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ABSTRACT

In considering reasons for employing creative dramatics as part of the input and motivation for an experience in creative written expression, it is important to consider the primacy of oral language over written language, especially for children. Drama involves talk, movement, and the involvement of self in expression which is outer-directed; writing tends to involve language which is more solitary and inner-directed. But talk and the exchange of ideas serve to create a need for expression; therefore, dramatic activity can be an effective form of exploration of a topic or problem prior to the act of writing. For instructional purposes, the tasks to be accomplished in a creative writing experience are broken into a methodological sequence: children's attention focuses on a broad topic in order to generate interest, ideas are exchanged to crystallize each child's thinking, and then a writing period follows. In the writing period young children dictate their ideas to the teacher or, after mechanics are under control, write individually. In individual writing the teacher serves as a catalyst, an audience, and an aid for mechanics upon request from the children. As creative expression began with interaction through talk, it should now return to it during a sharing period. (RB)

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# "Creative Writing through Creative Dramatics"

## Introduction

In recent years teachers have heard much of the importance of creativity in the English program for the purposes of helping the child to develop the ability to use language to organize his experiences in order to understand self and world. This concept of language for self-understanding was a major focus of the Dartmouth Seminar which, according to John Dixon, defined English as follows: "...our subject is experience, wherever language is needed to penetrate and bring new and satisfying order."[1] This viewpoint is expanded by David Holbrook in his paper "Creativity in the English Programme." He said:

> Creativity cannot satisfactorily be introduced into an English program unless creativity is accepted as a basis of our approach to English teaching as an art. Effective English teaching, in that it has to do with the whole complex of language in our lives, has to do with the whole problem of the individual identity and how it develops. In this words are crucial, and so in English teaching we cannot separate words from the dynamics of personality, nor from the processes of symbolism by which human beings seek to deal with their inward life.[2]

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[1] John Dixon, Growth through English: A Report Based on the Dartmouth Seminar, 1966 (Reading, England: National Association for the Teaching of English, 1967), p. 114.

[2] David Holbrook, "Creativity in the English Programme," Creativity in English, ed. Geoffrey Summerfield (Champaign, Ill: National Council of Teachers of English, 1968), p. 1.

This stress of the Dartmouth Seminar on language for self-discovery is further highlighted by Holbrook in the statement that in English we are concerned with "literacy in its deepest and widest sense--the capacity to use words to deal with inner and outer experiences."[1]

Two forms of creative expression, creative writing and creative dramatics, have received attention as avenues of response in a language program designed to help children make reality from experience. The rationale behind selection of these areas is stated by several writers on the topic.

Of creative writing Dixon, in an article entitled, "Creative Expression in Great Britain," has said:

> Now if we want--as I do--to use the word "creative" to suggest the process of making and fashioning things to stand for a world we experience, this is a telling observation. One can see a new value in the writing that goes on in English lessons, because here at least is the opportunity to stress the fashioning, the act of finding and choosing anew from the infinite system of words what will come closest to experience as we meet it day by day."[2]

He continues:

> In such personal writing, as it has come to be called, the teacher is looking for an effort to achieve insight--to brush aside the everpresent invitation to take the world as other people have found it, adopting ready-made their terms and phrases (their images of us). Writing is a way of building a personal world and giving

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[1] Ibid., p. 2

[2] John Dixon, "Creative Expression in Great Britain," English Journal (September, 1968), p. 795.

an individual rather than a stereo-typed shape to our day-by-day experience. Personal writing has to take feeling as well as thought into account, attitudes as well as observations.[1]

Similarly creative dramatics has been described by Dorothy Heathcote as "role-taking, either to understand a social situation more thoroughly or to experience imaginatively via identification in social situations."[2] Barnes defines "drama in a very inclusive way, to refer to the variousness within society and the individual as well as the activities which by expressing this variousness can help students develop that fullness of insight upon which true choice is based."[3] He suggests that drama can help the child "learn to tolerate the many voices within himself, to recognize and express his own variousness, to learn how to live amongst uncertainties and divided loyaltries."[4]

This call for English for self-discovery involving programs of creative writing and drama may place unrealistic and unattainable demands on teachers working in language programs which either have no real program of creative writing and/or which place primary emphasis on either the mechanics or the craft of written expression; and in which drama has been the Christmas play or reading aloud a story from a basal reader. With this in mind let us consider creative writing through creative dramatics. The rationale for including dramatic activities as part of the input for writing will be

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[1] Ibid., p. 797.

[2] Dorothy Heathcote, "How Does Drama Serve Thinking, Talking, and Writing?" Elementary English (December, 1970), p. 1077.

[3] Douglas Barnes (ed.) Drama in the English Classroom (Champaign, Ill: National Council of Teachers of English, 1968), p. 6.

[4] Ibid., p. 2.

explored, as will the methodology of a creative writing experience. Specific examples of topics utilizing creative dramatics as an avenue to creative writing will be described. Lastly, benefits of this approach to the development of programs for creative self-expression in both creative writing and creative dramatics will be considered.

The Rationale for Approaching Creative Writing Through Creative Dramatics

In considering reasons for employing creative dramatics as part of the input or motivation for an experience in creative written expression it is important to consider the primacy of oral language over written language, especially for children. Drama involves talk, movement, and the involvement of self in expression which is outer directed; whereas writing tends to involve language which is more solitary and inner directed. Thus involving talk and exchange of ideas to create a need to express as a part of the motivation for writing is essential. Dramatic activity, since it involves the self more fully in a role or situation than does verbal exchange, can be an effective form of exploration of a topic or problem prior to individual self-expression in the written form.

An explanation for the importance of having talk precede writing is offered, it seems, in James Moffett's treatise, Teaching the Universe of Discourse, in which he orders the kinds of discourse along several concurrent levels of abstraction as shown on the diagram.[1] In this theory of verbal and cognitive growth, Moffett takes the view that "language learning is ultimately a cognitive matter" in which the major tasks are comprehending and composing, with reading and writing being mechanical operations which are second degree abstraction systems, using symbols for symbols.[2]

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[1]James Moffett, Teaching the Universe of Discourse (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1968), p. 47. (The bold print shows the diagram as presented, while the lower case shows levels of abstraction which Moffett discusses as operating within levels, but which are overgeneralized by a linear model.

[2]Ibid., p. 15, 17.

## The Spectrum of Discourse

Rhetorical Distance

| Speaker-Listener | Abstractive Altitude: Speaker-Subject | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| I - me | | | |
| INTERIOR DIALOGUE (EGOCENTRIC SPEECH) | | | P |
| I - you | | | |
| VOCAL DIALOGUE (SOCIALIZED SPEECH) | RECORDING, THE DRAMA OF WHAT IS HAPPENING. | PLAYS | O |
| CORRESPONDENCE | | | |
| PERSONAL JOURNAL | | | E |
| AUTOBIOGRAPHY | | | |
| MEMOIR | REPORTING, THE NARRATIVE OF WHAT HAPPENED. | FICTION | T |
| BIOGRAPHY | | | |
| CHRONICLE | | | |
| HISTORY | GENERALIZING, THE EXPOSITION OF WHAT HAPPENS. | ESSAY | R |
| I - it | | | |
| SCIENCE | | | |
| METAPHYSICS | THEORIZING, THE ARGUMEMTATION OF WHAT WILL, MAY HAPPEN. | | Y |

From this view, discourse is then categorized along several planes. One is the relation between the speaker and listener as in the I - you of conversation or I - me of thought to the I - it relation of public address or publication, where the audience is impersonal and feedback limited or non-existent. Not only is distance between speaker and audience a factor, distance in time between speaker and subject operates to form a heirarchy of abstraction from communicating what is happening (drama), to reporting what has happened (narrative), to exposition of what happens in such a situation (exposition), to theorizing what may happen (argumentation). The relationship to kinds of discourse from plays to fiction to essay is obvious.

Progression in these planes is largely dependent on the child's previous language experience. It also operates across levels, that is evidences of generalizing may be found in narrative situations in conversation between friends or in thought (the I - me relation). However, there is a general progression of growth along these hierarchies, in Moffett's view.[1]

This need for a developmental progression from informal oral language structure of the home to use of other codes and modes has been noted by linguists and was a concern of the Dartmouth Seminar in discussion of the linguistic barriers set up because, to quote from Dixon, "'learning to read and write leaves the child alone with language in a way which differs from his previous experience. This should not be made a sudden transition. The new activities should be preceded, accompanied and followed by talk.'"[2]

If language is to serve as a means of self-discovery through creative self-expression, then it obviously must begin with language styles controlled by and comfortable to the child. This means that we must begin expression in the informal oral dialect of the child and only as he is ready to progress to use of the more formal and elaborate codes associated with written language. This implies that children's written language will largely be oral language put on paper, rather than written language, per se.

Not only must we consider the development of kinds and orders of discourse and the use of the language of the child in using written expression for personal growth, but it seems essential that in the exploration of any given problem that we provide for this progression from a close I - you or

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[1] See Moffett, pp. 14-59.
[2] Dixon, Growth through English, p. 17.

I - me relation of speaker-listener and in the speaker-subject relation from recording or reporting what is and has happened before it is expected that a person would fully enough control the subject to move to the I - it relation and to exposition or argumentation. This need for a progression in the exploration of a problem is, in my opinion, as essential for an adult as a child. It can be seen in our need to tell and describe to ourselves or others the happenings of an auto accident or other meaningful event.

Thus, the need for talk to precede writing in experiences utilizing creative writing for self-discovery is clear. The use of drama--what is happening, rather than what happened--can enhance the opportunity for exploration in many topics prior to writing, because it permits interaction and involvement of the whole self.

Methodology in Creative Written Expression

In order to consider the methodology of experiences in creative written expression, it is useful to consider the nature of the creative process. Most authorities define it as involving five sequential, but overlapping stages. These include the sensing of a problem or gap in completeness, followed by a period of reflection in which new perceptions are gained or developed. This stage progresses to a period of insight in which solutions to the problem or organization of the experience begins to take shape. Next the idea, solution, or organization is finalized and perfected, and lastly is communicated to or experienced by self and/or others.[1]

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[1] Refer to E. Paul Torrance, What Research Says to the Teacher: Creativity (Washington, D.C.: Department of Classroom Teachers, American Educational Research Association of the National Education Association, 1963), p. 4; and Mary Lee Marksberry, Foundations of Creativity (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1963), pp. 17-19.

While the value of non-directed writing experiences in which individuals write diaries, journals, or an any topic of importance to them is recognized; it also is important for purposes of self-discovery to initiate topics of pertinence for exploration. In this way, through preplanned experiences, perceptions can be heightened, sensory input provided, and the need to explore and express feelings created. Broad topics of significance to the experiences of the particular group of children should be selected. While research on topics of significance is lacking, literature interest studies can be utilized, since children seem to feel a need for exploration and self-expression about the same problems or topics in various modes. Knowledge of a particular group of children and recognition of their expressed concerns can provide an adequate basis for topic selection. When planning for exploration of a topic it should be broadened so that many avenues and levels of exploration are opened. This will provide input and opportunity for exploration on several levels to suit the individual needs of children. Thus, while a general topical motivation is undertaken, each child's choice of topic and form of expression remains individual.

For instructional purposes, it is helpful to consider the methodological steps which define the instructional tasks to be accomplished in a creative writing experience. I have used a five-step sequence for this purpose.[1]

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[1]Beatrice A. Furner, "Developing a Program of Instruction in Creative Writing in the Elementary School," Current Perspectives in Elementary Education (Des Moines: Iowa Elementary Principals, Iowa State Education Association, 1967), p. 51-54.

Methodological Steps in a Creative Writing Experience

1. Motivation period in which children's attention is focused on a broad topic in order to generate interest, develop a mood, and create a need to write.
2. Exchange of ideas to crystallize each child's thinking.
3. Writing period.
4. Sharing of ideas.
5. Follow-up activities, if appropriate.

The motivation step should be designed to focus children's attention on a broad topic with which they have had some experience. A need for self-expression is generated through use of stimulators involving discussion, use of literature, pictures, objects, films, records or tapes, reference to real and vicarious experiences of the children, and dramatic activity. The motivational devices should be used to heighten awarenesses, build perceptions, and to elicit response from each child. The motivators should be used as a springboard to encourage individual reaction and elaboration; not as a model or framework to be filled in.

As indicated by the double arrow, the second stage, exchanging ideas, overlaps the first. In fact, the sooner and the more frequently children can be encouraged to react personally; the more successful will be the motivational sequence in developing a need for personal exploration and expression. The use of creative dramatics as a means of exploring solutions to the problem can well provide this needed exchange. There should be a pulling together of ideas which encourages children to talk about their emerging idea in order to crystallize it enough that it is not lost in the transition to writing. Recognition of the fleeting nature of spontaneous, creative ideas underlines the importance of this exchange. Care must be taken, however, that the child does not express all of his ideas or in group dictation that consensus as to outcome does not occur. If this happens children may no further need to express and writing or dictation

may become merely a mechanical process of filling in an outline. Each child should be actively generating ideas throughout the writing process.

In the writing period young children dictate their ideas to the catalytic-scribe or, after mechanics are well enough under control, write individually. In group dictation the teacher serves as a catalytic agent, drawing out ideas and extending them by reflecting them back to the individual or the group. All responses are positively reinforced and those which seem to receive group approval and which fit the emerging story line are recorded in the child's own words. Teachers must exercise care that they do not edit as they record. If our purpose is self-discovery through language symbolism it is essential to use the child's language--not one foreign to him. Periodic rereading serves to stimulate children and to promote a sequentially developed story line. As the story nears conclusion the teachers should help children to find a satisfactory ending. The story should be reread for proofreading purposes so that children can be sure it is just as they wish it and that no errors in recording have been made. Titling can then take place.

In individual writing the teacher should during the writing period serve as a catalyst, an audience, and an aid for mechanics as requested by the children. Since talk is so basic the child may need to interact with his idea to the teacher or another child rather than to be alone with it. Provision should be made for this need. Again proofreading should be encouraged, not for mechanical perfection, but to be sure it says what I want it to say.

As creative expression began with the interaction of talk it should now return to it in the sharing period. Children should voluntarily be given the opportunity to share their solutions to the problem. A set for

creative listening in which the listener enters in imaginatively should be developed. By becoming involved in other's solutions, the creative process can be heightened for each individual. Interaction should focus on ideas and effective ways of expressing them through language, not on elements of form.

Reading of a group dictated story after a lapse of time during which a set for creative listening is developed permits the children to experience their solution, thus extending self-exploration.

If a sense of involvement in the problem is still high, children may welcome additional avenues of expression for extension of their ideas. Illustration or dramatization of the story or other solutions may provide the child with a means of extended exploration. For some children one of these modes may be more suitable than the original writing or dictation. The sharing of literature or music related to the topic may also add to the child's awareness of himself and his world in relation to the problem.

Follow-up activities of this sort should be based on the children's involvement with the topic. If a sense of completion has been achieved by them at this point in time, such activities should not be imposed.

Let us now more fully consider the contribution which creative dramatics can make as part of the motivational stages in a creative writing experience. In doing this it is helpful to consider the methodological steps in a creative dramatics experience[1] and their similarity to the stages in a creative writing experience.

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[1]Refer to descriptions in Barnes, Drama in the English Classroom, pp. 55, 59-62; Brian Way, Development through Drama (London: Longman, 1967), pp. 193-208; and Chris Curran, An Approach to Using Drama in the High Schools (unpublished Master's thesis, University of Connecticut, 1970), pp. 54.

Methodological Steps in a Creative Dramatics Experience

1. Warm-up exercises. (Preparatory physical and vocal exercises related to the topic.)
2. Individual or pair expressive activities.
3. Large group or class dramatization.
4. Reflection, discussion, and relaxation.

The first stage involves warm-up activities of an imitative and expressive form related to the topic to permit children to become involved totally, to unwind, to begin to sense the problem, and to be open to sensory input. This then evolves into pair or small group expressive activities in exploration of the topic or theme. Interaction is important here as children encounter each other and reflect off actions and reactions of others, as would be the case in a real life situation. This may then emerge into a total class activity by bringing the groups to another and relating activities of one group to another. After the improvisation or dramatization of the theme, a period for unwinding, reflecting, and considering the significance of what occured is important. The obvious similarity to the steps in a creative writing experience can be seen.

Now how can we approach creative writing through creative dramatics? In the motivational and exchange of ideas stages children can be given opportunities to respond dramatically to various sorts of sensory input. Since these stages require divergent thinking to create a sense of problem, openness, and non-completion with opportunity for exchange of emerging ideas, dramatic activity is highly appropriate since it relies on creative thought in experiencing vicariously or re-experiencing an event to determine its meaning. Initial dramatic responses can be of the warm-up type involving imitative tasks in response to some other form of stimulus.

Responses can gradually develop to be more expressive involving either individuals or small groups. As problems are explored and are generated through improvisation, the need for completion through creative expression will be developed. This need could be met through continued dramatic activity or through writing--the latter permitting individual response in a way not offered by group dramatization. Following writing in either the individual or group dictation style, dramatization of the stories, poems, or plays may naturally follow as a way of sharing or as a follow-up experience. Much of the needed warm-up for this dramatic activity will have come from the writing experience.

Such approaches have been used in the creative writing program at University Elementary School, the laboratory school at the University of Iowa.

In one instance, with second graders, a picture of a cougar looking into a car was used. Since no people were in the picture, consideration of the reasons for this and of their reactions was undertaken. Dramatization of the way the cat moved and sounded, the reactions of the people (feelings, facial expressions, sounds, and movements), and consideration of what happened provided input and created a need to explore more fully. An opening paragraph was dictated by the children, after which they wrote their ideas individually, in pairs, or small groups. They were so eager to share stories and to begin dramatization of various stories that the schedule for the remainder of the day was altered.

At the fourth grade level we have used a paragraph starter to explore the feelings of aloneness, reaction to a strange sight, and fright. The paragraphs is as follows:

Lee walked to the window to let in a little air. While raising the window, something caught Lee's eye. Lee's mouth flew open. There below the window saw the strangest thing Lee had ever seen ---

The paragraph is constructed to be very open-ended. Lee can be doing many things at the time, can be in many locations, can be male or female, and can see whatever each child desires below the window. Discussion of these possibilities will create a sense of problem and a need for self-expression, but actual dramatization involving the whole self does so more effectively, as children enact the opening of the window and the response to that strange sight below.

At the sixth grade level emotions have been explored through use of caricatures of frustration, smugness, joy, and boredom. After children react to what they think the drawings could be one rhyme is read, for example:

Smugness

Smugness
Sits upon a wall
Way up high above it all
Looking down his nose at us ---
Just before he starts to fall.

The intent of the author and illustrator to give their feelings about emotions is considered as the four poems are shared. Children's reactions are sought and they are guided to identify other emotions which they have experienced, to describe the feeling, how it sounds, looks, moves. This exchange of ideas can be intensified to create a need for self-expression by individual and/or pair dramatic activity using mime or improvisation to create the emotion. After writing children can share, illustrate, and dramatize ideas such as these written by sixth graders.

Confusion

Confusion is a mass of thought
Like the wind blowing some leaves,
They blow around and mix you up.

-- Julie

Hatred

Hatred is mostly madness,
Which often leads to sadness.
Please don't let anger turn to hate,
For oh, it is an awful fate.

-- Betsy

Misery

Misery has very long arms
That do nothing but harm.
Your only escape
is a batman cape.

-- Mike

Contributions of the Use of Creative Dramatics in Motivating Creative Writing

Not only does the use of creative dramatics make an effective contribution to the motivational stages of a given creative writing experience by providing sensory input and involving the child physically, verbally, and emotionally in the exploration of the problem; its use can aid a teacher in the development of programs of creative writing and creative dramatics for self-discovery and personal growth.

Teaching in any form of creative expression is an uncertain endeavor for teachers new to it, because of the nature of creativity. In developing

teaching techniques, the importance of the teacher beginning where comfortable is continually stressed.[1] By utilizing drama as an input for creative writing, the need to express should more fully be generated. Further, initiating creative dramatics in conjunction with experiences in creative writing can aid both teachers and children by providing a structure for initial dramatic responses, thus providing security. The move to written expression can assure opportunity for individual exploration of the problem during early stages when dramatics activity may be more outer directed by either the teacher or outgoing children than is desirable or than will be the case as teachers and children gain security in dramatic activity and as teachers develop techniques for guiding creative expression. Thus, the title creative writing through creative dramatics might easily be reversed.

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[1] Refer to Heathcote, pp. 1080-1081; Barnes, pp. 49-52; Way, pp. 8, 28-29, and 39-41; and Great Britain Department of Education and Science, Drama (Education Survey 2, London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1967), pp. 10, 13, 26-27, 34-37, and 44-45.