

CREATIVE DRAMA IN THE CLASSROOM AND BEYOND, 8/E

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Chapter 14

Drama as a Teaching Tool



Metro Theater Company actor Christopher Gurr planning with sixth-grade students at Lincoln Acceler School, St. Louis, MO. (Photograph by Kitty Daly.)

The school of the future will, perhaps, not be a school as we understand it—with benches, blackboards, and a teacher's platform—it may be a theatre, a library, a museum, or a conversation.

—Leo Tolstoy

Tolstoy's prediction of a century ago has taken place; today, we find both receptivity and active involvement of community resources in the education of children and young people. One of the most effective resources is theatre. The use of drama as a tool for teaching is not new: historically, both drama and theatre have long been recognized as potent means of education and indoctrination. The ways they are used today, however, are new, and they differ in a number of respects from the ways they have been used in the past.

Most familiar to us in the Western world is the theatre of ancient Greece, which developed from celebration and dance into a golden age of theatre. Athenian education in the fifth century B.C. was based on music, literature, and dance. Physical activities were emphasized, whereas music included the study of rhythms and harmony as well as the instruments of the time. Because dance was basic to religious festivals, it was stressed, and the chorus of young people received a rigorous training subsidized by wealthy citizens. Dramatists were highly respected, and drama was a major educational force. Plato, in *The Republic*, advocated play as a way of learning. Aristotle urged education in the arts, distinguishing between activities that were means and those that were ends.

The medieval church taught through the medium of mystery plays and, in so doing, helped to restore theatre to its proper place as a great art form. By the last half of the sixteenth century, drama was an important part of the curriculum of the English boys' schools; not only the reading but the staging of classic plays flourished. We could go on through the centuries, nation by nation and culture by culture, finding examples of the various ways drama and theatre have been used to inform, inspire, entertain, and indoctrinate.

The United States has only recently discovered the relationship between theatre and school. Indeed, the twentieth century was well advanced before the arts began to have any real impact on public education in this country. Private schools often offered opportunities in the arts, but usually as extracurricular activities or as minor subjects, rarely placed on a par with the so-called solids. On the secondary school level, they were given even less emphasis. All the arts tended to be what the teacher made them; thus they reflected the teacher's background, interests, and attitude. In the minds of many, theatre and dance were even questionable as part of a young person's education. Drama, in fact, followed music, athletics, and the visual arts into the curriculum. The publication of the *National Standards for Arts Education* in 1994 has had an impact, but the states are still uneven in acceptance and implementation of these standards and are therefore far from the subtitle: "What Every Young American

Should Know and Be Able to Do in the Arts.”¹ Nevertheless, a milestone was reached with a document that offers guidance to sequential learning across the four disciplines: music, dance, visual arts, and theatre.

Despite progress, however, the dispute regarding the importance and function of drama in education continues. Is it to be included in the curriculum as a means or as an end? Are we primarily concerned with its use as a teaching tool, or do we regard it as a discipline in its own right, to be taught for its own sake? Augusto Boal, in his introduction to *Theatre of the Oppressed*, states the question clearly: “Should art educate, inform, organize, influence, incite to action, or should it simply be an object of pleasure?”² From Aristophanes to the practitioners of today, these objectives have been discussed and argued. Indeed, today the arts are practiced in every category mentioned, for needs vary and interests differ. Adherence to one use does not, and should not, exclude the others. We need the arts for every reason given. Since the 1920s, many of the foremost practitioners in the field of drama education have warned against the exploitation of drama/theatre to achieve other ends, that is, making it a handmaiden to other subject areas. This exploitation, incidentally, has been of concern to teachers of the other arts as well. Are the visual arts, for instance, to be respected as art, or are they to be used for the preparation of school decorations, posters, party invitations, stage sets, and so on? This concern is not to be confused with inclusion of the arts in integrated projects, in which the same activities might be performed, but in which they are related, often brilliantly, to a unit of study. The influence of the British theatre-in-education (TIE) companies and drama-in-education (DIE) on American schools and producers of children’s theatre began a new era in the seventies, as many of their concepts and methods have been adopted here. Leaders insist that every subject in the curriculum can be taught through drama. It is the aim of this chapter to discuss some of the ways in which that can be done.

Integrated Projects

Projects integrating drama, music, dance, creative writing, and the visual arts with social studies and literature have been popular since the early days of the progressive education movement in America. Even the most traditional schools have found integrated projects an effective way of teaching and learning. Arts educators have generally endorsed integrated projects because they place the arts at the core of the curriculum rather than on the periphery. Such projects continue to find popularity in schools whose staff members are able and willing to work closely together. Such cooperation is often more easily accomplished in small private schools, where the schedule allows for flexibility and where there is concern for student interest.

The integrated project usually starts in the social studies or English class. With the topic as a base, various aspects of it are explored. Take, for instance, the topic of a

¹Consortium of National Arts Education Associations, *National Standards for Arts Education* (Reston, VA: Music Educators National Conference, 1994).

²Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* (New York, NY: The Theatre Communications Group, 1985), p. xlll.

foreign country such as Egypt. In the exploration of the topic, Egyptian history, geography, climate, religions, homes, clothing, food, occupations, myths and legends, and arts and crafts are all included, and from this study a project evolves. One fifth-grade class became so fascinated with Egypt that the students made shadow puppets and presented them in a program of short plays based on their favorite Egyptian legends. The project lasted for several weeks and involved teachers of art, music, and social studies; the results showed both interest and understanding on the part of the students.

Such integrated projects are part of schoolwork, done during school time, and if shown they are seen by an audience of schoolchildren. Occasionally, a project reaches into the community or is of such magnitude that a wider audience is invited to see the work. One memorable program given in New York City early in 1979 celebrated the International Year of the Child. This was an extremely effective project in which performers from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, children from the Third World Institute of Theatre Arts Studies, and children from the United Nations International School worked together on a multiethnic pageant. Titled *A Third World Litany*, it brought dance, chanting, music, and religious rites together, concluding with a pledge to observe the rights of children everywhere.

Whether drama should be taught as a subject in its own right or employed as a medium for the teaching of other subjects is at the heart of a continuing controversy, and each side of the argument has its proponents. It is not that the two points of view are incompatible. Many teachers holding both points of view achieve successful results. When the teacher subscribes strongly to one point of view, however, that separate point of view is given a priority; it is for this reason that drama/theatre as an art and drama/theatre as a learning medium are examined separately.

Drama as an Art in Its Own Right

When drama is taught as an art form, the goals are both aesthetic and intrinsic: aesthetic, because product is emphasized; intrinsic, because the child as artist is a major concern. Overall objectives in such teaching include range of perception, sincerity, and the deepening of feeling and thought, for arts education is “education of the senses, of the intuition, not necessarily a cognitive or explicit didactic education.”³

Drama classes include work on movement and rhythms, pantomime, improvisation, character study, and speech, often following a progression similar to the one I use in this book. The teacher helps students to develop greater awareness as they create dramatic situations. The problems of structure, organization, unity, and plot are studied through guided improvisation and group discussion. Characters and their relationships to other characters are analyzed for insights into motivation for their actions. Students are encouraged to express their own ideas and interpretations and to offer suggestions to the group. Indeed, the teacher’s first job is to create an atmosphere in which the players feel comfortable and at ease with one another while working together.

³Robert J. Landy, *A Handbook of Educational Drama and Theatre* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), p. 260.

The teacher of creative drama on any level usually begins drama instruction with simple group activities and theatre games. As the players develop and grow, they are given longer and more demanding assignments. Folklore and literature that lends itself to dramatization make excellent material for creative playing. The teacher enriches the experience by bringing in appropriate materials: music, pictures, and other visual aids. Properties and bits of colorful costumes help to stimulate the imagination, and if it is available, stage lighting helps to enhance the mood. A stage, however, is not necessary and is, in fact, undesirable until much later, when or if students reach the performance level. Even then, performing in an all-purpose room or in a large classroom, arena style, is preferable.

When players are stimulated and freed to make full use of their creative powers, they produce work that not only is satisfying to them but communicates to others. As Susanne Langer put it, "art creates perceptible forms expressive of human feeling."⁴

The aesthetic growth of a student has little, if anything, to do with his or her chronological growth, for the aesthetic sense is individual and so differs from one person to another. In a sound program of arts education, students are encouraged to interpret in their own way the world as they see it. Far from being an escape from life, art is a deep involvement in life, one that enriches the participant now and afterward. In the lower grades, children enjoy the act of creating or pretending. Few little children ask on their own to give plays for an audience. The process of playing itself brings fulfillment. In the middle and upper grades, however, product assumes a greater importance. Performing for an audience carries the experience one step further. It must be emphasized that this is not an essential or automatic outcome of every lesson in creative drama, but older children generally do reach the point where they want a performance. When this happens, the teacher should support the request and help them plan the details, adding the necessary showmanship so that the program or play will be a success. The teacher makes sure, however, that the children's work remains theirs and is not transformed into a show with an adult-imposed structure and style that turns guidance into exploitation.

If the program or play is developed through an improvisational method, process is stressed before product. Even though a script will be used for performance, working for meaning before casting or memorization of dialogue puts the emphasis on the play rather than on pleasing an audience. Thus process leads into product, which is the normal result of studying a performing art. Performance, to be satisfying to both players and spectators, calls for education of the adults in the audience as well as the children in the cast. Parents, teachers, and administrators need to understand what they are looking for and why: to appreciate the work that has gone into the performance; to perceive the growth and share the excitement of the players; to commend the result but not overpraise individuals, laugh at mistakes, or expect skills that are not yet developed. Performing can be a wonderfully rewarding experience if approached and received in the right spirit.

⁴Susanne Langer, *Problems of Art* (New York: Scribner, 1957), p. 80.

It is to be hoped that performances by children are confined to school assemblies, where a sympathetic invited audience will view the product with knowledge of the process through which the product was developed. Honesty and understanding are important, not technical skills that children do not have and cannot be expected to acquire until their bodies and voices have matured.

The other important component of aesthetic education is the experience of seeing good theatre. Providing this experience is often easier said than done because of the wide variation in both availability and quality of plays for the child audience. Availability depends on the community and its geographic location; quality, on the standards of the producing groups. There is no single pattern throughout the country. Professional, university, and community theatres all contribute, but not all meet the same standard of production. In some areas college theatres offer excellent plays and tour them to nearby towns. In other areas civic or community theatres provide regular and ongoing seasons of plays, including one or more for children and youth. In still other communities schools sponsor performances by professional touring companies whose work also varies in quality. Few plays designed for the adult audience are appropriate for elementary school children, though many adult plays hold interest and are recommended for high school students.

Good dramatic literature, well performed and artistically costumed and staged, is welcomed by every drama and classroom teacher as the other aspect of aesthetic education. A fine production nourishes as well as gives pleasure and, moreover, holds up a standard of excellence. Although the involvement of the spectator is rarely as deep as that of the participant, it can bring a child excitement and make a lasting impression. In addition, theatre helps build an appreciation of an art form that is different from the response one has to film and television. The live performance, in which the audience plays an integral part, touches us on a deeper level.

Drama as a Learning Medium

The 1970s, which brought new concepts of drama and theatre education to this country, caused some far-reaching changes in our practices and a reexamination of our methods and goals. Classroom teachers, more at home with the use of drama as a technique for teaching other subjects than with the production of plays (for which they had little or no background and insufficient time to rehearse), discovered creative drama to be an exciting and useful addition to the curriculum. Proponents of the new techniques offered the suggestion that administrators might find drama and theatre more acceptable as educational media than as aesthetic education. This argument would be further strengthened, they said, if research could prove that children's learning was enhanced when drama and theatre had been used as teaching tools.

The difference between drama employed as a specific teaching technique and drama taught as an art form, an end in itself, is primarily one of intent. Many of the same procedures may be followed, but in the case of drama as a learning medium, the teacher is using these procedures to reach certain extrinsic goals: to convey knowledge, arouse interest, solve problems, and change attitudes. Through the process of studying



Julia Morris teaching young children using a puppet as a tool. (Courtesy of Julia Morris.)

a conflict and the persons involved in it, material is illuminated and interpreted, just as it is in the preparation of a play.

British educator Dorothy Heathcote's approach to drama is particularly appealing to classroom teachers, who find in it techniques that they can use in their own teaching. She works, as she says, from the inside out, and her concern is that children use drama to expand their understanding of life experiences, to reflect on a particular circumstance, and to make sense of their world in a deeper way. There is no area of the curriculum in which she has not used drama. She begins with process and in time moves to a product that may take an audience into account, though this is not her major concern. She consciously employs the elements of drama to educate, according to Betty Jane Wagner, and aims to bring out what children already know but don't yet know they know.⁵

In lieu of putting on plays and dramatizing literature, Heathcote prefers to help children find the dramatic moment in an event or unit of study. She believes in helping the teacher use drama to teach more effectively, but not by exploiting it to sugarcoat nondramatic material. She encourages the teacher to work with children as a guide and resource person. When there is a drama specialist in the school, Heathcote advocates having the classroom teacher follow up the lesson with the drama specialist's

⁵Betty Jane Wagner, *Dorothy Heathcote* (Washington, DC: National Education Association Press, 1976).

suggestions. When there is no specialist, the classroom teacher must learn how to discover the tension, conflict, or point of greatest interest in a topic; how to collect relevant source materials; and how to guide the class through an original piece of work. This process may last for a few periods or for an entire semester, depending on the scope of the study and the interest of the children.

Dramatizing an event, Heathcote believes, makes it possible to isolate and study it. She starts with discussion, using the children's ideas and encouraging their making decisions. Once the direction is clear, she suggests a choice of procedures: analogy, simulation, and role. Of the three, Heathcote prefers the last because she believes it fixes an emotional response. She therefore assumes a role, taking part as a character in the drama. When clarification is needed, she steps out of role, stopping the drama for discussion; she then resumes the improvisation. It is this technique that most differentiates her work from that of American creative drama teachers, who rarely take an active part or stop a scene that is going well to discuss it.

Teachers following this method collect the best reference materials, literature, and artifacts they can find. The children are encouraged to spend much time studying them in order to build an original drama. Social studies, current events, and moral and ethical problems become grist for the mill because we are concerned with both cognitive and affective learning. Possible topics for drama might be the study of a particular community, an industry, energy, pollution, transportation, immigration, a disaster with social implications, or a great or well-known person. The possibilities are endless and may come from any area of the curriculum; the point is that by employing drama in this way, the teacher helps students to see below the surface of an event or topic and thereby gain a better understanding of it.

As an example, consider a disaster. Go beyond the immediate situation: What is the impact on the community? on the families of the victims? What are the ramifications of a major disaster, and what steps are taken by the government to prevent future catastrophes like it? The objective is to gain understanding, challenge thinking, and develop compassion.

The collapse of the World Trade Towers was a catastrophe that many teachers had to handle without preparation or any previous experience. Drama therapists were called in some cases. This was a disaster that will be recalled vividly for years to come, with drama still an effective way of coping with it.

Gavin Bolton of Durham University in England has worked with Dorothy Heathcote in the United States on numerous occasions and has also offered workshops of his own. Although they share the same educational philosophy, Bolton's techniques differ in certain respects. He stated his aims in drama education as follows:⁶

1. To help students understand themselves and the world they live in
2. To help students know how and when (and when not) to adapt to the world they live in
3. To help students gain understanding of and satisfaction from the medium of drama

⁶From notes prepared for London Teachers of Drama by Gavin Bolton, 1973.

Bolton admits to being primarily concerned with the cognitive aspect of the drama experience. Although he does not recommend neglecting the aesthetic element, he says that he teaches through it rather than for it.

Another of the current and respected voices in drama-in-education is Cecily O'Neill. As she says, she shares the philosophy of Dorothy Heathcote and Gavin Bolton, but realizing that many American teachers and students have difficulty applying it to their own work, she is trying to clarify the method by working with them over a longer period. The following excerpt from a paper written by Cecily O'Neill for me may help both teachers and students understand this practical use of drama-in-education.

Drama as a Significant Experience

For me, the most important task in drama-in-education is the creation of a shared dramatic context, a fictional world, in which it is possible to explore and examine ideas, issues, relationships, and content areas. Like theatre, drama is a paradoxical activity. It is both real and not real at the same time. Both drama and theatre require an active engagement with the make-believe, a willingness to be caught up in and accept the rules of the imaginary world which is created on stage or in the classroom. . . . I want my students to experience the pleasure, insight, and satisfaction of balancing these opposites. There will be a growing sense of mastery and delight in cooperatively manipulating the make-believe and sharing perceptions and cognitions with others.

A central concept in my work is role-play. In both theatre and drama the participants adopt roles. They pretend to become what they are not. By taking on roles they transcend their everyday selves and get a glimpse of their own potential. Roles can be assumed, modified, elaborated, refined, and relinquished. But the result is not merely that the participants' role repertoire is expanded. By exploring the different perspectives offered by fictional roles, students may come to recognize, and, if necessary, modify their habitual orientation to the world.

. . . In drama we are not seeking solutions or finding answers, as is often the case when role-playing is used as an instrument in the curriculum. We are trying to release students into finding their own questions. The power of the teacher-in-role comes not from theatrical skills or a desire to perform but from a capacity for courageous, imaginative, and authentic engagement with students in the co-creation of an imagined world. In my work with teachers I have tried to share this sense of structure. I want them to gain confidence in manipulating elements of the drama experience so that it is satisfying for both leader and participants.⁷

Again, as in every area, similar work is being carried on successfully in the United States, without publicity, by classroom teachers who have created their own methods of teaching. One of them is the Echo Project, designed by two young teachers in Middle College High School of La Guardia Community College, Long Island City, New York.

⁷Nellie McCaslin, *Children and Drama*, 3rd ed. (Studio City, CA: Players Press, 1999).

The Bongo Workbook, a manual for teachers of science and social studies, was made possible by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and administered by the Research Foundation of the City University of New York. The teachers, Paul Jablon and Terry Born, realized the special needs of this city's at-risk urban high school population and to that end designed an interdisciplinary team-teaching program in the late 1970s. By the late 1980s its success was recognized, and a workbook explaining their methodology was completed. Published in 1987, it became available for use by other teachers in the field. A popular technique described throughout is creative drama.⁸

Drama can be used to illuminate the study of science in middle school. With a grant from the Appalachian College Association, Professors R. Rex Stephenson and Mike Trochin collaborated on the play script *Galileo, Man of Science*. With a guide to extend the experience in the classroom following the performance, teachers are offered a wealth of ideas for further work in science, math, creative writing, playwriting, character study, history and ethics.



Ferrum College students perform Galileo, a play commissioned by the Appalachian College Association for middle school students. (Courtesy of R. Rex Stephenson, director. Later published by New Plays, Inc.)

⁸Terry Born and Paul Jablon, *The Bongo Workbook* (Long Island City, NY: Middle College High School at La Guardia Community College, 1987).

An interesting project was instigated by a teacher of first and second grades in a New York inner-city school. Discovering that the children had never experienced sharing a traditional Thanksgiving dinner with a family or community group, the teacher used the holiday as a way of learning about the first Thanksgiving and how some of our customs and practices have evolved. He included songs, arts and crafts, and the enactment of appropriate legends and stories in his plans. The children made Native American headdresses and strings of paper beads to wear for the occasion and paper mats to be used on the tables. With the cooperation of a parent-teacher committee, a complete Thanksgiving dinner was prepared. The children counted and peeled potatoes, apples, and squash, measured brown sugar, and made butter and stirred gravy, thus meeting the curriculum goals of science and math as well as social studies. Local merchants supplied food, including a large turkey, and a florist friend of the teacher contributed flowers for the tables. I was invited to the festivities held at noon on the day before Thanksgiving, and I was both charmed and touched by the enjoyment and pride of the children as they presented their simple program and then looked for their places at the tables. It was evident throughout that much learning had taken place through the use of the arts.

Two Sample Lesson Plans

The following lesson plans can be adapted to any grade level, depending on the curriculum and unit of study. This is the reason I have suggested procedures rather than specific books or stories. For "Animal Partners" there is a wealth of literature available in most libraries, from which the teacher can select the most suitable material. The Humane Society of the United States, the ASPCA, and most animal shelters have publications and films that are easily available. Reading about animals leads to discussion and the enactment of stories.



Animal Partners

Objectives

1. To teach a unit on humane education, using drama as a medium for learning.
2. To promote understanding and compassion for animals by studying their habits and needs and our relationship to them.

Preparation

Put pictures and photographs of different kinds of animals on the bulletin board. These may be pictures of domestic animals, wild animals, or both, depending on the focus.

Procedure

1. Begin with a discussion of the animals we know best. Talking about pets usually elicits anecdotes, for the children will have had experiences and stories they are eager to share. Lead the discussion into the care and feeding of dogs, cats, gerbils, guinea pigs, birds, and horses and our responsibility toward these domestic animals.
2. Most cities and many small towns have an animal shelter. Arrange for a class visit. Staff members are usually glad to welcome school groups and can answer questions such as "Why are the animals here?" "Who brought them in?" and "What happens to them if they are not adopted?" Staff members will explain some of the problems such as finding homes for old animals or animals with health problems and raising funds to support animal shelters.
3. The visit will lead to discussion in the classroom and afterward, and environmental and ethical issues may come up as a result.
4. If wild animals are included in the study and there is a local zoo, try to visit it. There the class will see wild animals as opposed to the domestic animals they saw in the shelter. A docent is usually available to lead the tour and answer questions.
5. Back in the classroom continue the discussion and read some of Aesop's *fables*, explaining how Aesop used animals to show human faults and foibles. Have the children enact the fables, which are short but offer opportunities to play animal roles. This is also a good time to think of ways in which animals are used today to help people: as guide dogs, for horseback riding, and in pet-assisted therapy, for example. In what other ways do animals and people care for each other? (Try to avoid discussion of animals in entertainment, research, hunting, etc., where there may be abuse. With older children these issues can and should be explored, but they involve ethical and legal problems that require mature consideration.)
6. Creative writing, stimulated by stories and class discussion, may include original stories, poems, or plays. Children in the intermediate grades and older may want to write a play about animals for an assembly program. Adaptations of favorite animal stories or original plots are equally good as experience for young playwrights.
7. When children are playing animals, it is usually better not to have them attempt walking on all fours. Standing upright not only is much easier but makes the player work on interpretation of the animal character rather than attempt to imitate stance and movement. Some movements can be suggested; helping the players find which ones is the challenge.



The Westward Movement

Objectives

1. To understand the reasons why people leave their homes and friends to make long, difficult journeys to new lands.
2. To experience the journey to the West through the medium of drama.

Preparation

1. The teacher leads a discussion on moving from one's home to a new neighborhood, perhaps in another city or country. Ask the children questions:
 - a. How many in the class have had this experience?
 - b. How did you feel about it?
 - c. How long did it take to make new friends?
 - d. What were the best things you remember about the move? the worst?
2. Select books, appropriate to the grade level, that explain the westward movement.
3. Select photographs and pictures of the country, the wagon trails, the housing, vegetation, and animals.

Activities

1. Study the route one family took, and make a map showing it. If there is time and the students are interested, each child can make a map.
2. Plan the important scenes and improvise the action that might take place before starting out, along the way West, and after arriving at the destination.
3. Write a play based on the scenes.
4. Share the work by performing the play for a school assembly or for an invited audience of parents or another class.

The Situation

This is the story of a family that makes the trip to the West. The characters have the difficult task of deciding what they must take with them and what to leave behind. They have strong and mixed feelings about the prospect of leaving friends and familiar surroundings for the strange and unknown. The father believes that he can provide a better living for his family. The mother is willing to go but apprehensive. The son is eager for the adventure, but the daughter does not want to leave her friends and her school. The family lives in the Northeast; if they go out West, they will be able to homestead and settle new territory, to be part of a new country.

The Scenes

Scene 1: Broaching the subject. The father gathers the family members together to tell them about the proposed move. Each one reacts to it in his or her own way.

Scene 2: Telling friends and neighbors. Some reactions are positive, some negative.

Scene 3: Preparing for the journey. The family must make the hard decisions as to what to take and what to leave behind.

Scene 4: Stopping to rest along the way a month later. Everyone is tired but eager to push on.

Scene 5: Stopping three months later. Exhausted, the family almost gives up, but after they have traveled so far and for so long, it would be hard to turn back.

Scene 6: Getting settled in their new home a few months later. They have found some good things, and there have been some disappointments.

As the students improvise the scenes, they will create the action and the reactions of their characters, who will become richer with each playing. Only a skeletal structure is given so as to offer the students maximum opportunity of developing the story in a credible and sympathetic way.

Questions

Where is the family going? What is the country like? What are the individuals' reactions when they finally reach their destination? What are the possibilities of farming the land, meeting neighbors, making friends? What about school? church? social life?

The students may want to add an additional scene or two as they work on this play telling the story of one family's experience of going West. Although I have included this as an appropriate topic for elementary classes, it is also one that high school students can relate to and handle on a more sophisticated level.

A delightful example of teacher-in-role was described to me by a young assistant teacher of preschool children. Asked to introduce a unit on animals, she donned overalls, boots, and a straw hat, entering as Farmer Jess. The children, after a few moments of silence, asked where Ms. Morris was. The teacher explained that *she* was Ms. Morris, but with the help of a costume and her imagination, she had become Farmer Jess. Their curiosity satisfied, the children spent the next thirty minutes eagerly immersed in a new level of teaching and learning. They discussed the different animals that could be found on a farm, their habits, their food, where they slept, and the care they required. At the end of the period, when Ms. Morris left the room, she suggested, that the children draw pictures of Farmer Jess's farm. Not only did they respond to the suggestion, but for several weeks afterward they talked about animals, described them in pantomime, and begged for more stories about them. This is an example of a lesson by an imaginative young teacher who at that point had never heard the term *teacher-in-role* yet used the technique with success.

Artists in the Schools

Another approach to drama/theatre education is the artists in the schools program, which brings performers into the classroom for a morning, a day, a week, or sometimes a much longer period. Here actors perform, demonstrate, or work directly with the children. This provides an opportunity for the teacher to learn new techniques that help him or her to continue alone after the actors have gone. It also exposes children to the creative artist, whom they would otherwise probably never meet. Throughout the United States, actors, dancers, musicians, painters, puppeteers, and poets have been brought into schools through funded programs. Information on available artists (both groups and individuals) is available through state arts councils and state departments of education. Today many theatre companies offer workshops or residencies following performances.

Playwriting with Young People

Since the sixth edition of this book was published, there has been a developing interest in playwriting with and by children and young people. It is too soon to tell whether or not this is a trend, but some unusual opportunities have been made available to both elementary and secondary school students and their teachers to learn more about this form of writing. The participation play, by involving the audience in the process as well as in the performance, introduces children to dramatic structure in a way that the formal proscenium production does not. Whether the idea of bringing a playwright into the classroom is in any way related to participatory theatre is hard to say, but it is obvious to anyone who has ever been in a child audience that children are extremely perceptive regarding character, plot, and motivation. Though children do not necessarily observe a linear pattern in their writing any more than they do in their improvisations, there is a logic in their dramatic writing which, if given encouragement and basic technical help, can lead to some impressive results.

One program that has attracted attention is the Young Playwrights' Project, initiated in 1980 by the Dramatists' Guild. To direct it the guild engaged Gerald Chapman, a young Englishman whose work in playwriting with young people at the Royal Court Theatre in London brought him to their attention. Chapman launched the project by offering workshops for students and teachers in the New York metropolitan area and later in other cities. By 1982 the Young Playwrights' Project had become highly successful, with seven hundred plays submitted that season, ten of which were produced with professional casts. The brochure for the following season announced workshops for young people from fourth through twelfth grades and a festival in the spring offering professional production of the award-winning scripts. Critics, educators, and directors have acclaimed the project as "an innovative design for learning," "a bracing theatrical occasion," "an opportunity for children to acquire not only a sensitivity to the art of playwriting and drama but a contribution to their cognitive, social and emotional development." The project has continued with winning plays given production every spring in one of New York's most prestigious off-Broadway theatres. Collections of the plays are also available in paperback.

A quite different approach was used by the late Aurand Harris, a well-known American children's playwright, who was playwright-in-residence in a number of communities throughout the country in the 70s and 80s. He spent a month at a time in elementary school classrooms, working directly with children, stimulating them to writing but without awards or eventual production. His educational objectives were to foster an ongoing interest in the dramatic form and to stimulate improvement in written communication.

Guided experience in writing plays performs a number of services for the student. Its contribution to the language arts, however, can be summed up in the following simple statement concerning plays as literature: "The important feature is that they [plays] are primarily linguistic, narrative constructs; they are all part of the unique relationship between language and form we call literature."⁹

⁹*Plays Considered as Literature as Well as Theatre for Young People from 8 to 18 to Read and Perform*, compiled and discussed by Aidan Chambers (South Woodchester, Stroud, England: Thimble Press, 1982), p. 6.

It is heartening to see that children's plays have finally been recognized as literature and accorded a place in some elementary school textbooks and anthologies of children's literature. Stories, poems, and essays have traditionally made up the content of these books; today, however, with a growing number of excellent plays by gifted children's playwrights, a new genre of literature has become available, one to which most children respond. It is also interesting to note that the range of subject matter has broadened. Plays with characters from different ethnic and racial backgrounds are being written, and some leaders in the field are also taking an active part in making fine religious dramas available to young people. For the junior and senior high school student there is practical help in Carol Korty's handbook *Writing Your Own Plays*.¹⁰ Clear organization and practical suggestions make this a valuable resource for both teachers and students.

A recent book, *Bringing the Word Alive—Children's Writings: Process to Performance* by Pat Hale and Trish Lindberg, makes the point that writing does not necessarily mean playwriting, although an original play may be the objective.¹¹ Let me explain. The authors accept all kinds of writing that children offer: stories, personal anecdotes, poems, journals, even songs. What children write is typically brief, often fragmented, and rarely linear. Their work may, however, become the raw material for performance in time. It is the teacher who stimulates and collaborates with the children in bringing a script out of a patchwork of forms.

Creative writing, handled in this way, provides a link to the curriculum, engaging children in a variety of learning styles and challenging them to think dramatically. Story starters, or phrases that can trigger the imagination, are effective ways of beginning:

It was a cold and stormy night.
I lost my boot in a snowdrift.
That haunted house on Pineapple Street . . .
The last day of vacation . . .
The present I didn't want . . .
When we moved to a new neighborhood . . .

Props stimulate imaginative responses in writing just as they do in creative drama. Show the children an unusual item. Ask what it is or where they think it came from, what it might be used for, whether they think it is valuable, or to whom might it have belonged.

The authors suggest brainstorming for issues related to a particular subject, especially if it is controversial or the objective is a socially conscious presentation. They describe an original play called *Just Between Friends*. The issues related to it were peer pressure, loneliness, families, fears, self-esteem, and hopes and dreams. After reading what the children submitted, the authors sorted the writings for their dramatic possibilities. The questions that always arise at this point are, "Do you try to

¹⁰Carol Korty, *Writing Your Own Plays* (Studio City, CA: Players Press, 1996).

¹¹Pat Hale and Trish Lindberg, *Bringing the Word Alive—Children's Writings: Process to Performance* (Charlottesville, VA: New Plays, 1996), pp. 8–9.

include everything, and do you change what the children have written?" The authors say that they do not make changes, except occasionally for grammar, but they may shorten a piece that is too long. They may also ask the writer to rewrite a piece for the sake of greater clarity. What can develop from this process may be either a play or a collage of the various writings that are submitted. In the latter case, everything can be included.

Playwriting, therefore, is not the only genre that drama can generate. Stories, poems, journals, letters, children's personal reactions to experiences are all possible, as described in *Children's Writings: Process to Performance*. The authors list the educational values of drama as a stimulus to creative writing:¹²

1. Providing a new way to motivate writing
2. Engaging children with a variety of learning styles in a collaborative process drawing on kinesthetic, spatial, musical, and interpersonal intelligences as well as language and logic
3. Linking writing to curriculum
4. Enhancing academic performance in children who may previously have lacked the confidence that comes from achievement
5. Challenging children to think and write dramatically
6. Empowering children and teachers to think of themselves as creative individuals

Group Poems

Group poems are adaptable to every grade level. The procedure for writing a group poem is as follows:

ESTABLISH GOALS

To involve everyone in the process of composing a poem.

To stimulate strong imagery.

PLAN ACTIVITIES

1. Brainstorm for ideas or, if the group is not ready for that, suggest a topic that will lead to a creative response.
2. After allowing two or three minutes to think about the topic, have each student contribute a line, a phrase, or even a word stimulated by the topic.
3. Write down the suggestions as they are spoken.
4. Read the resulting poem to the class, and discuss the strengths of the work, the structure of a poem, and the writers' feelings as they composed their lines.

Some of the topics I have used with success have been the last day of school, birthdays, the band concert, fire engines, in-line skates, skyscrapers, the school bus, and winter mornings.

¹²Ibid.

After having written a group poem, the children may want to try writing poems of their own. It is important that they not be concerned with rhyming; original work phrased in their own words or in free verse is a fresh approach, and the results will have far more authenticity than a struggle with a form that is neither childlike nor poetic. Although I include this as an appropriate activity for elementary classes, it is also one that high school students can relate to and handle on a more sophisticated level.

Other kinds of writing can be started in the same way, that is, with a group effort. This is particularly true of playwriting. Dividing the class into small groups of three, four, or five gives an opportunity for discussion of characters, plot, motivation, and dramatic action. The teacher must keep in mind the fact that children's logic is quite different from that of adults; by eschewing the linear form, they often come up with something delightful in its originality. Have a scribe in each group write down the dialogue, unless the recording is done by student teachers or aides. Reading the parts aloud when scenes are finished enables the playwrights to see where the weaknesses are and what filling out is needed. Drama is the best way to begin a playwriting unit.

A number of years ago when I was teaching in the intermediate grades, I often went to the teachers of language arts and social studies to see how we could work together. In every instance a unit in one or the other would be an exciting starting point for my creative drama class. For example, James Whitcomb Riley was celebrated annually in Indiana schools but I went beyond the poet and his work. We also studied the period in which he lived and wrote, the people and the customs as reflected in his verse. Choral reading, tableaux, and improvisation preceded writing. When the students were ready to begin, I divided the class into groups of three, each group taking one area. We worked out the scene that evolved, discussing and rehearsing for several weeks, finally presenting them in an assembly program for the school.

Other topics that the class found fascinating were "France in the Middle Ages" and "Taxation," both of which had tremendous ramifications. As the drama teacher, I consulted with the classroom teachers; the classroom teachers, wanting to use drama to illuminate the material, had the advantage of preparing in advance, calling visual materials, and stimulating interest through questions.

Special Arts Projects

Supplementing curricular offerings are the many special arts projects that have been funded by the U.S. Office of Education to promote intercultural and interracial communication for students, teachers, and community members. Although all the programs are subject to budget cuts, they have contributed to various areas:

1. The artist-in-residence program. Before each residency, the artist holds a workshop with teachers about his or her craft. Artists may include a poet, a dancer, a media specialist, a visual artist, a dramatist, and a musician.
2. Special series programs. In this area there are performances by actors, orchestras, ballet companies, mimes, and puppet theatres.

3. Speakers and field trips.
4. Arts camps.
5. Publications.
6. School-community relations. The aim is to involve more parents and community organizations in the purpose and implementation of the special arts projects program.
7. Teacher training. Workshops help teachers in ongoing arts programs.
8. Project replication. This may involve visits to other school systems and preparation of helpful materials.

An organization that has been a help and source of inspiration to many communities is Young Audiences. Founded in 1952 as a national nonprofit organization, it has as its stated purpose to enhance the education and, in doing so, the quality of life of young people by introducing them to the performing arts. To achieve this purpose, Young Audiences sponsors professional musicians, dancers, and actors who present programs in public and private schools. Students learn about the creative process directly from the performers. These are some of the offerings:

Programs for students. Performances and demonstrations are given in primary and secondary schools. Workshop and residency programs are also offered to teach students about the arts in a series of presentations conducted over a longer period of time.

Programs for the education community. Arts education is sponsored at the local, regional, state, and national levels. The programs encourage integration of the arts into teacher training.



Third graders make costumes and props. (Courtesy of Susan Sleeper, Dallas Children's Theatre.)

Programs for artists. Programs and training for artists are designed to meet the educational and cultural needs of the individual communities served. The organization provides—and sustains—career opportunities for performing artists.

Programs for growth. To expand its representation throughout the United States, Young Audiences is committed to strengthening affiliations among the thirty-eight chapters in its national network. Young Audiences researches techniques for developing arts education programs and distributes the published results to professionals in the field of arts education.

One of the benefits of a high-quality performance is the stimulating effect it has on students' own creative work. When the teacher makes use of the excitement engendered by an artist, the results are often imaginative and strong. When performers come into the classroom, another point is made: that art can be created and enjoyed anywhere; it is not confined to the concert hall. Young children have no problem with this; it is only the adult who thinks in terms of auditoriums, lights, curtains, and so on.

This brings up the point made earlier that drama is the least expensive of all arts to implement. It requires no elaborate equipment and no special materials. A room, a leader, and a group of children are the only requirements. A piano and tape recorder are useful but not necessary. Nor is stage lighting needed, although it adds atmosphere if it is available. Costumes and props can be supplied by teacher and students, but they act as stimuli rather than as dressing for players or stage. Education of the leader is important, but the many classes and workshops that are available today in most communities make it relatively easy for the interested teacher to find the help he or she needs. Pointing out the fact that creative drama is not the production of plays and therefore does not require a theatre rules out the first objection of an administration that believes drama is too expensive.

The Circus Arts in Education

Some startling facts emerge in a study of circus arts in modern education. Although it is generally known that some schools and colleges offer them on an after-school or extracurricular basis, the extent to which they are being offered is surprising. Today, according to Jean Paul Jenack, more than 150 colleges and universities have well-developed programs in circus skills, with many of the courses offered for credit.¹³ Some programs approach the work from a cultural or performing arts point of view, some from a physical education base, still others as entertainment.

The first circus arts programs appeared in U.S. schools in the mid-1920s, but there was no further record of activity until the 1930s. This took the form of magic shows, popular as entertainment both in and outside the classroom. Again, this did not lead to any well-developed programs in the circus arts. After World War II, circus skills were introduced into physical education departments as new body-building techniques. By the 1980s, a combination of many of these techniques reappeared, followed by a pattern

¹³Conversation with Jean Paul Jenack, 1995.



Educational Television. Using a puppet to teach basic English. (Courtesy of Kannie Chung, Hong Kong.)

of real growth. In England, circus arts were equestrian based, whereas in Eastern European countries, troupes worked for excellence in professional performance. The trend in the United States, in contrast, has been for circus performers to join in partnership with educators and community leaders. In recent years psychologists and the clergy have also found therapeutic values in the circus arts. Some companies emphasize production, preparing and sending out teachers' study guides in advance of a performance and giving a follow-up session afterward in the classroom.

Some schools and studios enroll children as well as adults in a carefully structured curriculum. Other circus professionals work closely in or with the schools, using the circus arts as tools for reaching boys and girls who show little motivation in academic areas. One thing the new circus professionals have in common is a strong academic background, often including a graduate degree.

It would be a mistake to think that all circus performers of the past were roustabouts or runaways lured by a romantic notion of life under the big tent. Circus people were not formally educated, for a variety of reasons, but they were not ignorant or illiterate. To the contrary, they were highly educated in discrete areas, generally taught by their families, with daily practice for perfection. The tradition was for families to hand down their expertise if the child showed promise. Education began at an early age, much like the training of the ballet dancer. Whether the young performer followed in his or her parents' footsteps as aerialist, equestrian, clown, or animal trainer, early

acquaintance with the field was necessary to ensure success in a demanding and often dangerous profession. Formal education was out of the question because of the heavy touring schedule, which made regular school attendance impossible. As to mathematics and science, some basic elements were mastered through the rigging of tents and wires, and practical information was gained where errors of judgment could be fatal.

Technology and Drama Education

A direction that I suspect we shall be seeing more of in the future is the use of technology in the study of the arts, particularly drama. Whereas interactive theatre has been with us for a long time in one form or another, the combining of video conferencing, the Internet, and creative drama represents a new strategy. Creatively and judiciously handled by a skilled leader, technology can reach a generation that may have had little direct experience in the arts. It is not by accepting the new technology *carte blanche* but rather by discovering the possibilities for its use and linking those possibilities to the study of drama that we can chart a new course. For example, at New York University in 1998, an intensive summer workshop for young people eight to fourteen, college students, and teachers, in connection with a group of children in Eastern Canada, did precisely that. Directed by Professor Alistair Martin-Smith, technology and the arts were brought together under the rubric *Dram Tech*.

Summary

Increasingly evident forces are attempting to change the direction of education from a purely intellectual emphasis to one that recognizes latent potential and therefore includes the arts as a basic component. Many teachers use arts as a tool for teaching as well as disciplines in their own right—not to sugarcoat other subject areas but to illuminate and interpret them. This is less a change, however, than it is an expansion of goals. The many and varied approaches to these concepts represent a new vitality in arts education.

Circumstances rather than specific methodology, however, should be our guide. Leaders share certain common objectives, but they assign priorities according to their situations, strengths, and needs. In other words, although there have been significant changes in the philosophy and the methods employed by teachers of creative drama, there is perhaps less actual than apparent difference from the approach of the past. All methodologies subscribe to a primary concern for the student; most place process above product; all hold certain educational goals in common.

A word of warning: a method is only as good as the person who uses it. A popular method may not be for you, whereas you may have devised a strategy that works well in your situation.

The controversy regarding drama as means or end is not settled and perhaps never will be. Compelling arguments on both sides press for a curriculum in which there is a place for each. Leading educators have declared drama and speech to be central to a language curriculum. They believe that drama can motivate writing and

improve oral skills; they believe that it stimulates reading. Some insist that it can be used to teach any subject effectively.

Many educators agree that study of the arts gives form and expression to human feeling and that attending the theatre as a spectator is a rich experience not found in film and television viewing. In the foreword to a publication released by the State University of New York in 1978, a strong stand is taken regarding the place of the arts in education: “The arts are a means of expressing and interpreting human experience. Quality education of individuals is complete only if the arts are an integral part of the daily teaching and learning process. The integration of the arts in the elementary, secondary and continuing education curriculum is a key to the humanistic development of students.”¹⁴

Statements of purpose distinguish the attitude toward arts education today from that held in the past. Hundreds of agencies and foundations—federal, state, and private—contribute to the arts as a further expression of support. Although we have far to go before we can point with pride to schools in which the arts and the academic areas have equal emphasis, progress has been made.

The National Standards for Arts Education lists note what students should know and be able to do in the arts by the time they have completed secondary school:

1. Communicate proficiently in at least one art form.
2. Develop and present basic analyses of works of arts from structural, historical, and cultural perspectives.
3. Have an acquaintance with major works of art from different periods and cultures.
4. Relate their knowledge and skills throughout arts disciplines.

Suggested Assignments

1. Investigate the work of Dorothy Heathcote, Brian Way, Gavin Bolton, or Cecily O’Neill. Books are readily available in most college libraries. Discuss in class the philosophies and methods of these leaders.
2. Design a lesson that you consider to be drama-in-education rather than creative drama. Consider goals, methodology, and expected results.
3. Design a lesson that you consider to be drama-in-education for a specific grade and area of study. What is the subject matter, and what are your goals, methodology, and hoped-for results?
4. If you are doing student teaching, ask if you may do some creative writing with the group. Bring the results to share with your college classmates.
5. Plan and then teach a lesson to your classmates.

¹⁴*The Arts as Perception (A Way of Learning)*, Project Search, The University of the State of New York (Albany, NY: State Department, Division of Humanities and Arts Education, 1978), p.iii.

Journal Writing

1. What is the relationship between means and ends?
2. Compare creative drama and drama-in-education in regard to goals and values.
3. Must there be controversy regarding the values of either approach? What do you see as the principal arguments on each side?
4. If your teacher were to evaluate you, what do you think he or she might write?