

Drama in Education and Theatre in Education: A Contextual Overview



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Abstract

One of the most outstanding occurrences in education particularly from the 1950's onward has been the move towards a change in the role of the student, who is now seen as agent of his/her own learning, opposed to models of uniformity and predominantly verbal teaching. Student centered teaching where implementation of variety of active methods of learning will give opportunity to students to express their specific identity was thought to be a better means of teaching and learning. How do young children learn? What types of instruction will best facilitate the teaching and learning process of young learners, and what role could educational drama play in these processes? This paper is geared towards giving an overview of educational drama methods that include Drama in education and Theatre-in-education; and how these can help students construct knowledge actively. It will highlight the role of Theatre-in-education and Drama in education, under the umbrella of educational drama in the teaching and learning process. It will also show the positive impact drama has in raising the standards of teaching and learning.

Keywords: Overview, Educational Drama, Theatre-in-education, Drama in Education, Construct knowledge.

Introduction

Throughout history, theatre has been used as a teaching tool. It has proven to be an effective means of communication and a socializing tool for instructing members of society on social norms, religious teachings and even introducing new ideologies. This is because, theatrical practices are born out of a natural desire to imitate others and the world around us. Greenworld (2004) on Aristotelian Mimesis observed "Aristotle began his famous treatise on theatre with the observation that the 'instinct for imitation is implanted in man from childhood' On its simplest level we learn by imitating how others walk, talk, dress, behave and so on". (11) Theatre is based on the idea of

imitation. Humans use imitation to become properly socialized and to learn new skills. In the same manner, theatre uses imitation to communicate ideas and lessons both to participants and audience.

Ancient Greece was the base for theatre's use as a teaching tool. Greece used theatrical art to effectively communicate lessons to the citizens, especially their own world view. To the Greeks, "Humans were godlike in their unlimited potential for greatness. Indeed, tragedy was devised to remind the Greeks that they were only godlike and not gods themselves" (Greenwald 110). Greek tragic plays were used to educate the masses about the dangers of hubris, or excessive pride by depicting heroic figures that were highly respectable but suffered a major downfall because of their fatal flaw (51). Throughout the medieval period and the renaissance, theatre continued to serve as an educational tool to communicate morality, social norms, and beliefs.

Though theatre has grown and changed greatly throughout its history, it has continued to play an important educational role. Just as Aristotle observed the natural human tendency to imitate the world around them to learn and grow, Vygotsky a Russian psychologist has also noted the importance of environment and interaction on childhood development. Siart (2012) quoting *Vygotsky's Legacy* explains that according to Vygotsky's theory, "the child's environment is not restricted to physical features. Instead, the environment is social and characterized by a variety of social interactions" (7). The child's potential for development is partially dictated by his or her environment. Ultimately, children may only benefit from the developmental possibilities of their environment through direct interactions. Social interactions allow children to observe and later mimic the behaviors they see. This view explains the central role of adults, or 'ideal forms', who interact with the child's more rudimentary behavior...This interaction with adults is critical because the child learns to master his/her own processes of behavior 'from the example of how an adult master's it' (8). To encourage this learning through interaction, Vygotsky advocated controlled and moderated play that uses interactions to foster development. Vygotsky was not referring to the frivolous past time sort of play, but to the play that requires social interaction and role-playing that allow the children to develop through experience. To Vygotsky, play allows children to develop 'tools of the mind' or higher cognitive abilities that laid the foundation for future learning. Siart quoting *"Tools of the mind: Philosophy"* stated Vygotsky believed that just as physical tools extend our physical abilities, mental tools extend our mental abilities to enable us to solve problems and create solutions in the modern world. (9). Vygotsky's theories about the

importance of play and other social and cognitive developmental theories in the education of children has led educationists and other scholars to move away from the traditional mode of teaching and learning to a more purposeful method that is child centered.

Theoretical Underpinnings in Educational Drama

Theatre as an educational medium uses entertainment and humor to attract children's attention and emphasizes learning through the interplay between actual and fictional contexts. The use of 'Theatre-in-education' (TIE) presents a new approach to engaging children in teaching and learning. Such development has its theoretical underpinning in the progressive movement, the constructivist model of learning and developmental psychology. The accepted model based on the hidden assumption that knowledge can be transferred intact from the mind of the teacher to the mind of the learner was no longer the norm, rather children/students need to construct knowledge in their own minds. Effective education is seen as a process where the teacher, children and schools are involved and participate actively or become active participants. "Children need to discover and transform information, check new information against the old, revise rules when they no longer apply" in the words of Golder (2018) (Abstract) The constructivist view of learning considers the learner as an active agent in the process of acquiring knowledge.

Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky are recognized as the most influential developmental psychologists of the 20th century. Their study of cognitive development provided the foundation for constructivists developmental theory. Constructivists theory posits that people develop their knowledge through active participation during learning. While Piaget states that cognitive development is a product of the mind achieved through observation and experimentation, (Golder 2018:677), Vygotsky (1978) sees cognitive development as a social process achieved through interactions with other knowledgeable members of a given culture (48). Piaget termed his work "cognitive constructivism". In his theory, two major things come into play – 'age' and 'stages'. According to him, these elements help direct what learners can and cannot understand at different ages and stages. This is because, to Piaget, people according to Arverklev (2017) "construct new knowledge and understanding from what they already know and believe, based on their previous experience" (12) His theory suggests that humans are unable to automatically understand and utilize information they have been given because they need to 'construct' their own knowledge through prior personal experiences to enable them to create mental images. Hence, the primary

role of the teacher in a constructivist environment should be to provide the setting, pose the challenges, and offer the support that will motivate or encourage students to create their own knowledge through their personal experiences” (Rummel in Golder 679). Vygotsky’s theory of social constructivism is characterized by active engagement, experiential learning, inquiry based, problem-based learning and collaboration with others. Here, the teacher’s role is to guide, facilitate, coach, provoke and co-explore in ways that allow the student to engage in creative and critical thinking, analysis, and synthesis of ideas during the learning process as the teacher assumes the role of co-learner who encourage the students to question, challenge and formulate their own ideas, opinions, and conclusions Golder (679). Constructivists do not look for copies or mirroring of an outer reality in the human mind instead they rather see humans as observers, participants, and agents who actively generate and transform the patterns through which they construct realities that fit them” Leonard in Agofure (2017:39)

Conceptual Framework – What is Theatre-in-Education

Theatre has always served as a bridge between entertainment and learning. Theatre-in-education is theatre that takes place in an educational setting such as schools, colleges and so on. It is a novel approach to engaging students to learn. It is the intention to use theatre beyond the purposes of entertainment. It goes beyond entertainment because, it creates a creative environment that changes the student’s attitudes, behavior, and knowledge. O’ Tool in Mages (2016) is of the opinion that “Theatre-in-education is an attempt to bring the techniques of theatre into the classroom, in the service of specific educational objectives, (4) In agreement McCaslin (2006) writes, “*TIE* differs from traditional children’s theatre in the use of curricular material or social problems as themes. Performed by professional companies of actor teachers, it represents thought-provoking content to young audiences for educational purposes rather than entertainment” (12). Theatre as a medium of education employs entertainment to attract the child’s attention and evoke enthusiasm in their minds to listen attentively and identify correctly the educational messages being portrayed. Situations are created to enable the students understand issues, explore relationships, derive, and evaluate solutions among other things. It is a coordinated and carefully structured program usually devised and researched around chosen topics of relevance to the school curriculum. It generally combines the elements of theatre by active participation of the children in improvised drama activities in which ideas are explored at their own level and stimulation.

The use of TIE according to Pammenter (1993) “began in Britain in the mid-1960s and grew out of recognition for child-centered education, whereby learning is more effective when a child investigates and discovers through active play (61) The use of Theatre-in-education is supported by the idea that individuals learn from observing others and receiving feedback from others as well as self-reflection and interaction between students/children and environment. TIE allows children to look at life as an observer, making conscious moral decisions in relation to the situations played out for them. Hanner D. et al (2010) in agreement observes that “this enables a cognitive playground where children can experiment with different choices and experience vicariously the emotional consequences of their own and other’s behaviors” (55) TIE can also provide experiential learning opportunities that are particularly powerful because of the influence theatre has on the audience member’s emotional and cognitive state.

The main aim of Theatre-in-education is according to Dice Consortium (2010) to use theatre and drama to create a wide range of learning opportunities across the whole curriculum. Most TIE programs comprise performance and participatory/interactive elements. Actor/Teachers (so called because they use the skills of the actor while thinking as a teacher at one and the same time) engage the pupils directly in parts of the play, or tasks and activities extending from it. Often, the TIE program involves preparation work and follow-up (usually drama) activities as a part of the whole experience. (205).

The beneficial effect of using theatre as a teaching tool in education is that it makes children to know themselves, their world, and their relation to it. That is the only way they can know who they are and accept responsibility for themselves.

Drama in Education

Drama in education began to develop in the early twentieth century as paedocentric concepts of education began to receive prominence. This is because play is one of the most powerful ways for a child to learn. The child looks around him and plays what he sees. Goodlass (2016) quoting Dewey observed that the primary root of all educational activity is:

instinctive, impulsive attitudes and activities of the child, and not in the presentation and application of external material, whether through the idea of others or through the senses, and that

accordingly, numberless activities of children, play, games, neumic efforts...are capable of educational use, nay, are the foundation stones of educational method (p.4).

As a result, many educators turned to experimenting with such methods. As mentioned before, Drama in education has its idea in the progressive movement in education of psychologists like Jean Piaget, John Dewey, and Lev Vygotsky among others. (Yoda 2012:105) To John Dewey, he insists that the importance of education is on 'active and experiential' learning. For Vygotsky, play is the leading source of development in children. To him:

...Play is the source of development and creates the Zone of proximal development. Action in the imaginative sphere, in an imaginary situation, the creation of involuntary intentions, and the formation of real-life plans and volitional motives – all appear in play and make it the highest level of preschool development” Vygotsky in Bodrova and Leon (2015: 376)

Cook (1914) an educationist who wrote *The Playway* in agreement with the psychologists about the importance of play in learning, observed that “The natural means of study in youth is play. A natural education is by practice, by doing things and not by instruction.... The main concern in a child’s life is that manifold business understood clearly by him and dimly by his elders as play. (1) It must have occurred to everyone that since a child’s life under his own direction is conducted all in play, whatever else we want to interest him in should be carried on in that medium, or at the very least connected with play as closely as possible. (3) Cook criticized the teaching and learning method of his day and concluded that ‘children’s practical and experiential learning should be the core of education. (3) He became one of the pioneers of Drama in education along with Dorothy Heathcote, Peter Slade, Brian Way, and others.

Drama in education appeared in England in the mid 1960’s as a program aimed at the development of children as a whole person and for the promotion of their growth as human beings through drama. It was a program that uses drama as an educational means. To Brian Way, (1981) “education is concerned with individuals; drama is concerned with the individuality of individuals with the uniqueness of each human essence” (3) He does not acknowledge the traditional intellectual education which seeks sameness in children, rather he “insists on necessity of drama education in which children experience arts through activities” (3) This kind of view was the basis of drama education in DIE which used drama to develop the human growth of children as well as to teach other subjects. For Peter Slade who is referred to as the founder of improvisational drama, he asserts that children naturally try to act characters appearing in their imaginary play world. This

he termed 'dramatic play'. He insisted that children's spontaneous drama activities should be respected in education. (5) Slade places emphasis on children's spontaneous drama activities and recognizes the dual nature of children as actors and as audience in their play. Espousing on this, McCaslin (2006) writes that it is "free play of young children, in which they explore the world imitating the actions and traits of those around them" (258) Dorothy Heathcote a leader and a practitioner of Drama in education believed that children should be encouraged to discover their real nature through fundamental drama experience. She believes according to Yoda (2012) that "children should be put in a stimulating activity through which they discover themselves by living through situations" (80). This she called improvisation. She affirms that "dramatic improvisation is concerned with what we discover for ourselves and the group when we place ourselves in a human situation containing element of desperation" (102) Heathcote believes that improvisation and roleplay are important elements of Drama in education and enables one to put oneself in others' shoes, think and feel their way through the power of imagination. According to Rosenberg in Yoda, Heathcote believes that "the ultimate object of drama education is to have students discover "the universal human experience" and consider and examine what they experience in life. (115) To her, role playing prepares children for practical social lives.

We can conclude from Heathcote's practice of Drama in education that her aim is to build on the children past and personal development and social adjustment, giving them a deeper knowledge not just about themselves but of what it is to be human as well as an understanding of the society they live in and its past, present, and future.

Creative Dramatics

Like theatre-in-education and drama in education, creative dramatics as a method of teaching and learning developed out of the educational philosophies and experiments of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was based on the idea that creativity should be emphasized by spontaneous activities that include drama. John Dewey, one of the proponents of child-based education and his associates established a laboratory school. Coxwell (1995) discussing Dewey's contribution to creative dramatics, according to O'Farrel observed that "they undertook experimental work in child centered education and advocated spontaneous activities for children in which drama was frequently used" (20) It was Winifred Ward who made significant inroads in the development of creative dramatics. "She coined the term 'creative dramatics' as the title of her first book published in 1930" (21). Her approach was to develop a method of story

dramatization by using storytelling as a basis for her work. She established training programs in creative dramatics at Northwestern university in the 1920's and 1930's and in 1949, founded The Children's Theatre conference which became the national organization for educational drama in the United States. (21) Among her many contributions to creative dramatics was the development of theory and methodology for including drama in education.

Articulating the needs of creative drama and its importance in the learning experience of children, McCaslin (2006) defined it as "a way of learning, a means of self-expression, a therapeutic technique, a social activity, and an art form, the most completely personal, most highly stylized art forms human beings have (5). Piggins on his own see's creative dramatics as "a process related discipline in which participants recreate historical or dramatic happenings. (1984). To Snydergreco, creative dramatics is "activities in which children, with the guidance of a leader, spontaneously generate drama" Perhaps, Winifred Ward gives the clearest definition of creative drama as "all forms of improvised drama created by children themselves and played with spontaneous dialogue and action" in Duke (1974:5) This includes all forms of drama such as dramatic play, story dramatization, impromptu pantomime, shadow and puppet plays, and all other extemporaneous drama". (10) This signifies that any type of children's play could be considered creative dramatics to some extent, but creative dramatics is more structured than children's play. Its aim is not merely to entertain the child but to let the child develop socially, emotionally, and physically. It is not the product or the result of the dramatic play that is important, but rather the process. Creative dramatics is not an isolated project in which the class forgets their schoolwork and begin to play, rather the teacher uses it to expand what the children are learning in other subjects. It takes the concept learned in other subjects like math, social studies and English language and expand them using imagination. Creative dramatics takes the facts and concepts that children/students have always been taught and incorporates problem solving and creative thinking to motivate a child to discover new skills and new ideas, which the child will need to prevail in the society. Creative dramatics can also promote the individual needs of the children. According to Bolton, "creative dramatics offers a dimension of knowing that can help children learn much information in many curricular and personal areas. (23)

Educational Drama

Educational drama is a comprehensive or umbrella term that refer to any form derived from the act of using drama in the service of education. In this vein, Barlow defines it as a “whole group activity that enables the facilitator and children to work together, as an ensemble, to improvise and create a drama” (1) Shuman views educational drama as “anything which involves persons in active role-taking situations in which attitudes are the main concern, in which process takes precedence over product”. (1978) Educational drama does not have external audience, instead, children are both the players and the viewers of their work; they are their own audience. It is used as a synonym for Drama in education, Creative dramatics, Theatre-in-education, process drama and others. It uses improvisation, imagination, role-play, games, teacher-in-role, and other such elements to help develop children/students individual and social skills while fostering their creative and expressive abilities. Educational drama makes children develop self-esteem, power of understanding, emotional learning among others. Baldwin and Fleming (2003) believe that “emotional learning is the best form of learning, as children can remember their experiences and the knowledge gained from their actions. Therefore, educational drama event is a unique process that is individual to the ensemble” Cattanach (1996) observes that the most important thing offered through educational drama is the so called ‘aesthetic illusion’, which means that educational drama and its tools, such as improvisation, games, etc., offer individual students the opportunity to simulate daily life activities in a ‘safe’ environment created by theatrical context without any restrictions and fears”. This is because, when children/students are fully involved with their learning, they can link their thoughts and feelings to lesson content which results in emotional learning. Educational drama results in what Sternudd discovers as ‘holistic learning’. In discussing the holistic learning, he writes that the participants are expected to gain tools to study their own experiences on the subjective, emotional, and cognitive levels to achieve an insight and understanding of the human dimension in various disciplines. (13)

Conclusion

To engage children/students in teaching and learning that is productive, a new medium of teaching and learning must be adopted. The progressives saw that drama and theatre provides a better platform for children and teachers alike to teach and learn. This article provides an overview of several educational drama and theatre methods and reasons for integrating them into the academic

curriculum and the benefits of doing so. There is evident fact of the change in education from a purely intellectual emphasis to one that recognizes latent potential of drama and theatre. Drama and theatre can be used to illuminate and interpret other subjects. The many and varied paradigms of educational drama represent a new approach and vitality to education.

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