

Drama in the Singaporean Classroom

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Author Note

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Abstract

This paper investigates the use of drama as an educating tool in classrooms. By referring to case studies in Norway and a research paper on drama's impact on student's writing, I compile reasons to use drama in the classroom as well as the challenges faced. The paper is also written with Singapore's education system in mind.

Keywords: Drama in education, challenges, reasons, Singapore

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What is drama in education? Drama in education is the use of drama in the classroom to facilitate the teaching of a subject. More specifically, Cremin, Goouch, Blakemore, Goff and Macdonald (2006) had defined drama in education as “a social constructivist view of learning and employs elements of both spontaneous play and theatre in order to explore ideas, issues and themes” (p. 275). In this paper, I intend to consider Singapore’s education system as I reason why drama should be used in the classroom as well as the challenges it brings.

One reason to use drama in the classroom is the active engagement it provides for students, something overlooked in Singapore’s mostly didactic classroom. In a case study by Cremin et al. (2006), students were introduced to a drama of a boy left in the water tank and told to explore the boy’s thoughts and emotions (p. 280).

Usually disaffected writer, Rowan, was so engaged in the drama that he took charge of his own thought processes, writing a narrative with relative ease – requesting less help from the teacher – and exploring a larger variety of ideas and vocabulary (Cremin et al., 2006, p. 280). Sæbø (2009) explains this as students constructing their understanding through their individually constructed experiences of the perceived experiences (p. 285). Indeed, Rowan exemplifies the potential of drama in the classroom.

Drama should thus be implemented in classrooms as it encourages students to take charge in their learning, a higher level of thinking. Personally, I feel that such a healthy learning attitude would prove to be a value-add to the education present in Singaporean schools where students have become passive receivers of knowledge. This responsibility for one’s own education and curiosity may also prove to be an adaptive life skill for future endeavours outside the classroom.

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While in Secondary school, my English teacher found that our class had difficulty differentiating the tone of a formal letter and an informal one. Though my English teacher eventually resolved it by making us writing out two personal questions in an informal letter, drama provides another answer. Drama is also able to contextualise students' learning as seen in the research conducted by Cremin et al. (2006).

The teacher-researchers found that writing spontaneously from dramatic situations in the classroom helped the students to visualise the situation. In turn, students were able to produce writings that had "a clear sense of focus and empathy, powerful language choices, the inclusion of detail and an often emotively engaging voice" (Cremin et al., 2006, p. 279). This was evident in six year old Nathan's plea, written in the dramatic situation of a beached whale. Usually an inexperienced writer, Nathan was able to produce a writing that had a clear intent "voicing a genuine and urgent desire to help the whale" (Cremin et al., 2006, p. 286). By engaging students affectingly and cognitively (Sæbø, 2009, p. 282), Drama inspires students to create organically. A skill that is difficult to teach. It is thus useful to apply in the classroom as drama brings contexts that help facilitate the practical aspect of learning.

However, attempting to use drama to provide students with a platform to engage students actively in a dramatic context is no easy feat for the teacher. In order to yield quality works showcased in the research by Cremin et al. (2006), writing was carried out spontaneously during the drama. In addition to that, drama lessons are usually reflective in nature and students may require the teacher's "assurance and sensitivity" in response to "the learner's affective engagement" (Cremin et al., 2006, p. 288).

Sæbø (2009) further exemplified how Norwegian teachers who failed to plan effective drama lessons hindered "the potential for students to create their own experiences in related to the subject matter." (p. 287). Indeed, a lot is required of teachers who plan to use

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drama in the classroom. Seeing that teachers' lack of vocational experience and training to use drama effectively is a challenge in Norway where drama is already a part of the curriculum, it might prove more difficult for drama to be used in the classroom in Singapore where drama would be viewed as a new and foreign pedagogical tool.

Personally, I feel that drama is a bidirectional process – an active engagement between student and teacher. Hence, the fact that students have to play such a huge role in order for the lesson to progress may prove to be a challenge. As brought forth by Sæbø (2009), “students’ abilities... are the starting point for the drama and the interactions within it.” (p. 289). Though Sæbø (2009) points this out as a challenge when students are left to dramatise a scene independently, I think it could be applied to the engagement with the entire drama. For the drama lesson would not be possible if students are unwilling to think in the perspective of characters and contribute to the creative process. I foresee it to be more demanding in a Singaporean classroom where students have become conditioned to only provide the correct answers and may be less willing to provide alternative and creative answers.

In summary, drama should be used in the Singaporean classroom because of its ability to provide contextualised learning for students and enabling them to take part actively in the learning process. It is acknowledged that drama in the classroom might pose challenges to both students and teachers. However, instead of avoiding the use of drama in education, I think it could be conquered by: providing teachers the vocational skills required to plan and carry out drama activities effectively in the classroom and slowly integrating drama into the curriculum to ease students to the new learning method. Yes, it would be a long process but I think that it would be worth it in order to provide a more holistic education which would be especially beneficial to Singapore's education system.

References

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