DRAMA IN EDUCATION A SIGNIFICANT APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

Drama in education (DIE), as an artistic and educational experience, is amply evidenced in the literature as a dialogic, emancipatory practice of education. If we consider cognition and emotion to be interrelated, drama as an educational tool becomes essential. It forms the metaphor of our lives, which we live through both the cognitive and emotional realms. Art and creativity play an essential role in the relationship between body, emotions and mind. Furthermore, as we live in relationship with the rest of the world around us, our learning is embodied, our brain, emotions and physiology are constantly connected. Thus, the article demonstrates that drama and performance are important in teaching the whole child, whether taught as a discipline or used as a teaching tool. Educators, neuropsychologists and theatre and drama specialists should be open-minded and willing to step out of comfort zones and together make a case for using theatre and drama methods as a way to improve human life. Using drama and performance techniques as educational tools to optimize learning is not a new concept [1, 12]. This non-product oriented way of working with theatre and performance techniques was identified as "drama" in the last century. This article is about the importance of drama in education.

Keywords: drama in education, multiple intelligence theory, performance techniques, brain based learning, dramatization, cognitive growth

1. INTRODUCTION

Drama improves oral language as well as thinking. Looking at correlational studies of the effects of drama on oral language development, it was found that drama improves or is correlated with the improvement of oral language. And what is the effect of drama on reading? Drama appears to be effective in promoting literacy. There are experimental studies in the literature showing that drama improves story recall, comprehension, and/or vocabulary. For example, look at the amazing results of the Whirlwind program in Chicago. The statistical study (Parks & Rose, 1997) showed that students participating in the Whirlwind program improved their Iowa Test of Basic Skills reading scores more than control-group students in three months. Emerging literacy studies show that children give their early writing a multimodality involving gestures and graphics. Drama serves as an effective pre-writing strategy, clarifying for children the concepts they want to explore through writing. Recent observational studies report remarkable maturation in student writing emerging from drama. There are significant changes in audience awareness before, during, and after drama. Writing produced in role play pays more attention to sensory imagination, awareness of the reader, insight into characters' feelings and empathy, and the need to clarify information and reveal it selectively. Seven statistical studies show that drama improves the quality of writing. It is also significantly correlated with early word-writing fluency. Preschoolers who engage in symbolic play and drawing are more likely to read and write early. I can't imagine teaching any subject without drama. It is a powerful stimulus to think and write.

Process Drama: Its Nature and Function

Its nature and function Process drama, a term widely used in North America (but originally from Australia) and synonymous with "pedagogical drama" or "drama in education" in Britain, is concerned with the development of a dramatic world created by both teacher and students working together. Through the exploration of this dramatic world in which active identification with the exploration of imaginary roles and situations by the group is the key feature, second and foreign language learners are able to build their language skills and develop their insights and abilities to understand themselves in the target language. Like theatre, it is possible for process drama to provide a sustained, intense and deeply satisfying encounter with the dramatic medium and for participants to understand the world in a different way (O'Neill, 1995). A fundamental theoretical basis of process drama is strategic interaction (Di Pietro, 1987), which holds that language learning is both an individual and a social practice. Strategic interaction includes such essential elements as the capacity of language to create and involve students in new roles, situations and worlds; dynamic tension; the motivating and challenging power of the unexpected; the strategic quality of language acquired under the stress of achieving goals; the linguistic and psychological ambiguity of human interaction; the group nature of the enterprise; and the importance of context. Although all of these elements in strategic interaction become core features of process drama,

process drama incorporates these aspects in a more complex, improvised, and flexible format. Process drama places greater emphasis on improvisation, participation, student autonomy, and teacher actions. Rather than just a series of brief exercises, process drama involves various strategies and methods of organization in explorations and encounters (O'Neill & Lambert, 1982; O'Neill, 1995). As Kao and O'Neill (1998) state, process drama "involves careful sequencing and layering of dramatic units or episodes. The intensive series of episodes or scenes brings about the tension of the drama, the motivation to overcome obstacles, and the fluency and precision needed to accomplish the task with both the support and challenge of the teacher who is also a participant in the dramatic world." The intense series of scenes brings out the tension of the drama, the motivation to overcome obstacles, and the fluency and precision needed to complete the task, with both the support and challenge of the teacher, who is also a participant in the dramatic world.

Constructivist Theory of Learning and Drama

The last three decades have seen a sea change in our understanding of the learning process, and thanks to the brain research currently being conducted by quantum scientists, we may be on the verge of another such profound transformation. Simple behaviorist models of learning are now largely discredited, except when it comes to mastering the simplest mechanical skills. While steeped in behaviorism at Yale University in the 1950s, Jerome Bruner and other cognitive psychologists in New York were discovering the brilliant Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky. They weren't just modifying or reformulating behaviorism; they were transforming it by placing the importance of meaning and values back at the center of human psychology. They began a quest to formally explore and describe how human beings make meaning. In doing so, they climbed into bed with thinkers who had been excluded from psychology's home for most of this century: philosophers, historians, anthropologists, linguists, novelists, poets, and playwrights.

This has resulted in the establishment of the now widely held constructivist learning theory, which is based on the assumption that knowledge is constructed by each learner. As children are actively involved in experiencing the world, they also construct models in their minds of what they are experiencing. Their way of thinking is literally transformed by their experience and their attempts to understand it, and especially by experiences that demand responses that go beyond what they can generate on their own. With the exception of those psychologists who in the past quarter century have turned away from the construction of meaning to the processing of information, comparing the brain to a computer, leading learning theorists place the construction of meaning at the centre of their understanding of how the human brain works (Bruner, 1990, p. 4). Constructivist theory holds that humans actively create their own models or hypotheses about how the world works, not only with the mental contents of their biological brains but in dialogue with the culture in which they live. As Bruner (1986) suggests, humans construct meaning in the presence of three worlds: the world they are born with, their innate human instincts to understand the world and their capacity to learn language; the objective reality of the real world; and the culture in which they are immersed. According to Bruner, all theory in science and all narrative and explanatory knowledge in the humanities are dependent on the human capacity to construct a world to imagine a world. In other words, learners are active, goal-oriented, hypothesis-producing symbol manipulators.

Learners express their understanding in symbols – first in gestures, then in spoken words, in pictures, and finally in written language. Since they are under pressure to find the answer themselves, they are learning actively. A recent comparative study of the differences between Japanese and American mathematics lessons showed that teachers in Japan ask students to solve a problem on their own before teaching the lesson. American teachers teach the lesson first and then ask students to apply what they have learned. Japanese students learn faster and more deeply. Drama is very much like a Japanese mathematics lesson. Each drama creates a problem for students before they are taught how to respond. They first act and then reflect on their actions. This is perhaps the reason for the power of drama in influencing learning. Another characteristic of drama is its emotional component. Because of the immediacy of the dramatic present and the pressure to respond appropriately in role in a social setting, participants become alive to the moment and alert to what is expected of them. As they become caught up in the spirit of the dramatic activity, they are often able to express themselves in more mature ways and language.

Approach to Drama in Education

DIE is seen primarily as a learning medium, where many of the skills and strategies used in theatre serve educational goals. Theatre emphasises performance, creative drama emphasises the development of personal awareness and confidence, but DIE takes a more balanced approach in terms of emphasising both content and form. It is important to note that although different forms of drama share the same common elements of theatre, their goals differ. In DIE the emphasis is on the value of the process for the participants rather than for the external audience. The need for an integrated approach to DIE, which balances content (i.e. what the play is about) and form (how it is explored), is widely acknowledged in the field (e.g. Bovell & Heap, 2005). In addition to the development of specific drama skills such as the ability to maintain a role, a number of other skills are also acquired through DIE, such as emotional, creative and imaginative powers, practical skills for communicating and expressing ideas, the exploration of feelings and meaning,

investigative, analytical, experimental and interpretive abilities, aesthetic understanding and critical thinking skills. These are general life skills and correspond to those advocated in the field of adult education. Many theorists in DIE refer to the 'collaboration' between learners and teacher, which arises from the co-creativity of drama and the process of ongoing negotiation and renegotiation of learning objectives and outcomes between teachers and learners (O'Toole, 1992). According to Freire and Shore (1987), 'the emancipatory teacher must be very aware that transformation is not simply a question of methods and techniques, but of a different relation to knowledge and society.' There is a lively hybridity in the process of artistic acting, which can also serve the purposes of a transformative pedagogy. Learners will in some way be asked to imagine themselves differently and behave differently, to adopt roles and characters that take them beyond themselves. When examined against classroom realities, the issues that emerge from the literature clearly bring out the challenges and difficulties associated with trying to implement power-sharing ideals within a hierarchical structure.

2. DISCUSSION

One of the most interesting and attractive aspects of research for the drama specialist is that it legitimises drama as a form of education, since it is based on scientific findings. Taken together, research from social science, educational psychology and neuroscience is closely related to the goals of drama as already articulated by Nellie McCaslin [4]. Since the early 1980s, the eminent psychologist and scholar Howard Gardner has been advocating the recognition of multiple intelligences, rather than focusing on the most commonly recognised verbal/linguistic and logical/mathematical abilities. While he claims that every human being has a basic set of intelligences in a particular mix for each individual, he also points out that the destructive or constructive use of intelligence does not occur by accident [23, pp. 44-46]. Deciding on how to use intelligence is as much a question of value as it is a matter of cultural circumstance and environment. Drama, due to its performative and interdisciplinary nature, can teach multiple representations and understandings of important questions, topics and themes [23]. This makes drama highly suitable for teaching inclusion, diversity and social awareness [5-8]

Many educational programs are based on the Multiple Intelligences theory [23]. Although the mind-body-heart connection has been a subject of research and philosophy globally since ancient times, and more so in Eastern philosophy than in Western philosophy, the relationship between emotion and reason is generally overlooked in our educational system. Our educational system continues to favor "objective" IQ testing while erasing differences in background and cultural setting. We see the same phenomenon in varying degrees in Russia, Japan, and China as well. Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, one of the leading scholars of happiness and creativity, claims that the ultimate pursuit and achievement of happiness depends heavily on our individual perceptions and goals in which cognitive and emotional processes are combined in concert with one another [10]. If we challenge ourselves with tasks that require a high level of resourcefulness and commitment, we ultimately find ourselves living more fulfilling lives. Thus, if we consider cognition and emotion to be interrelated, then dramatic education becomes essential: Children learn about life through drama by exploring imaginary themes, topics and issues simultaneously on both the emotional and cognitive levels. Drama creates the metaphors of our lives, which we then carry out in both the cognitive and emotional realms; the two cannot and should not be separated. The current generation of children is more emotionally disturbed than the previous generation; more lonely and depressed, more angry and unruly, more nervous and anxious, more impulsive and aggressive" [2, p. 13].

This conclusion by Daniel Goleman more than 15 years ago, based on contemporary news reports and social science research, points to a deficiency in our educational and social system that cannot be cured by traditional teaching and learning models. Goleman advocates meditation to develop emotional intelligence, which results in "decent human beings – more important than ever for our future" [2, p. 263]. Research shows that emotional health is fundamental to effective learning [2, p. 78-95]. But our collective emotional health has hardly increased since 1995 [11]. Drama techniques such as role play, image work (tableau), spotlight, hot seating, parallel play, etc. in teaching practices can be seen as a platform (or means) for acquiring, experiencing and enhancing emotional intelligence, helping children develop self-confidence, curiosity, purposefulness, self-control and the ability to build relationships, communicate and cooperate [2, p. 194].

The key to Davidson's research are "mindfulness" exercises that can change the brain patterns that create your emotional style and improve your flexibility, perspective taking, social intuition, self-awareness, sensitivity to context and attention. Play is clearly a collaborative practice, play methods connect to mindfulness because it not only encourages participants to imagine possibilities in their lives in their minds, but also creates opportunities for individuals to make these ideas concrete, try out imagined changes and give life to different approaches and ideas conceived abstractly in the brain. Engagement with childhood play and play, from an early age and ongoing, can potentially influence people's emotional style. The role of arts and creativity in the relationship between body, emotions and mind is perhaps most

clearly laid out by scholar Mary-Helene Immordino-Yang, an affective neuroscientist and human developmental psychologist. Immordino-Yang's research reveals a strong connection between emotions, culture and the brain. Immordino-Yang, like Gardner and other scholars, suggests that thinking, feeling, and learning do not occur in isolated vacuums, but, instead, within social and cultural contexts: "A large part of how people make decisions is tied to their past social experiences, reputations, and cultural histories" [3, p. 99].

We perceive and make decisions in context based on what we believe and the way we identify. Our learning is embodied, our brain, emotions and physiology are constantly connected. And we live in relationship with the rest of the world around us. A brain lives in a person, in a culture, in a world we are trying to understand [3]. Ultimately, Immordino Yang's research may provide one of the most convincing arguments for the need for creativity, including drama and performance. Her research suggests that drama, as part of a collection of creative modes of expression, can be adopted not only as a teaching and learning tool in education, but also as a way to experience, practice, explore, and play with real-life situations in an imaginary and safe environment.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Why is this research so important for the use of drama education? It is important to understand that all of the above is not new, rather, what is new is that the benefits and relevance of teaching drama in formal or informal settings can now be scientifically demonstrated and the implications of this scientific research need to be further explored and adopted by educators, neuropsychologists and theatre and drama specialists in dialogue, not separately. We, as educators, artists, scientists and others, can reap great rewards by working together with an open mind and a willingness to step out of our comfort zones, particularly to use theatre and drama methods not only as a way to teach about the arts, but as a way to improve our lives through the arts and education. Drama methods as an integrated way of teaching and an embodied form of learning aim at understanding and empathy [13, 14]. Drama methods provide invaluable resources that help us imagine, create, debate, show and understand what it means to be human. Drama in education is not trying to make children into actresses and actors, any more than physical education is trying to make them into future athletes or gymnasts. Using drama with young children takes them on a creative journey and helps them develop their social, cognitive and language skills. Drama is about humanity in all its complexities, helping us to understand the world around us.

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