Pathways to Innovation and Development in Education

A Collection Of Invited Essays

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CONTENTS

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Chapter 20

Development Education through Drama in Education

Céline Healy

To meet the opportunities and challenges of the world as it is now, and to be actively involved in shaping the world of the future, learners need to develop the knowledge, understanding, attitudes and skills to actively participate in the development of local and global communities (Wade, 2008). Development education is based on reflection, analysis and action at local and global levels (Kenny and O'Malley, 2002). It seeks to enable learners to make connections between their own lives and the wider world so they may be more aware of the parts we all play in causing, sustaining or preventing the inequalities that exist in the world (McMorrow, 2006). Development Education aims to develop "critical thinking skills, analytical skills, empathetic capacity and the ability to be an effective person who can take action to achieve desired development outcome" (Tormey, 2003, 2).

It is difficult to learn to become actively involved in society through transmission approaches to education. Active involvement in society necessitates learners' active involvement in the classroom. However, it is not just a matter of introducing activity into the lesson, the activities need to engage learners in the learning process enabling them to develop a deep understanding of the important ideas to be learned (Nugent, 2006). Active learning is grounded in constructivism based on the premise that knowledge is constructed rather than passively received (Fox, 2001). Learning is achieved through exploration, discovery and reflection. The social elements of learning are emphasised through co-operative action, collaborative problem-solving and sharing (Niemi, 2002). Active learning enables learners to make connections between the classroom and the world outside, between concepts, information and real-life scenarios. Development education and active learning approaches are inseparable. However, implementing active approaches to learning can pose a challenge for teachers and there is a prevailing attachment to more traditional approaches in Irish second level schools (Clarke et al, 2010; Mc Morrow, 2006; Jeffers, 2004).

This practitioner has found Drama in Education (DiE) to be a valuable methodology in development education lessons helping to create motivating, meaningful contexts for learners to examine and discuss their worlds and the worlds of others. DiE uses as its foundation the human ability to imagine and re-create the behaviour of others in different times and in

different places (Neelands, 1992). It combines elements of theatre and pedagogical approaches to enable learners to become actively involved in viewing a situation from a variety of perspectives. The focus is on problem solving and living through a particular moment in time. DiE is a means of using learners' own experience to understand the experience of other people. Learners are enabled to actively identify with imagined roles and situations in order to explore issues, events and relationships. This identification is used to allow them to look at reality through a fictional lens (Wagner, 1999). An experience is explored through the creation and examination of layers of non-linear episodes relevant to an experience or situation. These episodes cumulatively enrich and extend the fictional context and allow a situation to be viewed and analysed from different angles. Through this analysis learners are led to see the meaning of their actions and to develop a better understanding of themselves, human behaviour and the world in which they live.

DiE provides a bridge between the unfamiliar world of concepts and data and the familiar world of human experiences and endeavours. Participants feel that it is happening because the same rules as are used in real life apply. The important difference between life and the make believe life created by the DiE situation is that there is an opportunity for one problem to be faced at a time. Drama in Education helps to peel away all that is extraneous to the experience or situation being explored leaving only the meaningful for examination. Dramatising an event can isolate it, making it simpler and more understandable (O'Neill and Lambert, 1982). In real life a decision taken cannot be revised except in the long term. The DiE context creates a 'no penalty' area where learners can see how decisions taken can influence a situation and learn from this (Heathcote, 1984). In this 'no penalty' area the burden of future responsibility is taken away. Learners are enabled to examine and test out their ideas and attitudes without having to live with the consequences of the decisions they make during the course of the drama. Thus, lived through experience and reflected upon experience can be combined to lead to greater understandings (Bolton, 1986).

DiE is not about acting or re-telling stories. It does not focus on the creation of a spectacle for an external audience. It uses the process of creating drama as a means of learning and therefore does not need an external audience to give it significance (Bolton, 1979). Participants create the drama but are also audience to their own work in process. The participant part of the person and the spectator part have equal status. Built-in distancing devices enable them to be audience to their own work and to reflect on and discuss its meanings and issues raised (Heathcote, 1984). The spectator part allows participants to stand back and analyse what they are experiencing at any given moment. The participant part deals with the event in a practical manner. By becoming a 'self-spectator' the participant is making things happen and is brought to an awareness of how he/she is making them happen. This exposes the learner to why things are happening and the possibility that they could be different. By placing participants in a position of being able to make a difference to the way

things are, they are being offered a possibility to effect change. This helps facilitate a change in insight and perception.

DiE offers a means of exploring and examining experience in ways which are denied to us in real life (Fleming, 1998). There is a process of de-familiarisation as scenes are looked at afresh through the conventions of drama. Complexities are revealed through simplification as aspects of a situation are thrown into relief so that they can be scrutinised and thus enable learners to examine things as they are rather than how they might be. In this way learners are brought to realise that there are many ways of looking at the world. They can examine their's and others' ways of looking at it, and realise there is no norm. DiE works by allowing learners 'to put behaviour under a microscope', reflecting on what they learnt and articulating it for others. These skills are transferable and can help to open learners' minds, broaden their outlook and increase their general knowledge. Learners learn to examine their own and others' culture and come to realise that all culture is relative, there is no norm.

Drama in Education takes learner needs and interests as its starting point and incorporates the active learner-centred approaches that are central to development education. Using a range of teaching and learning strategies in a multi-sensory way, it supports the interaction of multiple intelligences and facilitates different modes of expression. It gives learners a voice and enables them to use it. Creating contexts where learners draw on their empathetic competence along with their analytical and critical reasoning skills, it helps them develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to engage with the world. Drama in Education has a lot to offer development education.

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