

four seasons in one day –

literacies in changing climates

Adult Literacy Conference ■ Melbourne ■ September 10-11, 2004



BEYOND WORDS 'Using Creative Communication'

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Drama and Literacy - Experiencing learning

Literacy is for the whole of life.

An effective society requires a whole range of literacies – For the family, social life, educational, institutional, the workplace and the public domain.

Literacy is happening all of the time.

Film, TV, text messages, notes, memos, e-mails, books, letters of complaint, protests, footy guides, newspapers.

Using automatic teller machines, the internet, e-mail, filling in taxation forms or understanding supermarket checkout procedures are just some of the day-to-day tasks that require people to apply their literacy and numeracy skills in diverse ways. These forms of literacies and numeracies are the new basic skills of the 21st century.

And literacy is also about having an element of confidence to interpret information, to read the meaning of words and of character.

Literacy is seeking to develop self expression, skills for practical purposes, ways to develop knowledge and to provide avenues for debate and discussion.

These are literacies that are not learnt by sitting down at a desk. These are experiential literacies.

They require confidence, and interpretation.

They require action.

They require communication.

Drama is about communication.

It is a way of education in the fullest sense .

*** Drama engages learners, communicating creatively. It is about 'experiencing' learning.**

Moving beyond words, it acknowledges students as a whole.

It gives the opportunity to use a variety of learning styles and types of learners. It is interactive, experiential learning.

Drama provides the opportunity for the communication of thoughts, feelings, ideas and actions

Most teachers are well aware that they ought to teach all four elements of language : reading, writing, speaking and listening. Often it is reading and writing that they concentrate on.

Listening and speaking are more difficult to structure - and assess!

Drama is the perfect vehicle.

Through Drama students can have ample opportunities to practice listening and speaking, which can lead to reading and writing! It can happen in a context that is real for them, rather than isolated, and teacher set

Drama...

- Gives the opportunity for students to be players not spectators in learning.
- Focuses on taking a skill and applying it
- By combining drama and literacy students are able to role play for real life. It gives the opportunity to 'rehearse' real life situations for practical purposes.
- A student who practices public speaking
- Text becomes movement and gesture. Movement and gesture becomes text.

- Through learning to use the body, facial expressions and gesture, words become alive.
- Develops Self expression
- Drama can socially contextualise language

Drama in Literacy...

- Develops self awareness
- Grows self confidence
- Promotes fluency of speech

Story : freeze frame story writing by long term unemployed men who were 'pen phobic.'

- Exploring ideas in a positive environment.
- Cooperative learning, working with others
- Learning to negotiate through language
- Requires self discipline
- Opportunities to extend tasks to developing text - play building, story writing.
- Encourages self knowledge and self respect

Drama in Literacy...

- Provides a forum for public debate.
- Drama encourages the use of sound, voice
- Example : Aboriginal learners and their work with rhetoric.
- Giving a voice to people who do not have a voice.
- Encourages co-operation and cultural awareness.
- working with others to explore and create meaning - group devising

Drama in Literacy...

- Can investigate a variety of viewpoints in a non-threatening manner eg conflict management/bullying - You Tell Me scenarios..
- Using and interpreting the language of others (verbal and non-verbal) - role plays
- Is a way to teach social awareness through role play - forum theatre

Drama brings words to life.

- drama is an innovative approach to literacy;
- drama is essentially experiential learning;
- dramatic techniques in the classroom can provide motivation, purpose, context and focus for improving literacy and oracy;
- drama can develop important creative skills for living with change.

Research

Using dramatic activities as an instructional tool in the language arts classroom is based on the principle that drama directly involves the child, and an involved child will be interested in learning (Smith, 1972). The following studies document the effectiveness of incorporating dramatic activities into the language arts curriculum.

McMaster (1998) reviewed research studies regarding the use of drama in literacy education and found that drama is an effective medium for literacy development in nine areas.

1. students development is affected through drama. Drama creates motivation for students to participate and facilitates students' responses in reading instruction.
2. dramatization is a source of scaffolding for emergent readers by providing rich background experiences for future reading.
3. dramatization leads students to develop symbolic representation, which is the same concept children require in order to understand the alphabetic principle.
4. dramatic activities provide students a meaningful environment where they can practice oral reading repeatedly to develop fluency.
5. new vocabularies presented in the drama context provide students opportunities to acquire the meanings visually, aurally, and kinesthetically.
6. drama helps students acquire the knowledge of word order, phrasing, and punctuation that contribute to the meaning of a written sentence.
7. drama activities help students read different forms of discourse, especially in familiarizing children with nonfiction.
8. students monitor their own comprehension in drama and develop effective reading strategies.
9. teachers can use drama as an assessment tool since it provides immediate feedback about students' understanding of new reading materials.

For adolescents, dramatic activities provide meaningful contexts and motivation to practice literacy use. Worthman (2002) explored the writing done by a teen theater ensemble and showed that the aesthetic activities provided adolescents opportunities to see writing as a means for communication other than solitary practice. Ferree (2001) documented how two British secondary language arts teachers engaged students with literature by producing soap operas. During the production, teachers engaged students in various language usages, spelling and writing instruction. Students were motivated to participate because they had ownership over the product. Students also had opportunities to study realistic materials, use technology, learn actively, and to collaborate with peers in the production process.

Dramatic activities also provide scaffolding for effective literacy instruction in elementary and English-as-a-second language classrooms. O'Day (2001) wrote that scaffolded play with elementary students allowed them to participate actively in their language learning. Students were motivated to organize, rewrite, discuss and perform the play.

Classroom drama clearly builds reading, writing, speaking and critical thinking skills. In her article "Situational Drama: An Alternative to Worksheets" (The Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, May, 1996), Texas High School English teacher, Melissa McQueen, describes drama as a bridge of understanding between students and the text. Adding physicality, voice and emotional value to a text shifts students from decoding to comprehension.

Many students also find that drama helps them develop the confidence essential to speaking clearly and thoughtfully in front of others. In the West Virginia field test of Career Strategies even painfully shy students had the courage to volunteer to read a part by the end of the program.

The fear factor!

When it comes to using dramatic activities in the language arts classroom, a lot of teachers are afraid of the notion of drama. They believe it to be 'acting' or 'theatre'. It's being 'on the stage.'

And what if I can't control them! What if it exposes psychological issues? Many teachers also feel that they do not have the required 'extrovert' personality to carry it off.

So how can this work?

We need to consider another way to promote the use of drama in the classroom.

There is enormous potential for drama, not only as an innovative approach to literacy but as an effective curriculum integrator and a way of engaging students particularly through emotional engagement with themes, characters and issues.

- Drama pedagogy aligns well with applied learning strategies, integrated curriculum and Rich Tasks, and is a powerful means of allowing students to actively demonstrate learning outcomes.
- In introducing drama to Literacy teachers, a knowledge of why to use to drama and when, the freedom to approach the matter from where you feel most comfortable
- It is wisest to start with small successful ideas - 5 minutes. Start from where you are at!
- Eg Creative Communication strategies - my experience - the need for a name change to workshops as the name 'drama' scared teachers off!
- We need to move from the empty vessel theory, where the teacher is the font of all knowledge. To a facilitated learning approach. Creatively engaging students in their own communities, connecting, transforming lives and learning communities.

Teaching Ideas

- Teaching sounds with the body.
- Teaching beginning, middle and end through tableau or frozen pictures.
- Ask students to move to words and their meanings eg spongy, fantastic, amiable, frilly, fudgey. Capture how you feel about the word. Talk about meanings.
- Make the shapes of vowel sounds with movement - very helpful for students learning English as a second language.
- Consider a modern version of old classics eg Macbeth.com
- Dramatizing workplace issues creates an excellent foundation for writing assignments. Once students participate in the strategies explored through drama, they have concrete images to put into written words.
- Group divided randomly into teams of four or five. The team that makes a letter, capital or small, in the smallest amount of time, gets a point
- In groups think of a five letter word and make the word with your bodies
- ABC Potpourri - my boat is loaded with a..... (something beginning with A) Continue through the alphabet and pantomiming the objects in a simple action mime.

Using drama in Literacy

- Start where you are at.
- Embed drama into the curriculum
- Experience learning..

What are the questions that you want to be asking?

I see,

I hear

I do, I understand