultural world. However, no analysis existed about the role of signs mediation in
34 such a process, although in Vygotsky's perspective no qualitative transformation is possible without mediation.
35 Thus, we need to define a theory of sign systems that could account for the multi-modal processes of meaning
36 making taking place during DiE activities.
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45 We hope this article has successfully showed our primary efforts in trying to introduce the semiotic tradition
46 in cultural psychology to theorize the complex dynamic generating process of new understandings. As the
47 hard-working villagers in the green child story sit together and celebrate their victory from hard work in a
48 cultural ritual, human beings need affective generalization to have a glance of their own existence to continue
49 the endless journey forward in irreversible time. The imaginary world in DiE offers opportunities for
50 developing children to distance from and transcend the everyday world. The artistic power of DiE cannot only
51 engage children into the dramatic layer of experience, but also has the potential to launch children into the
52 existential layer of experience, the aesthetics, in which there is a human being facing "mess". It is an existential
53 "mess" derived from a finite human being dealing with her ability to grasp the transcendental infinity. Cultural
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1 psychology of semiotic mediation contributed valuable efforts for psychology to enter into this rich
2 phenomenological area opened up by DiE. As Valsiner (2020b, in press) has put forward, cultural psychology
3 should recognize itself as a general psychology of human beings which has to cover the most creative and
4 innovative forms of human psyche. DiE and psychology are two areas trying to develop a form of abductive
5 generalization. We propose that an inter-disciplinary joint research effort with a particular focus on affective
6 generalization and transformation can be a productive direction for next steps and future researches can pay
7 more attention on the micro-genetic level to analyze participants' subjective meaning making processes in DiE
8 activities.
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14 15 16 17 **Reference**

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