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Philosophical Perspectives on Dramatic Art

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When participants really do this and keep focused on solving the problem at hand, their natural differences and strengths arise. If any one person tries to dominate, equal sharing is hampered or destroyed. And conversely, when all participants work cooperatively, everyone has the opportunity to be heard and to try a range of responses.

What about our own awareness? The class I described occurred over twenty years ago. I say that gender was not an issue. But perhaps it was. I know my awareness of gender issues has increased since the mid-seventies. Our self-images often catch us up short. Naturally I think of myself as an open, sensitive person without strong biases—until I remember something I said, wrote, or did ten years ago that now makes me feel ashamed. So surely I am making mistakes today that will make me cringe ten or twenty years from now. But we can't give up or stop trying. And that's not just pep talk. If solving the problem of gender bias were not a process as dynamic as drama itself, it would be too boring to stimulate or to hold our interest.

What has been surprisingly easy and tremendously affirming has been the discovery that most major philosophers of education consider the arts in general—and, dramatic art in particular—essential to the curriculum. References to drama can be found in the writings of rational humanists, essentialists, progressivists, critical theorists, and economic reconstructionists, to name a few. What these writers mean by dramatic art differs, of course, and by experiencing these differences, future teachers can begin to articulate compelling visions of how best to educate young people and to expand their repertoire of drama strategies. Hopefully, many set off on the life-long journey of developing their own philosophies of education as well.

To understand progressivism, students read John Dewey's most succinct (yet densely written) treatise, *Experience and Education*, not easy reading for undergraduates especially. This work contributes to the theoretical grounding of "learning through experience" (19), acknowledged by drama educators since the early part of this century. Through good old-fashioned lecture, I draw out for students how radically different Dewey's approach to education was in the early twentieth century compared with those who preceded him. I share Dewey's earlier writings, specifically passages from *Democracy and Education*, in which he calls for schools that employ "a large variety of shared undertakings and experiences" (84). Further, he writes, "Literature and the fine arts are of peculiar value because they represent appreciation at its best—a heightened realization of meaning through selection and concentration" (249). Contrary to popular opinion, Dewey did not strictly favor improvisational approaches to drama; he also recommended freely using "dramatizations, plays, and games" (161–162). Then, in my education foundations class, we do exactly that.

After leading students through warm-up exercises, I ask them to create improvisations in small groups, in which they solve any number of dramatic prob-

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As a teacher educator I have the dual goals of helping pre-service teachers in foundations courses understand philosophical approaches to education, as well as helping them gain an awareness of the purpose and rationale for arts in the curriculum. I achieve these goals by approaching them simultaneously. While discussing all the fine arts, I focus on exploring philosophy through dramatic art because my background and interests lie in theatre, and because I believe that drama is the most accessible of the fine arts. By facilitating drama experiences in foundations of education courses, students gain an understanding of the philosophies of education as well as multiple perspectives of dramatic art by learning through experience.

Philosophical Perspectives on Dramatic Art
PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES ON DRAMATIC ART

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Having spent the better part of the semester reading about and experiencing the pedagogical implications of major philosophies of education through drama, we turn our attention to issues and ideologies of the 1990s. Jonathan Kozol, an educational activist and reformer, exemplifies the view that school reform is not possible until the economic reconstruction of schools takes place. In *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*, he protests the colossal injustice of economic inequalities by describing underfunded and neglected schools in selected cities across the United States. Although he does not provide a theory for drama in the schools, one poignant interview in his book offers a glimpse into the role theatre can play in the most destitute of circumstances.

While investigating a "landscape of hopelessness" in the South Bronx, Kozol interviewed Jack Forman, head of the English department at Morris High, who explained why theatre was in his school's curriculum:

I have strong feelings about getting past the basics. Too many schools are stripping down the curriculum to meet the pressure for success on tests that measure only minimal skills. That's why I teach a theatre course. Students who don't respond to ordinary classes may surprise us, and surprise themselves, when they are asked to step out on stage. I have a student, Carlos, who had dropped out once and then returned. He had no confidence in his ability. Then he began to act. He memorized the part of Pyramus. Then he played Sebastian in *The Tempest*. He had a photographic memory. Amazingly, he will graduate, I hope, this June. . . . Now, if we didn't have that theatre program, you have got to ask if Carlos would have stayed in school. (101-102)

Clearly, an encounter with a theatre production has the potential to emancipate students who may not participate in their own educations in any other areas. For example, having spent the better part of the semester reading about and experiencing various lands of role-play, for example, memorizing parts for drama productions will allow students to "get the feel" of speaking Standard English while not under the threat of correction. . . . Playing a role eliminates the possibility of implying that the child's language is inadequate, and suggests, instead that different language forms are appropriate in different contexts. (53)

Requiring students to memorize anything has been a questionable practice in the
(1) The use of certain words in writing, such as "perception," "understanding," and "interpretation," can significantly affect how a reader perceives a text. For example, using technical jargon can make a text more difficult to understand, while using more familiar language can make it easier. However, it is important to strike a balance between using terms that are too specific and those that are too generic.

(2) The use of visual aids, such as diagrams and charts, can also help to clarify complex ideas. However, it is important to ensure that these aids are relevant and do not distract from the main message of the text.

(3) The use of color and typography can also affect how a reader perceives a text. For example, using bold or italicized text can draw attention to important points, while using too many colors or fonts can make a text look unprofessional.

In summary, the use of language, visual aids, and design elements can all affect how a reader perceives a text. By carefully considering these factors, writers can ensure that their ideas are communicated effectively.