

CREATIVE PEDAGOGY FOR TEACHING¹

A convergence of practice and perspectives

The Power of Imagination and Creativity

Education is a process of continuous group dialogue that enables people to acquire collective knowledge necessary to bring about change and transform the society. It is a shared experience between the learners and educator; providing a democratic situation where people critically and creatively engage reality, and continuously discover ways to participate in the social action.

However, the world of education has become increasingly focused on narrow curricular objectives, standardized testing, and the prediction and control of students' learning. Such reductive focus made education too specialized, compartmentalized and fragmented. We are educating our mind but forgetting to educate our hearts and spirits. The overemphasis on knowledge and skills has led to the neglect of values, attitudes and collective aspiration – failing to develop the full potentials and capacity of the human person.

As we enter into the 21st century where higher learning and skills e.g. effective communication, digital age literacy, inventive thinking and high productivity (economic wellbeing) are considered essential tools to navigate the new world, the need for a transformative approach to education that focuses on the holistic development of the individual's faculties and capacities as human person becomes even more evident and relevant. We need an approach that allows a teaching and learning situation where it develops the intellectual, emotional, volitional powers, and faculties of both the learners and educators to become free and responsible, critical and creative, peaceful and compassionate workers and citizens of multi-diverse, multi-ethnic, multicultural world.

Imagination and creativity offer both the learners and educator possibility to actively participate in this kind of democratic group dialogue. The playful attitude and collaborative undertaking of drama/theater set the opportunity for learners to take risks, solve problems and develop new insights and reflections. As educator collaborates with the learners, drama/theater invites, uses and brings to life the learners' own ideas. They share ideas, analyze context and eventually challenge the status quo through improvisation and devising original work. As imagination and creativity are stimulated and enabled in every interaction, the learners and educator are in a journey towards making outcomes that are new and of value.

Imagination and Creativity at the Core of Drama

Drama/theater is a shared and cooperative activity which arouses the individual and collective imagination. These can be channeled into forms of artistic expression, which may be written or spoken, individually or collectively expressed. It can be used to explore and communicate personal and collective responses to different learning areas. The multi-sensory nature of drama/theater provides flexible structures to facilitate the abstracting, constructing, reconstructing

¹ Lifted from *Creative Pedagogy for Teaching: A convergence of practice and perspectives*. An in-house publication written by Cris Anthony C. Gonzales for Philippine Educational Theater Association (2010).

and communicating meaning. It gives various opportunities to the mind, body and emotions to connect and function together rather than separately, enabling the person to make all-round and interconnecting sense of their experiences.

Drama/theater provides both the learners and educator with the opportunity to experiment with ideas from the real world in an imaginary or safe setting. By assuming different roles both familiar and unfamiliar, using appropriate language and gesture, the group involved in drama/theater begins to develop their ability to empathize. It also stimulates and encourages a creative response to situations, developing original and independent thinking, opening up avenues for expression and the chance to pursue their learning in a multi-sensory environment

In recent years, there was a re-emergence of drama/theater as a vehicle for teaching creatively in the classroom and across the curriculum in most Western countries. As more educators abroad becoming aware of drama strategies as methodology, art-based strategies have increasingly integrated into educational practice outside the context of drama lessons. More teachers are becoming increasingly aware of drama as a child-friendly and 'brain friendly' medium with an established framework and methodology that supports the teaching of thinking.

It is accepted and recognized that drama/theater is an effective teaching and learning medium. It is a tool for developing personal, social and emotional development. As an inclusive, social, group activity that invites emotional engagement, it helps the learners to establish positive and mutually supportive relationships in small and large group's situations. It uses the learners own ideas, there by allowing them to develop their own interests within the drama frame – raising their self-esteem and self-image. Drama/theater is also a medium for developing communication, language and literacy. It provides powerful contexts for speaking and listening; provides opportunities for the learners to communicate their thoughts, ideas and feelings. The use and interpretation of verbal and non-verbal communication in drama provides a means of understanding symbolism and the juxtaposition of words and silence. It supports and promotes a literate imaginative environment which makes connections between reading and writing enabling the learners to begin to understand their real purpose to convey meaning.

Drama/theater is also a medium for developing knowledge and understanding of the world. It offers imaginary worlds within which the learners are supported to understand and make sense of the real world from within a distanced and safe context. It provides distanced, powerful 'as if' experiences which encourages shared exploration, problem-solving and prediction and critical thinking; and sharpens learner's awareness of the real world and its cultural diversity.

The mathematical development of learners is also supported in the drama experience by enabling abstract concepts to be given a visual and tactile form. The experience can help develop mathematical understanding through enjoyable engaging dramatic play and imagined drama contexts. Drama/theater is also used for physical development as it generates ideas and develops concepts which can then be expressed through physical movement as an aesthetic art form. It helps children to access, develop and consolidate ideas and concepts kinesthetically through linking thought, action and movement. It also gives engaging and motivating contexts for responsive, controlled, devised and expressive movement individually and in groups.

Finally, drama/theater is a medium for creative development. It provides a responsive multi-sensory learning environment within which the learners are able to go through a process of making connections, generating original ideas, solving problems together, playing with and expressing ideas and feelings through a variety of teacher-fashioned forms and representations. It encourages, values and fosters creativity, originality and multi-sensory expression; and provides

opportunities to work creatively alongside adults as fellow artists functioning as supportive creative models and facilitators of the learners' own creativity. As audience /participants, the learners are guided by teachers to recognize and appreciate the aesthetic qualities of their work and the work of others. Drama/theater involves the development of drama skills, knowledge and understanding to inform and enhance future creations. It becomes a forum for constructing, deconstructing and recreating ideas with everybody's ideas valued and accepted

The Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA) firmly believes in the power of drama/theater in enhancing the learning and teaching situation into a creative, safe and child-friendly context. PETA promotes a process-centered approach to education that provides an authentic mirroring of real life learning where new problems are synthesized through structures and methods formulated to enable effective discovery. It adheres to the values and principles enshrined in the Philippine constitution of fostering patriotism and nationalism, accelerating social progress and promoting human liberation and development. The creative pedagogy aims to transform the learning and teaching experience – enabling the teachers and education institutions to inspire patriotism and nationalism, foster love for humanity, respect for human rights and dignity, appreciation of the role of national heroes in the historical development of the country, teach the rights and duties of citizenship, strengthen ethical and spiritual values, develop moral character and personal discipline, encourage critical and creative thinking among learners.

Indeed, by defining Theater-in-Education as one of the institutional thrusts of PETA, the company hopes to strengthen its curriculum for the school teachers – empowering the 'managers of the learning process' as key partners in pursuing a creative and participatory, interactive and integrative, transformative and culture-based education towards developing the full potential of the human person.