

Solving Problems thru
Voice & Body
Leads

Rationale and Definitions

contrast to drama as a *product*, a finished, polished production for an audience. Many teachers in the creative drama tradition use theater games or acting exercises to stimulate improvisation. The originator of many of these games is Viola Spolin ([1963], 1985), who developed improvisational acting exercises for adults and children that challenge participants to concentrate upon solving a problem in a group activity limited by rules. Spolin explicitly connects the techniques of theater to the techniques of play, seeing playing a role as a sort of vacation from the everyday self and the routine of everyday living. This creates a psychological freedom that releases potential and spontaneity.

Yes

Children bring with them to the classroom the universal human ability to play, to behave "as if"; many children spontaneously engage in such dramatic play from as young an age as ten months. "The taking on of dramatic roles, the dramatic encounter with new situations and with new possibilities of the self," John Dixon ([1967] 1975, 38) says, "is not something we teach children but something they bring to school for us to help them develop." Drama in education teachers recognize and value this universal ability children bring to the classroom and use it as an educational resource. Children have an opportunity to play with various options of behavior, generating a series of possibilities and reflecting on the consequences—all without ever having to experience the results of their actions as they do in real life.

Done

Drama is powerful because its unique balance of thought and feeling makes learning exciting, challenging, relevant to real-life concerns, and enjoyable. Participants work imaginatively in role to construct contexts and events. In the process they learn to build a collective belief in the imagined situation and to explore issues, alternate courses of action, relationships among people, and the emotional subtext of encounters with others. This type of drama is a mode of interpretive thinking. The drama is generated through a perceived need to explore a problem or a dilemma and thus serves a heuristic function in the development of social and rhetorical skill. Participants are testing hypotheses, inviting supposition, and experiencing the art of logical argument. As participants experience the perspectives of various roles, they not only see the world from other viewpoints and develop empathy but they also enlarge their understandings.

Goal

Goal

OK

OK

Yes

word:
heuristic

Viola Spolin (1963)

VO is a short story with meaning, with the word
Educational Drama and Language Arts: What Research Shows by Betty Jane Wagner

Solving Problems thru Voice & Body
+ Readings

Participants in a drama are instrumental in creating the event. They are at the same time playwrights, actors, audience, and critics. When they stop the drama to assess its effectiveness, they reflect on the implications of their actions. Because the classroom atmosphere is one of exploration, of "playing" with alternative courses of action, with generating a range of possibilities, participants are less likely to reach premature closure or quick solutions. In their effort to understand or make sense of a certain imagined situation, they have to use all their previous knowledge and experience—physical, cognitive, intuitive, and emotional. Often students discover responses in themselves that are unexpected and more mature than they realized they could generate.

Drama is a mental state. "The essential nature of the dramatic medium is a liberating act of imagination, . . . a dual consciousness in which the real and fictional worlds are held together in the mind" (O'Neill 1995, 159). Because profound learning is that which fuses both thinking and feeling, the lessons children take from drama in education are likely to stay with them. They are assimilating material in a way that is natural and relevant (Rice and Sisk 1980).

Rice 25, 58

Rationale for This Book

We hope this book will encourage school leaders who do not as yet advocate or implement drama programs in their schools to do so. As Stewig's (1986a) interviews with building principals in eight metropolitan school districts revealed, informal classroom drama was not widely used in the 1980s on a regular (more than once a month) basis. Many of the principals were not aware of the differences between informal classroom drama and the more traditional scripted plays. Since most school districts do not have a team of drama specialists, the future of drama in the classroom lies increasingly with regular classroom teachers, most of whom have never had even a course in educational drama.

Even more disturbing is the fact that of the 150 schools chosen by the National Council of Teachers of English (from among 700 applications), to be named as Centers of Excellence for the quality of their language arts programs, only 4 mentioned *drama* specifically in contrast to 38 that included the word *writing*. On the

Children are active meaning makers both in their play and in their work. They make guesses as to how things work, and they test out those guesses. Then they express the understandings they have constructed in symbols—in gestures first, then in oral utterances, drawings, and, finally, in written language. In other words, learners are active, goal-oriented, hypothesis-generating symbol manipulators.

The Role of Gesture

Let's go back to the beginning. Our first experiences both before and after birth were centered in our bodies. As newborns, we knew when we were hungry, dry, comfortable, held in strong and loving arms. Even then, we were aware of language—not as a system that encodes meanings, but as a phenomenon of consummate interest. Words surrounded us, but they were not a predominant way of knowing. As an infant, every part of our body was engaged in making sense of our world—in constructing meaning.

Before we could talk, we used gestures to communicate. Dr. William Condon of Boston videotaped infants in a maternity ward. He found that the seemingly random first movements of the neonates, even in the first twelve to twenty-four hours of life, were, in fact, synchronized with the breaks in the adult speech around them. It was as if the infants were "talking" with body movements. This study has since been confirmed in neonatal studies in other countries. Infants all over the world move, gesturing with their arms and legs in the gaps between the language that surrounds them. It is as if they are taking a conversational turn. When the nurses or their mothers talk to them, the babies lie still; when the adults stop talking, the infants move. Even when the nurses are talking with each other and not to the newborns, the babies stop moving as if to better attend to the language they do not yet understand (Emig 1983, 137).

Thus, movement and gesture, even before vocalization, may well be the seeds of conversation. Gesture is the shoot from which writing grows. We start by gesturing as if writing in the air; our gestures are signs and symbols just as our later pictures and writings on paper are also signs and symbols.

child's weakness; in order to imagine a horse, he needs to define his actions by means of using the horse in the stick as the pivot. (97-98)

Gesture then leads to symbolic play, and because it is done with the hand it also leads to drawing. The first drawings of children are not representational; rather they are metaphorical symbols. (This circle stands for a face.) Most young children go through the familiar stage of drawing tadpole people. These simple drawings are not representations of the real people they see. Instead, they are simply shorthand symbols. Arms and legs are just sticks attached to a circle. As Howard Gardner (1980a) puts it, their early pictures "stand for the entire class or represent an ideal type, instead of depicting particulars that can be identified and then paired up with their realization in the 'real world'" (65). Young children are using simple symbols to create imagined possible worlds (Bruner 1986a). Thus, both symbolic play and drama are ways of saying, "This stands for that." Both are developments from gesture, and like it, they are symbolic acts.

Vygotsky found that children do not understand a task first and then do it, but rather they seem to want to do the task and then try to understand it. The dialectical relationship between thought, action, and what we call meaning making (the relation between goal-directedness and specific behaviors) appears to be wholly consistent with Vygotsky's claim that learning leads development because of the ZPD. Because play is self-sponsored and goal directed, children's greatest self-control occurs in play (1978, 99).

Vygotsky emphasized the fundamentally social nature of human activity, including learning and development. He demonstrated empirically that higher psychological processes, while eventually internalized, never lose their socialness. "Moreover," he noted, "everyday life situations are marked by the continual collective creation of task environments for cognitive activities to occur" (Newman and Holzman 1993, 71).

According to Newman and Holzman, "Vygotsky is frequently criticized for not paying attention to affective factors" (78). This is because "he did not view affect as separable from intellect. Furthermore, . . . he provided a sophisticated critique of Piaget and Freud for making just this separation" (78). Vygotsky's unity of

intellect and emotion is the clue to the meaning Vygotsky gives to the social. "He stated more than once that all higher mental functions are internalized social relationships" (Newman and Holzman, 78). Because spontaneous dramatic play on the part of preschoolers, and teacher-led drama in the classroom are both powerfully social acts and both engage the intellect and the emotions, they are activities that vigorously engage children in learning in their ZPD. Vygotsky saw such social activities as particularly critical for what he termed "retarded" children; they need pressure toward abstraction, not low-level learning, lest they get locked into concrete thinking. He would be appalled by the focus on low-level skills that characterizes so much of our contemporary curriculum for the learning disabled. They are precisely the group that most needs drama; they also need to work in collaborative heterogeneous groups. Both drama and collaboration foster the children's creating ZPDs for each other.

Enactive, Iconic, and Symbolic Representations

Jerome Bruner (1961) claims that there are three major ways human beings represent and deal with reality:

1. enactive
2. iconic
3. symbolic or representational

Enactive representation is with the hand, iconic with the eye, and symbolic with the brain. In enactive knowing we learn "by doing," by experiencing with our body. Iconic knowing is knowing through an image—either in the mind, in drawing, or in gesture. Symbolic knowing encompasses translation into language.

Enactive Representation

Bruner's (1966) theory of development is that the child advances from the motor or sensory (enactive) representation to relatively concrete images (iconic) and, finally, to abstract representation (symbolic). Any theory of instruction must be congruent with the theory of development to which it subscribes. The best instruction

is that which structures knowledge so it can most readily be grasped by the learner (Bruner 1966, 40–42). Drama, because it is always in part enactive, can thus engage even preschoolers.

We can easily see, however, that drama is not just enactive. It involves all three kinds of representation. Role players use their bodies, create images in their minds, and use language to symbolize experience. However, drama is not unique in this way. Literacy also involves these three kinds of knowing.

Let's look now at reading and writing. Even these two primarily verbal experiences have enactive and iconic elements. Reading on first sight seems the opposite of enactive. It is a quiet engagement with written symbols. I was led to rethink this perception about reading on the basis of Deborah G. Jacque's teacher research (1993). She read *The Judge*³ five times to her kindergarten students, and she videotaped the first and last sessions. What she discovered was that during the first reading, when the children had difficulty understanding the story, they sat very quietly. Their excitement and questions increased with each reading, and, interestingly enough, by the final reading, there was a marked increase in body movements to convey the meanings of the story. She noted, "For example, [two children] acted out 'closer day by day' together, children acted out the meaning of scoundrel with killing hand motions, and [one boy] physically hid his body from the horrible thing as it appeared behind the judge." The story reads:

Its eyes are scary,
Its tail is hairy,
Its paws have claws,
It snaps its jaws.
I tell you judge we all better pray!

The first time the children heard these lines they just sat there. By the time it was read the fifth time, they "were actively using their bodies to create their unique and shared meanings of this text" (Jacque 1993, 51). In Bruner's terms, they were experiencing the story enactively.

Reading for older students may not seem to engage their bodies. Certainly most of them read with only very minimal bodily movements, but their understanding depends on the enactive

knowing, even if the kinesthetic experience is only remembered. A good line of poetry can propel us instantly to enactive knowing. Our bodies respond as we hear the words. Take, for example, Robert Frost's familiar lines, which can catapult us to the "doing" of a walk. Watch what happens as you read these lines from "Birches":

... life is too much like a pathless wood
Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs
Broken across it, and one eye is weeping
From a twig's having lashed across it open.

I can hardly read those lines without wincing, or at least blinking. In other words, like Jacque's kindergartners, I respond to the words with my body. We know through our skins and our bones. Without a real walk in his New England woods, Frost would never have been able to role play it along the trail of his memory and translate that enactive knowing into words.

Or take Keats' "Ode on Melancholy," where he points out that sadness is found in the moments of greatest joy or pleasure. As he puts it,

... Veiled Melancholy has her sovran shrine,
Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue
Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine,
His soul shall taste the sadness of her might.

Did you feel a tightness in your tongue as you read those lines? Reading can be an enactive experience.

It seems more obvious that writing is enactive since it is done with the hand rather than with the comparatively immobile eyes. As I discussed under the heading of symbolic representation, the act of writing, according to Vygotsky, is rooted in gesture.

Iconic Representation

Iconic representation is knowing through images. Like role playing, drawing stems from gesture. It is gesture crystallized. In a *tableau vivant*, or frozen picture in a drawing, an image is created.

But drawing or drama are not alone in this. Without imaging in our minds, we cannot read or write. So like enactive representation, iconic knowing is not unique to drama.

Readers engage in iconic knowing as they translate words into pictures. Read this line by the cowboy poet Tim Henderson, "When the live oaks make witch fingers on a red Comanche moon." Can you see the image? Words lead to iconic knowing. Not only do we see the night sky, but the witch fingers tells us the time of year. Live oaks only become witches when the leaves have fallen near Halloween. We also have in that line a sense of place. The Comanches once roamed the great southwestern plains of the United States. "When the live oaks make witch fingers on a red Comanche moon." Writing too is dependent on iconic representation. The challenge especially for the fiction writer and poet is in large part to create pictures.

Symbolic Representation

Both dramatic play and drawing are ways children enter imaginatively into their worlds and engage in what Vygotsky terms *first order symbolism*. Because dramatic play and drawing are ways of saying *this* stands for *that*, Vygotsky sees both as a precursor to writing. Both are symbolic acts. It is just a step from this to using letters symbolically. Writing, like dramatic play and drawing, is an act of symbolizing, and like drama and drawing, it has its roots in gesture. Writing is simply an extension of gesture and drawing. It is putting onto a page something that stands for something else.

The first letters children write are symbols for whole words or objects, just as pictures are. They are ideographs like Egyptian hieroglyphics. Thus, a little girl in Argentina will write a large capital *M* to stand for Mama and a small capital *m* to stand for herself, Maria (Ferreiro and Teberosky 1982). The size of the letter symbolizes the relative size of the persons. Maria is using letters as what Vygotsky terms *first-order* symbols. This *M* stands for this person, so she is using it as she would a picture; she is still at the drawing stage. The tadpole people and the alphabet letters are interchangeable because they are both first-order symbols for the persons they

Chapter 3

Oral Language

Oral language is commonly held to be the seedbed for later growth in literacy. Drama has been advocated as a way to develop not only oral language facility and the acquisition of standard dialect, but reading and writing as well.¹ Both observational and empirical studies appear to support these claims.

Analysis of Language Functions and Features

Heathcote believes drama activities can reveal and stimulate many styles and levels of language that traditional classroom instruction cannot and does not provide (Wagner 1976). Children enter school with patterns of thinking and communicating that characterize their out-of-school world (Verriour 1986). In school these patterns of language and the contexts in which they are embedded can be accessed and then used as a springboard for more abstract and extended levels of thinking and the language that forges it. Verriour suggested that the school environment should not merely reflect and reinforce the existing patterns of thought and language. He pointed out that informal classroom drama can offer a range of different language contexts and modes of expression that are effective in enhancing language growth. Several studies show that it does just this.²

According to Galda and Pellegrini (1985), "The language used in play is similar to more formal, literate uses of language required of children in school" (vii). This claim echoes the more general one by Scollon and Scollon (1981) that children in Western literate

societies are inevitably influenced to use language in ways that are shaped by the "essayist" rather than an oral cultural tradition.

Byron (1986) points out that dramatic experience enhances oral language development as children recast their vocabulary and speech patterns to suit the roles they assume and to accommodate the listeners whom they address within imagined contexts. He notes, "The language must feel right if the drama is to feel right" (131). For example, when a group of villagers in a drama want to appeal to the king against a royal edict requiring the destruction of their homes, they are "compelled by the logic of the drama" to attend to the following concerns:

Audience—What is likely to move the King?

Content—What arguments do we use?

Tone—Should we appeal through logic or feeling?

Vocabulary—What words capture our meaning best?

Style—Do we use the language of the King's edict? (132)

Drama allows students to balance the informational, expressive, and interactional modes of language. As students play different roles, they learn how to communicate across various modes or language types. As they are pressed to use language in ways that are quite different from everyday language, they extend the range of their language registers and styles (Nelson 1988). Informal drama featuring Heathcote's teacher-in-role and mantle-of-the-expert strategies is a powerful scaffolding device not only for normal children but also for severe to profound hearing-impaired students (Manley 1996).

Children speak differently depending on whether they are talking to a younger sibling or to a parent, and they also speak differently depending on the setting: For example, a church calls for a different language register than a baseball game (Heinig 1977). Drama provides children with experiences that enhance their ability to judge the appropriateness of verbal and nonverbal communication strategies for a wide variety of imagined experiences. This experience raises their level of social cognition.

Drama also provides opportunities for children to use language for a wider range of purposes than is typical in classrooms (Felton, Little, Parsons and Schaffner 1984; J. Carroll 1988). There is a higher incidence of interactional and expressive talk compared to the high incidence of informational talk in traditional classrooms. Interactional talk focuses on people (rather than things) and expressive talk focuses on feeling and thinking in contrast to informational talk that is chronological and concrete.

In a study of eleven fifth- and sixth-grade classes, word samples of 45 to 85 words each of children's talk were selected from each drama session over two terms. Schaffner (as reported by Wilkinson 1988) analyzed these using Graham Little's (1984) method, categorizing them according to context, audience, purpose, content, abstraction, time sense, and sequencing. He found experiential drama had the following positive effects:

- greater use of language for a wide variety of purposes
- more frequent opportunity for otherwise rarely used expressed language
- greater use of abstract thinking and language evolving from expressive language
- greater understanding of language as a powerful tool enabling its user to "act upon" rather than "be acted upon." (Wilkinson 1988, 12)

During a drama, children's language about human concerns predominated. It was more abstract and generalized than language at other times. The children's learning was enhanced by the opportunities they had to reflect on their actions.

Carroll (1988) examined and classified oral discourse in role in drama-in-education primary classes in primary school. "In-role" discourse is some 20 percent more focused on societal concerns and less on material facts, in contrast to traditional classroom discourse. Drama enabled teachers to shift from centrally teacher-controlled discourse "to a more flexible context, which in turn allowed a greater range of classroom verbal initiatives on the part of the pupils" (422). Carroll also found that cognitive and affective responses are inseparable in the intellectual development of primary children.

Genishi and Di Paolo (1982) examined 189 arguments among three- to five-year-olds in a preschool classroom. Many of these concerned who should play which role in dramatic play, suggesting that preschoolers invest a great deal of importance in drama. The findings of studies of school-age children (Mitchell-Kernan and Kernan 1977) also show that even at ages seven through twelve, in role-playing tasks with puppets, children use requests and responses to them to "define reaffirm, challenge, manipulate, and redefine relative status and rank" (Wilkinson 1984, 149).

When children engage in dramatic play, they contextualize events by dissociating them from the immediate classroom context within which the play is actually happening (Wolf and Pusch 1985). They sustain the imagined text in much the same way they will need to sustain a fictional context unrelated to the actual one when they listen to a story being read aloud. Wolf and Pusch concluded from their observational study: "There is a remarkable similarity between these five-year-olds' oral narratives and the written texts they will soon work on reading and writing" (75).

Benson (1990) studied the narratives four- and five-year-old children created in play and storytelling settings to determine how "they organized the events of a narrative; how event representation in play was related to narrative structure; how they handled internal states of characters; and how they used some of the more formal conventions associated with stories, such as beginning and ending markers, and the use of the third person past tense" (259). As predicted, actions were dominant in the narratives of four-year-olds, whereas language became dominant among the five-year-olds. The best narratives of the four-year-olds were sequential, but 38 percent of the five-year-olds produced plotted narratives. The stories the children acted out were similar to the structure of their narratives in storytelling. Sixty-eight percent of the children included information about the internal state of the characters. Benson concludes that dramatic play facilitates storytelling.

Metacommunication

One thing seems certain: Even preschoolers are able to negotiate meanings during dramatic play in a highly sophisticated way, using metacommunication (communication about communication)