

THE ADVANTAGES OF USING DRAMA AS A METHOD OF EDUCATION IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT: This article discusses the advantages of using drama as a method of education in elementary schools. The article consists of five main parts: definition of drama, drama in education, the advantages of using drama in elementary schools, current situation and recommendations. The first part can be divided into two sub-groups: the importance of drama and forms of drama. The second part deals with drama in schools in general and drama in elementary schools. In the third part the advantages of using drama in elementary schools are discussed. One of them is self actualization and the other one is personal or emotional development. In the fourth part is current situation in drama. Finally the last part is recommendations.

KEY WORDS: Drama, elementary school, advantages of using drama, method.

ÖZET : Bu makalede ilkökulda bir yöntem olarak dramanın kullanılmasının avantajları tartışılmaktadır. Makale beş ana bölümden oluşmaktadır: dramanın tanımı, eğitimde drama, ilkökulda dramanın kullanılmasının avantajları ve öneriler. Birinci bölüm iki alt bölümden oluşmaktadır: dramanın önemi ve dramanın biçimleri. İkinci bölüm genel olarak okullardaki drama ile ilgilidir. Üçüncü bölümde ilkökulda dramayı kullanmanın avantajları tartışılmaktadır. Bunlardan biri kendini gerçekleştirme diğeri ise bireysel ya da duygusal gelişmedir. Dördüncü bölüm dramada günümüzdeki durumdur. Son bölüm ise önerilerdir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Drama, ilkökul, dramayı kullanmanın avantajları, yöntem.

1. Definition of Drama

Drama is the most significant model of learning and is a basic activity for learning. It is the way of helping children to think about their individual or social problems. Children can learn to explore issues, events and connections, by means of drama. In drama, children draw on their knowledge and experience of the real world in order to create a make-believe world [1]. Thus, drama is one of the few areas of the curriculum which is built on dreams and voices.

1.1. The Importance of Drama

Drama is the centre of existence; because, it is a valuable form of communication. Drama provides children with an opportunity to work together cooperatively on a shared life. As a result, it gives children the change to express themselves more effectively in everyday situations [2].

Moreover, drama encourages children to learn how to influence others and how to put themselves in other people's shoes. This activity is thought to have educational value. Some people claim that trying to be in someone else's shoes and to imagine in certain situations gives a physical, visual and immediate experience or discussing the same things [3].

1.2. Forms of Drama

Dramatic forms are inclusive of all other educational and arts forms. That is, in dramatic activity can be employed language, music, dance and movement. There are two main categories of dramatic forms: play and improvisation.

1.2.1. Play is unplanned. It is the prerogative of children and it differs from work [4]. Through play children learn to get on with others and to find out how they stand in relation to others. In fact, children's play is purposive and requires considerable effort [5]. It is the only and the natural vehicle through which they learn about themselves and the world. Drama is similar to play in that it is useful in developing play so that children can extend themselves creatively and constructively [6]. With drama and play children ought to be able to express and communicate their feelings and understandings in their own ways [7]. However, their response is not only personalised in drama, it is basically social.

1.2.2. Improvisation is a form of dramatic play which has a regular shape. It is known to be a form of representation and is acknowledged by the actors to be clearly separated from life. In education, this form can be called child drama or creative drama or similar terms can be used. Dramatic improvisation followed by reflection gives children practice in reasoning and acknowledging [8]. Furthermore, it may help children to find drama very attractive because

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they can respond in a natural way during their play activities. It also provides emotional content in their socialization [9].

According to Courtney, play and improvisation symbolize the real life situations which children experience. They understand the essence of human experience within focused meaning and collaboration in which ideas are mutually explored [10].

2. Drama in Education

Education, which is the process of helping people to find essential meanings in life, involves both teaching and learning. To this end, drama can be useful for learning in the curriculum. Therefore, education and drama are similar in that they are closely linked in the learning process and they deal with children.

Traditional education may be summed up the center as curriculum centred outside the child. However, the new movement in education, which has introduced the concept of child centered education, is combined with children's play. It is a fact that the meaning of child centered education is deemed close to children's play rather than subject centered education [11]. Moreover, drama is seen as the "play way" to education. Both imagination and play are inherent parts of effective education. Thus, drama is a vital part of education in schools [12].

2.1. Drama in Schools

The school is a form of community in which everything concentrates on helping a child to share in the inherited resources of the race. When children first enter school, most are faced with an environment where learning is more cognitively and emotionally demanding than that experienced in the home [13]. At the moment the teacher, who is knowledgeable about children's difficulties, should find drama models to relieve them. While using drama for relaxing meaning, students can interpret their own feelings, learn to work together in a conducive environment which permits them to solve problems creatively. These activities, which are the most important aspect of natural learning in education, have different views concerning their use in schools.

2.1.1. Views of Drama in Schools: There are some views concerning drama in schools. According to Lynn McGregor, educational drama can be classified into two groups: learning through drama and envisaging drama [14].

The first group of drama emphasises the exploration of issues and people through drama. It is an exploration, which involves both the teacher and child, resulting in discussion of the issues involved. It can

be used as a method to teach particular subjects, such as history or social studies.

The second group of drama is envisaging drama as an art form in its own right. It places responsibility on children to work on the stimuli given by the teacher. Usually the teacher plays a relatively passive role. This activity means that children have to produce ideas, decide among themselves how to put them together and then create a scene with its own characters.

According to Dorothy Heathcote, all dramatic activities can be located on a continuum, from the most classic or highly stylized, to the most domestic or casual [15]. A new dimension of experience in drama can be very quickly reached by shifting from one place on this continuum to another.

The classic mode requires great concentration and control so it seems difficult as a way into drama. Yet, the domestic mode looks easier, it is casual and similar to everyday human relationship. For this reason, a teacher selects the appropriate kind of drama on the basis of needs of the class which is important in the present circumstances [16].

2.1.2. Common Characteristics of Using Drama in Education: There are plenty of properties of drama but the common characteristics of using drama in education are as follows [17]:

- Imagination and creativity: The concepts of imagination and creativity could be said to be essential ingredients in drama. These are usually focussed on understanding human behaviour in terms of how people feel and behave in certain situations.

- Play: Play is a profoundly important activity in the process of character development and one that they share with higher species, such as apes.

- The social aspect of drama: Drama helps the inherent qualities of the person making the effort, partly by increasing the sensitivity involved in sharing with other people and partly by determining for himself the sort of the world he wishes to life in.

- Creative problem solving through drama: Drama is a social activity since children work together on problem solving through drama, they are working towards expressing their solutions. This can be communicated to others and finished scene which is performed and which serves as a communicating link between them and others.

- Performance: Dramatic activities are not always performed in front of an audience. When they are, they are sometimes a result of children wanting to communicate their work to others.

2.2. Drama in Elementary Schools

Multicultural education is not concerned only with what happens in the classroom. It also addresses the broader organisational, curricular and community issues which have a direct bearing drama in schools. New educational ideas have been ideally suited to using drama in the elementary school classroom by introducing problem-solving and critical-thinking activities through mutual discourse between teachers and students [18]. Above all that students can act out their activities if they are between the age of 7 and 12.

New educators agree that continuity is very important and that if all teachers are trained to use drama this would help to safeguard the student's opportunity for dramatic experience in elementary schools [19]. At this point Akin's thesis can be referred [20].

What is more, in the elementary school it is potentially easier for drama to act as an integrating force in curriculum and for teachers to draw on different subject areas in order to create a wide range of learning outcomes from drama. As Tom Stabler points out in "drama in elementary schools", the link between drama and other curricular activities can be dynamic and not merely a passive means to convenient follow up activities [21].

2.2.1. Models for Dramatic Action: There are three models for dramatic action: Exploratory, illustrative and expressive [22].

2.2.1.1. Exploratory: The exploratory model is the most common in classrooms. In fact, most "how to do it" drama texts deal with this model which is the most widely known amongst students. Teachers use this model for students to explore new experiences.

2.2.1.2. Illustrative: The students try to analyze their own inner meaning by means of illustrative model of drama which uses their mental powers, body and voice. This model allow students to use dramatic action for understanding personal relationships.

2.2.1.3. Expressive: The expressive model is used to communicate ideas. This model has a socially practical significance.

2.2.2. Using Drama as a Method: There are two things that should be clearly understood when drama is chosen as a method: the meaning of drama and purposes of drama.

2.2.2.1. Meaning: Teaching should always be a reflective activity but it is often difficult to see in the classroom. The teacher's traditional role is ques-

tioner. Questioning is likely to be teacher's most useful tool and it also used to check on the level of learning in the class. On the whole, these kinds of lessons contain more discussion than action. This method does not develop the creativity of students so that they are not given the maximum opportunity to express their own ideas.

Teachers, who believe that the most effective use of drama in elementary schools, do not allow this situation. They notice personal needs of individual students and are aware of their reactions, who is isolated, thinking, feeling, so that teachers can assess feedback for each individual student, so bringing a social or imaginative capacity into the classroom for satisfaction and fulfilment by using drama as a method [23].

It is the teacher working with the students within the drama, who will build on the students' ideas and make a bridge for them between their own experience of the world and the meaning of drama, so that both insight and understanding arise from the activity [24]. It is the process of acting and imagination meaning through acting that is important. The educational significance is that the child will learn through his own experience. Therefore, drama in education has enormous potential for the teacher [25].

No book and no method can replace a teacher. On the contrary, if drama is successful it will be because of the skills teachers use to motive their students, to build on their contributions and focus and pace the different activities in the classroom. It is only through the teacher's own commitment to, and involvement in, the work, that drama will realize its full potential as a medium for learning.

2.2.2.2. Purposes: Drama is emerging as a powerful model of learning through which students are encouraged to gain mastery over their own thinking. Furthermore, there are some purposes for using drama as a method which is as follows:

- Drama affords students an opportunity to work together co-operatively on a shared project. It also increases the child's awareness of the divergence of views both within the classroom and within the wider social context.

- Drama extends both the range and quality of the child's language usage. It provides an opportunity for trying out different models of discourse and can create an impetus for a wide variety of oral and written forms.

- Drama can also offer children the opportunity of critically appraising their own and other's work.

- Drama is a particularly useful way of "opening

up" problems, themes and topics that are of social concern. It enables children to view such subject matter from varying perspectives and to raise their own awareness of the complexity of the issues involved.

- Drama involves children in a complex process of selection, demanding of them an ability to choose between various effects and devices in order to shape a unified and coherent utterance.

3. The Advantages of Using Drama As a Method of Education in Elementary Schools

So far it can be seen from the article that drama is an important device of educational experience which should be available to all students in elementary schools. This section of the article is concerned with the advantages of using drama.

There are two main advantages of using drama: one of them is self actualization, the other one is personal or emotional development.

3.1. Self Actualization

The first advantage of using drama in elementary schools is that it allows students to work together and to share responsibility for the development of self actualization which is the main objective of education and which also continues throughout life. If a student achieves self actualization, he will have the qualities of being realistic, creative, trust and independent.

In drama students actively engage in situations which make sense to them in terms of their past experiences and their present levels of understanding. Because of this, each drama activity provides them with new experiences and fresh perspectives. This kind of activity causes self actualization in child.

In addition, both teacher and student participation are equally important for the success of drama. Some teachers within the collective drama process rather than to monitor students from outside. This permits teachers and students to adopt social roles, which is quite different from those they might normally assume in the more formal teacher-student dialogue of the classroom. The teachers' use of drama provides opportunities to help students engage in more abstract levels of thinking in response to the dramatic situation [26]. The teacher's primary aim is to devise dramatic situations which encourage students to engage in independent thinking in order to gain fresh insights about themselves and their world [27].

In accordance with the description of drama given in this paper self actualization is the first advantage for the students. Self actualization leads to

other effects as well. These can be summarized as follows:

-To give students an opportunity to examine their own problems with a new perspective.

-To show student the direction in which he or she is going.

-To make students to reflect on experience and see what they do in common with other people.

-To go beyond the tight framework of the curriculum in subjects, such as science, languages and mathematics.

-To give students freedom besides responsibility.

-To show students how they can stay with something they don't like and work through it to a point of accomplishment.

-To increase student's vocabulary and help them develop a finer control of rhetoric through interaction with others and through tapping subjective experience.

3.2. Personal or Emotional Development

Personal or emotional development is the second advantage of using drama in elementary schools.

The new idea in education, that is drama, opens up possibilities for free choice and individual decisions. Therefore, it helps the individual to explore many aspects of the world and even his own feelings and emotion. If drama is used with learning and teaching experiences in elementary schools, it would help students to develop in the desired ways. Drama will also provide a bridge for the students who understand to become their role in sharing responsibilities with their classmates.

Furthermore, to act out a dramatic activity, a class of students must cooperate, all have to agree to try to sustain the drama, to support one another's efforts to believe, to share their personal ideas and interpretations with others [28]. What is more, drama may become the catalyst for the establishment of interpersonal relationships outside of the classroom so that it will lead to personal or emotional development.

To this end, the advantages of using drama are as follows:

-To help students discover that they know more than they thought they knew.

-To lead students to see the real world more clearly in light of what is revealed by the imagined one.

- To help students capture more and more of what is implicit in any experience.

- To develop a tolerance for a variety of personalities and ideas.
- To make an abstract concept or experience very concrete so the students can understand and have control over it.

Given this, it can be inferred that there are various hidden advantages of using drama in elementary schools. For this reasons, the use of drama in education deserves a more prominent place in today's elementary school curricula. It would seem that drama is more powerful than any other medium in education. As a final remark, drama operates most effectively as a teaching or learning methods in elementary school that allows encouragement for developing curricula.

4. Current Situation in Drama .

Different seminars and courses to introduce drama have been given The Association for Contemporary Drama and at various higher education institutions in Turkey since 1980. Although each seminar was designed to address specific disciplines, the series reached an impressive cross-section of professions: pre-school, primary, special education and art teachers, Ministry of Education officials, child psychologists, children's theatre actors [29]. Some topics are stated as follows:

Creative Drama in School

The Vital Importance of Drama in Education

Play/Drama with Children-Play/Drama for Children Training of Drama Leaders

New Ideas for the Experienced Drama Teacher

In Ankara, 80% of the private kindergartens as well as some private elementary schools have drama lessons, drama teachers and drama in the activity program related to different subjects such as poetry, story, music, painting and the like. The Association for Contemporary Drama seeks to function as a central authority for the training of new drama teachers and offers inservice training on request to kindergartens, elementary and secondary schools. Moreover, the Ministry of Education organized a training program in drama for pre-service kindergarten teachers and at the university level, several institutions in Ankara offer courses in creative drama on both undergraduate and graduate levels through various departments. Currently, some theses were written by graduate students [30].

5. Recommendations

In order to implement drama in teaching-learning process in all elementary schools, the following would be of great importance.

1. Particularly the teachers of elementary schools should join in inservice training so that they can learn about using drama as a method in elementary schools. Besides teachers, administrative staff, such as directors, inspectors and subject matter specialists, should be trained in the same drama courses.

2. Some books and periodicals which deal with using drama as a method in elementary schools should be made available for teachers so as to inform those who have some classical opinions on drama.

3. The Association for Contemporary Drama, Universities, particularly faculties of education, and the Ministry of Education should organize seminars, workshops or conferences on the advantages and ways of using drama as a method in elementary schools.

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