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It is ironic that although most English teachers consider drama to be within their curricular domain, drama is used more often as a teaching method in other disciplines. Dramatic techniques such as role playing and simulations are well documented in social studies and history, business and vocational, foreign language, counseling, and even

science classes; but according to recent reports (Applebee, 1984; Goodlad, 1984) dramatic techniques are rarely used to teach language arts classes in the U.S., especially at the secondary level. English teachers tend to relegate drama to theater courses, isolating drama techniques from most English classrooms. Yet, the literature on classroom drama suggests that there is considerable untapped potential for using drama as a teaching method.

Experts emphasize that using dramatic techniques as a teaching method is not the same thing as teaching theater. Theater is an art form which focuses on a product, a play production for an audience. Drama in the classroom--often referred to as creative dramatics to distinguish it from theater arts--is informal and focuses on the process of dramatic enactment for the sake of the learner, not an audience. Classroom drama is not learning about drama, but learning through drama. Charles Combs (1988) explains:

"While drama is informed by many of the ideas and practices of

theater art, it is principally valued as a learning medium rather than

as an art form, and is governed and validated through criteria other

than aesthetics. Informal drama's goals are based in pedagogical,

developmental and learning theory as much or more than they are arts

based; its objectives are manifold, but they are all directed toward

the growth and development of the participant rather than the

entertainment or stimulation of the observer." (p.9)

DRAMA IS A HIGHLY VALUED TEACHING TECHNIQUE

In dramatic activities, students use and examine their present knowledge in order to induce new knowledge. Bolton (1985) points out that while much school learning is an accruing of facts, drama can help students reframe their knowledge into new perspectives. Dramatic activity is a way of exploring subject matter and its relationships to self and society, a way of "making personal meaning and sense of universal, abstract, social, moral, and ethical concepts through the concrete experience of the drama." (Norman, 1981, p. 50, as quoted by Bolton, 1985, p.155)
According to Dorothy Heathcote (1983), an important value of using drama in the classroom is that "in drama the complexity of living is removed temporarily into this protected bower so that children not only can learn it and explore it, but also enjoy it." (p.701)

Heathcote also emphasizes the way drama encourages enactment of many different social roles and engages many levels, styles, and uses of language. Language is the central tool and concern for Heathcote, who notes the crucial nature of communication in society and places communication at the center of the educational system.

Other researchers and theorists also attribute many benefits to using drama in the classroom. In Dramatics and the Teaching of Literature, James Hoetker (1969) contends that drama increases creativity, originality, sensitivity, fluency, flexibility, emotional stability, cooperation, and examination of moral attitudes, while developing communication skills and appreciation of literature. Hoetker describes drama as a method of better accommodating students whose learning styles are visual or kinesthetic, of teaching critical skills, and of producing aesthetic experiences with literature.

Most of the research on drama in the classroom has been done at the primary level, where drama has been found to improve reading comprehension, persuasive writing, self concepts, and attitudes toward others (Pellegrini and Galda, 1982; Gourgey, 1984; and Wagner, 1987). In her research with high school students, Renee Clift (1983) found that students using dramatic enactment performed as well as students in traditional lecture, discussion, or seatwork modes. Moreover, they experienced more instances of higher order thinking, more topic-specific emotions, decreased apprehension, and less topic-irrelevant thought than students in the non-dramatic mode.

BENEFITS CAN BE GAINED WITH VARIED APPLICATIONS

Drama has many applications in the classroom. The teacher may work in role, as Dorothy Heathcote (1985) demonstrates, assuming for herself and her students the "mantle of the expert." With this role-playing technique, teacher and students might assume the attitudes and language of present-day scientists planning a Bronze-Age community; or they could become monks who find an ancient manuscript and must decide what should be done with it.
Whether students become the town council in "The Pied Piper" (Tarlington, 1985), government officials in Farley Mowat's "Never Cry Wolf" (Barker, 1988), or representatives of the publishing industry (Martin, 1982), teacher and students collaboratively construct their imaginary world. The gradual construction and exploration of this world results in a better and more personal understanding of the central issues being studied.

Improvisation takes many useful forms besides role playing. Theater guides like Viola Spolin's classic "Improvisation for the Theatre" (1963) provide a wealth of activities, but the most successful improvisations are those derived from the work at hand. For example, a class might dramatize what it is like to be an outsider while reading

Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" (Bailey, 1982) or might simulate being survivors on a deserted island before beginning Golding's "Lord of the Flies" (Sheehy, 1982). Catherine Hrybyk's (1983) class improvised a trial of Nora Helmer from Ibsen's "The Doll House", and Helen Sheehy's (1982) students worked in interpretive groups to enact the ways Nora might make her final exit, reflecting all they knew about Nora's character and situation.

Other techniques useful in the classroom are readers' theater and choral readings and writing and producing radio programs, television screenplays, or documentaries. Students develop both an understanding of and appreciation for literary genres and for particular works of fiction by writing scripts from fiction or writing fiction descriptions from play scenes.

Dramatic activity is a useful way to begin a piece of literature or to generate ideas for writing. Drama can encourage students to explore, clarify, and elaborate feelings, attitudes, and ideas. Because drama requires students to organize, synthesize, and articulate their ideas, it provides an excellent opportunity for reflection and evaluation at the conclusion of a unit of study.

THE TEACHER PLAYS THE ROLE OF FACILITATOR

In using drama in the classroom, the teacher becomes a facilitator rather than an authority or the source of knowledge. Hoetker (1969) warns that "the teacher who too often imposes his authority, or who conceives of drama as a kind of inductive method for arriving at preordained correct answers, will certainly vitiate the developmental values of drama and possibly its educational values as well." (p.28)
Classroom drama is most useful in exploring topics when there are no single, correct answers or interpretations, and when divergence is more interesting than conformity and truth is interpretable. As Douglas Barnes (1968) puts it, "Education should strive not for the acceptance of one voice, but for an active exploration of many voices." (p.3)

As collaborator and guide, the teacher sets the topic and starts things in motion, but the students' choices determine the course the lesson will take. The teacher encourages students to take the major responsibility for giving meaning to the curricular concepts and to communicate them through action, gesture, and dialogue. Heathcote (1983) says that the teacher and students make a journey into new territory together. Cecily O'Neill (1985) writes, "The dramatic world of educational drama is most valuable both educationally and aesthetically when its construction is shared and its meanings negotiated." (p.160)

Constructing shared, negotiated meanings requires that teachers feel secure enough to give students center stage in the classroom. Practitioners advise interested teachers to

begin by devising brief activities, to use familiar subject matter, and to resist making hasty judgments. Hoetker (1969) cautions that "development through drama is a gradual, cumulative process, and it is very uncertain what may be the developmental timetable, especially if drama is only an occasional activity." (p.29) However, with practice, teachers of English will discover that the use of drama techniques in the classroom can become a vital part of their teaching repertoire.

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