

Creativity and Drama

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CREATIVITY

The aims and objectives of drama can be distilled into one general long-term aim – drama is concerned with the development of the individual's personality to the utmost. How is one to go about this task? This paper will deal with a factor which is considered of great importance in reaching the aims and objectives of drama – creativity. Creativity for whom – children or adults? But, even before this question is determined, we must ask ourselves a prior one: What is creativity?

'Creativity signifies a specific human capacity for achievement. But what capacity? How can that be explained? Wernher von Braun, the rocket researcher, once pinned down in an interview what counts – inspiration in new ways of utilising what is already known, invented, and constructed, and in establishing new links between what already exists. What is known must be reorganised and applied in different ways. Children achieve that in play. They take the blanket from the sofa, hang it over the table, and play at 'exploring caves' between the table

legs. Everyday objects – blankets and table – have suddenly acquired a new function with assistance from imagination.’ (Kischke, 1979).

The key words in the above quotation are ‘inspiration’ and ‘imagination’. Both carry a shade of meaning that can easily be equated with what Brian Way (1977) calls ‘intuition’.

The definition of creativity implies the courage and adaptability of the child – in other words initiative. Can the child be courageous and adaptable if the average parent, for the sake of peace and tranquillity at home, represses his (the child’s) initiative through too many rules and through the common demand that orders be complied with immediately? (Slade, 1976). (App. 1).

Initiative depends largely on self-confidence – can the child remain self-confident if he is scolded and told off every time he does something ‘wrong’? Does the adult who judges peremptorily that a child’s action is ‘wrong’ ever consider the fact that it



may simply be a different way of doing or looking at things? Does the adult, who takes pride in his maturity and experience, realize that the child may have a different set of values – that he is strongly motivated by needs totally different from those of the adult?

A child’s initiative and imagination can soon disappear if they are time and again suppressed by adult prohibitions – perhaps reinforced by the threat of punishment. If there is a ban on taking the blanket from the sofa so as to prevent ‘untidiness’, pleasure in such play will not last long. Dare we, through too much insistence on ‘correctness’, (which many a time is only conventional) risk the wasting away of all the characteristics on which creativity thrives through the most cruel of deaths – undernourishment? As Sybil Marshall (1969) states about the outcomes of her research: ‘To put it simply, we found that in our adult pride and ignorance we had constantly underestimated the ability of children, and because we, the ignorant adults, were in authority, we had actually been holding back their burgeoning ability to learn and to achieve’ by forgetting that ‘their basic taste is good’ (idem) and by imposing on them a ‘fifth-rate standard of conformity’. (idem). A child used to be thought ‘creative’ if he could paint beautiful and faithfully reproductive pictures or maybe play the piano well. Through Educational Drama we realize that creativity entails much more than that. Creativity cannot be institutionalized (it *can* be, but it no longer remains ‘creativity’ for the majority of children).

Imagination *will* atrophy if it is not continuously stimulated. Children must be shown that the world is not shut off by prohibitions.

It is time for adults to reverse the current state of affairs that atrophies imagination and help the child develop through creativity.

But, again, it is important that we should not try to pigeon-hole creativity. If we equate it with such school subjects as ‘Art’ and ‘Music’ only, we will only be looking at single facets of a complex phenomenon. After all, why can’t children be creative during English and Maths for instance?

Much less can we equate creativity with what happens in the school. In fact, the educational system being what it is, it is safe to assert that much of what I would term ‘creativity’ takes place everywhere but at school. Since it involves the entire person, all the senses and the intelligence, creativity occurs wherever the personality of the child is given the minimum chance of developing.

Creativity occurs everywhere where children are playing, gathering experience, and interpreting the environment in their own fashion. This ‘theory of creativity’ is based on the view that inventiveness, originality and ability to solve problems

can receive expression in a great diversity of tasks and physical environments.

At this point, perhaps, one needs to stop and retrace one's steps, because we haven't asked ourselves or sought to reply, yet, to the most basic question. Are children capable of creativity? The answer is most definitely 'yes'. Children express their capabilities for creativity whenever they are not drilled and deprived of enthusiasm and pleasure in discovering, inventing and experiencing. Children are creative whenever they build a 'playground' in the most unlikely of places. Children are creative in finding exciting adventures where most adults expect only boredom. They are creative when they are able to unabashedly react to the ever-present stimuli of life. Most adults have long lost the flair and courage for such fun.

But creativity raises its problems and this could lead, through misunderstanding, to its suppression. Whereas 'good' children, who do not give expression to their imagination, are 'easy' children for parents and adults, the creative child is disconcerting. Parents and adults praise the child who follows the rules, respects and seems to have the values of adults (seems - or has the child been bullied into accepting them?). There is no trouble with such children, nor are there any new ideas, any fun, any surprises.

On the other hand, life is not easy for the child who asks questions, who wants to try out things, who challenges rules. The difficulty arises from the fact that adults - educationalists and parents alike - want two conflicting things at the same time. They want children to be original as well as well-adjusted and inconspicuous. They want a kind of creativity that does not upset and disturb - creativity without conflict and deviation.

But all creative thought and action is characterised by the very fact that it deviates. It is a healthy deviation from known solutions. It is a refusal to accept the idea that only traditional ideas can be uniquely correct. If parents want the easy way out, they need only train children to switch on the television set and sit quietly. Teachers need only ominously brandish a ruler (maybe use it!) and scream for the first week of school.

Creativity, on the other hand, demands a deeper commitment to children. Adults must be more informed. They must be ready to devote time and attention to them, to reassess their values in terms of those of the child.

CREATIVITY AND EDUCATIONAL DRAMA

'Civilizations are best remembered for the creative activities of those people who helped build them. If schools do not nurture creativity above all

else, civilization cannot move forward' (Shuman, 1978).

I have already said that I consider creativity as the single most important factor for Drama to reach its aims and objectives. In what follows I will be more specific - I will deal with how educational drama can help creativity develop.

Among the first steps to be taken must be a change of attitude to one in which the 'child is regarded primarily as a subject, that is, as a being who is actively involved in, and intensely curious about the process of constructing and arranging his knowledge of the world. . . .' (Morgan, 1978).

Through drama the teacher can help to awaken the potential for creativity in children who have been forced to let it 'sleep' through regimentation, fear of punishment, under-estimation and under-nourishment at home and at school. The drama teacher's task is then, in the first place, to



encourage creativity and provide opportunities for creative outbursts using what there is already:— the child's thirst for life.

This means that the child's capabilities of

imagination, and self-expression, as well as his physical senses, will be treated as 'tools' which will be sharpened by educational drama to help towards what is ultimately the main aim of education, the development of the 'whole' person. Drama proceeds from the known to the unknown. It therefore creates a point of departure by helping the child to understand himself. This is the first step towards helping him on the road towards understanding the people around him and the world.

Teaching a child to be creatively alive entails training him to receive impulses from imaginative stimuli and helping him to make these real so as to produce the necessary sensory and emotional responses. In other words, the child must become imaginative enough to enter into the make-believe world of the drama class, suspend his disbelief and yet at the same time possess sufficient self-control and concentration to sustain the effect. The closeness of educational drama to discovery through play is evident here.

Through 'free play, drama will try to develop the child's ability to use his own imagination. This can be helped through guiding in the use of the five senses - a form of imaginative experience founded on memory which is itself founded on observation (Barnfield, 1974).

There should be no inhibitions against the enterprise, for:

"Every human being is born with imagination. Unfortunately, however, in education, imagination is usually equated with 'art'; art is equated with professional practice; those children who show some degree of achievement in one or other of the arts are labelled imaginative, and the closer their work is to the accepted criteria of 'good' professional art then the more imaginative they are. The remainder are 'no good' at art, and, because imagination and art are equated, are therefore 'unimaginative'. Human dignity being the bastion that it is, the majority effortlessly accept this quality of unimaginativeness." (Way, 1977).

There are inhibitions only if one's conception of creativity is delimited and is identified with 'professional practice'. For the whole point of drama teaching is to realize that the imagination is idiosyncratic, and the great educational advantage of drama is its dramatic attitude towards the imagination.

This means that every individual imagination must be first developed in its own right before it is put through the trials of competition, comparison and criticism. There must be confidence in it.

Confidence in anything requires, naturally, a certain amount of preparedness. How are we to prepare the grounds for the development of





imagination?

Most important is the atmosphere in which practice in using each individual's potential for imagination takes place. The child must not be preoccupied with a fear of failure, nor must there be any hint of competition or comparison (Let's see who can do it best!). We must avoid comment, 'sarcastic or caustic' as Brian Way puts it. It is also important that children, perhaps at the start of their work with imagination, are not scared off by being asked to act *for* the class - there must be no audience - actor divisions which tend to reinforce all the negative aspects outlined above. Therefore such instructions as 'let me see you . . .' should be avoided. We are concerned with authenticity of reactions not with the ability of their portrayal.

