



BETTER  
PRACTICE  
IN ARTS  
EDUCATION

VOLUME III

BETTER  
*practice in*

THEATRE

EDUCATION

Robert Smith, MFA  
*Salisbury University*

Quest: Arts for Everyone  
Tim McCarty, MA  
Kevin Strachan, MEd

Renee Decker, BA and  
Frank Germinaro,  
*Research Assistants*

James L. Tucker, Jr.  
*Series Editor*

BUILDING EFFECTIVE TEACHING  
THROUGH EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

## **BETTER PRACTICE IN THEATRE EDUCATION**

Better Practice in Arts Education, Volume III  
Building Effective Teaching Through Educational Research

James L. Tucker, Jr. *Series Editor*

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Maryland State Department of Education  
200 West Baltimore Street  
Baltimore, MD 21201-2595  
Telephone: (410) 767-0352 or (410) 767-0100  
Fax: (410) 333-1146  
TTY/TDD: 410-333-6442  
Web site: <http://www.marylandpublicschools.org>



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## F O R E W O R D

The State of Maryland is gaining increased recognition nationally for its education reform initiatives and its commitment to high standards of accountability in education. It further recognizes the need for high quality arts education as an essential part of our children's education. In 1989, after a decade of requiring experiences in dance, music, theatre, and the visual arts for all students in grades K-8, Maryland became one of the first states to require that students earn a credit in the fine arts to receive the Maryland High School Diploma. Maryland's reform initiatives have traditionally focused on envisioning what students should know and be able to do, providing resources and enhancing instructional practice, and documenting student learning. This particular project focuses on informing instructional practice.

In 1995, the Maryland State Board of Education adopted a goal that 100 percent of Maryland's students will participate in fine arts programs that enable them to meet the content and achievement standards established by State standards for the arts. By 1997, K-12 standards for dance, music, theatre, and visual arts education, developed by a 38 member task force, were approved by the State Board. The following year Project BETTER was initiated to develop a resource tool that would inform instructional practice in each of the art forms.

The concept for Project BETTER – Building Effective Teaching Through Educational Research – was created by the Division of Instruction of the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) during the late 1980s as part of its mission to promote effective instruction. The development of the four volume publication for the current project was guided by the same three major objectives: 1) to identify current research on effective instruction, 2) to synthesize this research in the form of non-theoretical summaries, and 3) to deliver this information directly to practitioners.

The information in this publication is designed as a resource to assist teachers in expanding and refining their repertoire of teaching strategies and to guide instructional planning and decision-making that supports student achievement of State standards in the arts. It is not intended to prescribe a particular style of teaching or one "best" method. This resource provides a guide to teachers as they consider their curriculum objectives, the nature and needs of their students, their personal style of teaching, and their available instructional resources. The application of this knowledge will result in more effective teaching and more powerful learning.

## Introduction

It is a long-held belief that the arts promote and enrich the academic and social development of young people. Professional knowledge shared among educators in the fields of creative dramatics/drama-in-education and child development tells us that interpersonal, verbal, and reading comprehension skills can be taught, or at least enhanced, through arts experiences and training. Often supporting voices claim that students exposed to arts learning develop critical and creative thinking skills and problem-solving strategies that are transferable to other academic domains. However, in this age of assessment and accountability, what do we know specifically, empirically about arts learning, successful teaching, and the characteristics that define arts processes and contexts? Further, what research and measures support the observed or anecdotal claims, rich as those claims may be, so often made by advocates of arts education?

BETTER addresses these vital questions and looks to current and historical scholarship to substantiate a variety of propositions in several ways. First, documenting cognitive and affective outcomes related to effective arts teaching and learning, BETTER Practice in Theatre Education offers practical and theoretical arguments for arts integration using evidence drawn from a range of researchers within and outside of the discipline. Second, BETTER explores the potency of arts learning in differing populations (including at-risk and disabled students) and establishes connections among theatre, literacy, cognition, and communication skills. Finally, BETTER supports the Maryland Essential Learner Outcomes in the Fine Arts (ELOs) and is perhaps best read in conjunction with the ELOs and compendia such as *Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning* and *Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Academic and Social Development*. Together, these texts promote and validate the utility of the arts—their effectiveness as instructional tools and as autonomous, academic subjects with unique content and procedures.

While BETTER Practice in Theatre Education celebrates the potential power and authenticity of arts-related teaching and learning, it also raises ancillary questions regarding the efficacy and application of said instruction. For example, when using the arts/theatre to

teach other academic subjects, e.g., math or science, in what ways does theatre “serve” the related domain? What proportion of instruction and learning relates to sound practice and theory? Are the “applied” theatre exercises and processes removed from their conceptual foundations only to be used in pedestrian ways? Are there substance and rigor in the application for both domains? What are the causal relationships among the “academic” domain, the arts experience, and learning? These complex questions (suggesting a rich agenda for future research) converge in two fundamental concerns: (1) What characterizes a meaningful application of the arts? and (2) In what ways might this knowledge foster better instruction? These interrelated core questions are the essential concerns of BETTER.

*Building Effective Teaching Through Educational Research/Theatre Education* does not answer all of the questions it raises—nor should it. It does, however, identify and synthesize current research on effective instruction, and it advances an implicit philosophical framework grounded in advocacy that may encourage deeper thinking about curricular design, pedagogy, and student learning in and through the arts.

Robert Smith, MFA  
Salisbury University

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# Theatre and Language Development

*Reading*

*Social Cognition*

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*Prewriting Process*

*Creative Drama, Storytelling, and Proficiency*

*Speaking Proficiency*

*Oral Language*

*Motivation and Reading Comprehension*

*Schemata and Reading Success*

*Second-Language Learning*

# Reading

## THEORY

Teachers who approach literature from a dramatic approach help students become better thinkers and better readers. This is especially true for students who are seriously delayed in their reading. Studies demonstrate a correlation between the mental processes employed for theatre and those employed for reading (Pellegrini, 1985).

The traditional approach to stories involves reading silently or aloud. Students look at the words on the page and sometimes sound them out to understand what happens to the characters. The teacher may lecture, ask questions, and have students work in small groups on questions or issues in the story. The story is read and addressed. But is it really understood? And will it even be recalled a few weeks or months later?

## BETTER PRACTICE

**Teachers who use dramatic reenactment of stories in their classrooms provide opportunities for students to internalize the meaning of language. They enhance comprehension of stories read in class and build more generalized skills for story reading and story recall.**

Too often, the answer is negative. However, when students become physically, intellectually, and socially involved in the reenactment of a story, they more readily understand characters, relationships between characters, the action of the story, details, and intent. Having reenacted and discussed the story, students understand it better when they reread it. They also remember the story for a longer time (Pellegrini & Galda, 1982).

More important, teachers who encourage and guide their students in dramatic activities generally find their students to be stronger readers. In a meta-analysis of 80 studies (culled

from 200 published since 1950), Ann Podlozny establishes a relationship between classroom drama and verbal ability. Her results reveal statistically significant correlations between drama activities and six areas of reading and language development including reading readiness and achievement, story understanding, and story recall (Podlozny, 2000). Theatre and reading involve similar mental processes, and story schema is developed in the process of creating, performing, and watching dramatic performances. Children, through their own teacher-guided creations, learn the elements that make up a story. Through theatre they organize narratives and become characters. They experience and solve problems, change, and grow. They use language and action to communicate.

Acknowledging the potentially language-rich environment associated with theatrical experiences, James Catterall notes increases in reading proficiency among students who are highly involved in drama activities, particularly students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Catterall, Chapleau, & Iwanaga, 1999). Growth also appears in remedial readers exposed to creative dramatics. Investigating the relationship between creative dramatics, children's literature, and reading comprehension skills, researcher Sherry DuPont reports increased scores among fifth-grade students after a six-week integrated program (DuPont, 1992). Students active in theatre become storytellers at the same time that they become story readers. It stands to reason that they are more able to comprehend stories than students not involved with the art of the story (Wilhelm & Edmiston, 1998). Teachers should understand, however, that "the play is [not entirely] the thing." Much of the benefit of theatre results from metaplay, the process of analysis and creation in preparation for the performance. Students look to the text for guidance and context—how to execute an action, how to speak or respond. In metaplay, students challenge each other with their varying opinions and interpretations of the text. And as students explore and debate the meanings and intentions of a text, rich opportunities for teaching arise—opportunities to probe, to ask deeper questions, to revisit the text, and to create (Williamson & Silvern, 1991).

Researcher A. Page reports that such depth of work with a text, both through the metaplay and the

**The story schemata generated through repeated group dramatic play should not only lead to better comprehension of stories just enacted, but also result in increased understanding and recall of stories in general.** (Christie, 1987, p. 36)

(Although professional experience often confirms Page's assertion, it should be noted that Podlozny's work contradicts the vocabulary building suggested here.) Dramatizing a story one has just read, or pantomiming a poem or story, helps children internalize the meaning of language, extend their range of understanding, and make unfamiliar words their own. And through theatre, these words take on far greater interest and importance to students than when they appear on a list to be memorized for the Friday quiz. Through theatre, the teacher helps students become better readers.

performance, also builds vocabulary. The teacher who approaches literature through theatre allows students to look closer at the language, the words on the page, and the denotations and connotations of the words (Page, 1983).

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- Bruner, J. S. (1986). Play, thought, and language. *Prospects*, 16 (1), 77-83. Rather than learning language and thinking from formal instruction, children develop from play. When encouraged to play with their language and to apply their ideas to it, they come to understand the power of symbols (i.e., words, actions). The very act of symbolic play—transforming an object or oneself into another object, person, situation—is an important source for literacy development.
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- DuPont, S. (1992). The effectiveness of creative drama as an instructional strategy to enhance the reading comprehension skills of fifth-grade remedial readers. In R. J. Deasy (Ed.), *Critical links: Learning in the arts and student academic and social development* (pp. 22-23). Washington, DC: Arts Education Partnership. Documents relationships among creative drama, children's literature, and reading comprehension in fifth-grade remedial readers.
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- Pellegrini, A. D. (1985). The relations between symbolic play and literature behavior. *Review of Education Research*, 5 (51), 107-121. A review and critique of the empirical literature.
- Pellegrini, A. D., & Galda, L. (1982). The effects of thematic- fantasy play training on the development of children's story comprehension. *American Educational Research Journal*, 19, 443-452. The process of recreating characters and events of a given story leads to greater understanding of that story.
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- Williamson, P. A., & Silvern, S. B. (1991). Thematic-fantasy play and story comprehension. In J. F. Christie (Ed.), *Play and Early Literacy Development*. Albany: State University of New York Press. Thematic fantasy play and spontaneous dramatic play help children recall a story more accurately than those who did not perform the story dramatically.
- Wolff, S., & Encison, P. A. (1994). In C. Kinder & D. J. Leu (Eds.), *Multidimensional aspects of literacy research, theory and practice*. Chicago: National Reading Conference. Theatre activities in response to reading help students more readily imagine the story. The ongoing critical thinking that takes place through theatre enables students to gain a deeper understanding of their reading and of themselves.

# Social Cognition

## T H E O R Y

For years, educators in mainstreamed school settings have attempted to integrate students with and without disabilities. Many schools have devised buddy systems or special friend initiatives to bridge the social and educational gap between the two groups. Cooperative learning techniques and recreation activities are also popular approaches. Providing an environment for students with disabilities that is both motivationally stimulating and emotionally safe is often problematic. Despite problems, many programs succeed.

With theatre, some teachers have increased interaction between students with and without disabilities, and have stimulated friendships between the two groups. Theatre teachers report, and studies indicate, that the pretend world of theatre functions as a kind of neutral territory in which the two groups can converge in creative, artistic, and meaningful ways (Miller, Rynders, & Schleien, 1993). The processes of dramatic exploration and artistic creation encourage an environment in which both groups remain active and challenged, free of some of the risks connected with other programs. Dramatic play provides a

unique paradox in which participants can experience risks without penalties. Theatre is a social interaction. Consequently, it is an excellent choice when working with individuals who possess limited social skills (Gardner, 1985).

Miller, Rynders, and Schleien (1993) cite examples of how students with and without disabilities who participate in creative drama activities spontaneously initiate play and assume imaginary roles with each other outside the classroom. An

environment of imaginative play and creation is equally enriching to children both with and without disabilities. This is not merely a way for students with and without disabilities to spend time together. Through theatre, both groups share the process of imagination and creation. They interact in a positive way and build friendships not often developed in other areas of school.

## B E T T E R P R A C T I C E

**Teachers who use theatre as a medium for instruction effectively increase interactions and encourage friendship building between students with disabilities and those without disabilities.**

*If adults leading [theatre] activities encourage imaginative play in activities involving children with and without mental retardation, it appears that the group dynamics and enjoyment of everyone involved are enhanced.* (Miller, Rynders, & Schleien, 1993, p. 232)

## R E F E R E N C E S

Bernstein, B. (1979). *Action, relation, and transformation: A study of Viola Spolin's drama games*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto. Theatre games for school-age children who are mentally retarded, as well as for those who are not.

Gardner, H. (1985). *The mind's new science*. New York: Basic Books.

Gresham, F. (1982). Assessment of children's social skills. *Journal of School Psychology, 19*, 120-133. Attempts to train students with disabilities have had only limited success.

Programs that simply bring these students in contact with peers without disabilities for various activities fall short of the desired integration that educators and parents want for their students and children.

Miller, H., Rynders, J. E., and Schleien, S. J. (1993). Drama: A medium to enhance social interaction between students with and without mental retardation. *Mental Retardation, 31* (4), 228-233.

The shortcomings of most peer socialization-oriented programs are not found in programs that bring together students with and without disabilities in theatre activities. The authors believe that interaction and friendships are improved by including both groups of students in traditional theatre games and activities.

# Roleplay and Writing

## THEORY

To be effective writers, students must have a sense that what they say has value and how they express it in writing will interest their readers. Students are often insecure and uncertain of what they wish to say. Even those who know what they want to say are often unsteady with tone and voice necessary to make their points appropriately. As a result, their narrative writing is often bland and their expository writing mediocre.

## BETTER PRACTICE

**Teachers who use role-play as a generative device with their students enable them to become better writers. They encourage students to approach the essential act of expository, persuasive, or narrative writing by experiencing and responding to different characters and points of view.**

For example, when approaching persuasive writing, students can use improvisational role-playing with a partner to develop a series of convincing and meaningful arguments. As students interact with classmates, orally and kinesthetically, they may explore and test rationales and counterarguments. The immediate feedback or spontaneous interaction between participants may also help students identify a variety of logical, ethical, and emotional appeals. Betty Jane Wagner speaks to the positive relationship between role-playing and successful persuasive writing. Comparing the writing of fourth- and eighth-grade students receiving direct persuasive instruction (lecture only) or no specific instruction with students exposed to lecture and role-playing sessions, Wagner observed stronger argument construction and writing among students receiving the lecture/role-play intervention—particularly in the fourth-grade group (Wagner, 1986).

*[Theatre is] another way for focusing—of taking up an attitude to [the writer’s] material. Either a clear role or a clear sense of audience is needed for a writer to have a starting point.* (Barrs, 1987, p. 217)

Teachers who wish to improve student writing can turn to theatre. Role-playing, one area of theatre, helps students develop a voice both on stage and on paper (Barrs, 1987). Role-playing allows students to try on different hats and a variety of personalities, to be someone they are not (Summerfield & Summerfield, 1987). When students act in a role, they are challenged to organize narrative sequences and identify ideas and emotions—to develop empathy by adopting voices or states of mind that are possibly foreign to their lives.

Through roleplaying, students learn to develop cognitive and affective strategies and to use language in expressive ways. For

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Barrs, M. (1987). Voice and role in reading and writing. *Language Arts*, 64 (2), 207-218.

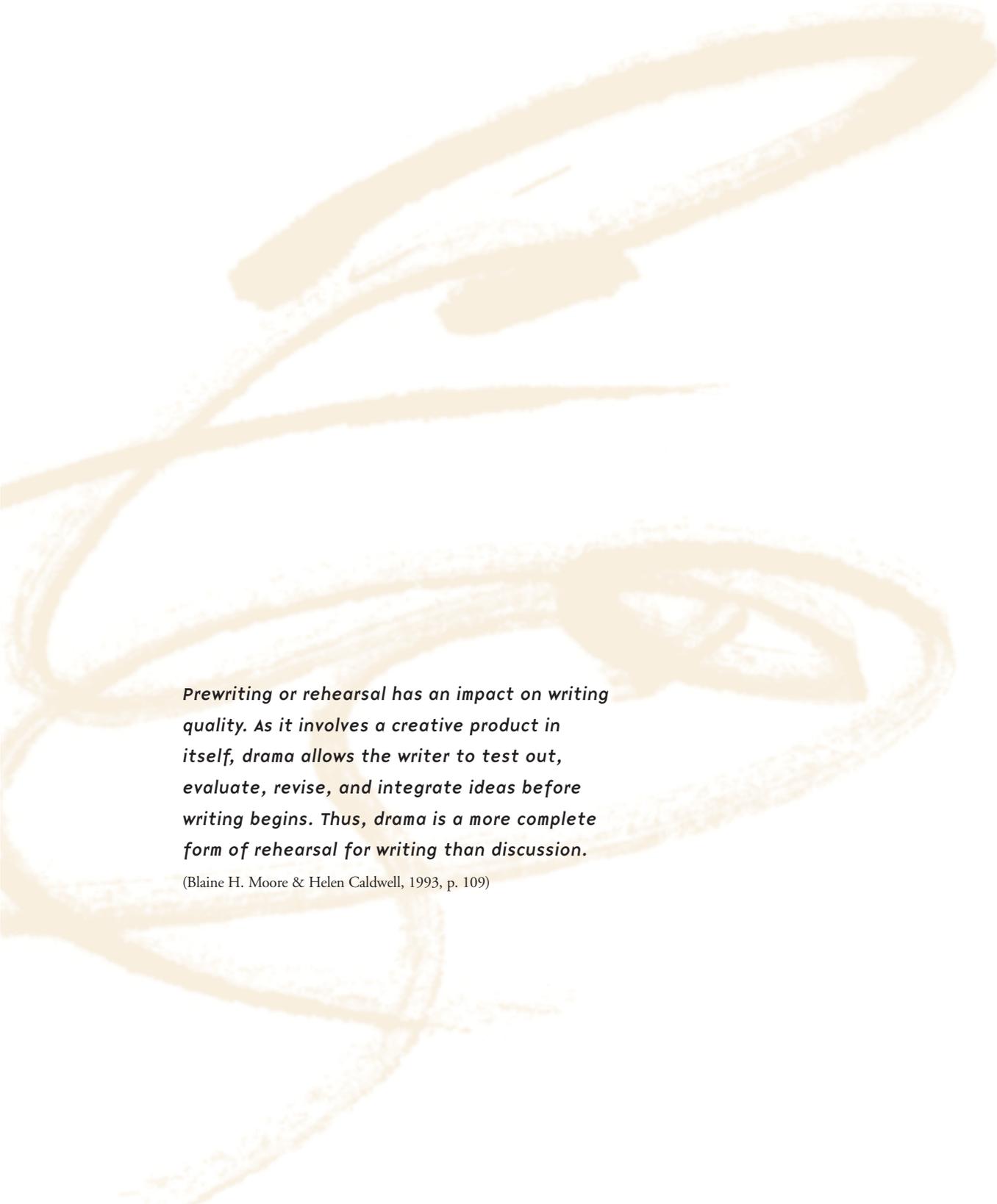
Role-playing as another way of focusing—of developing an attitude toward the material. Role-playing provides a clear role and a clear sense of audience needed for a young writer to have a starting point.

Enciso-Edmiston, P. (1988). Writing and responsibility. *London Drama* 7, 8-10. Theatre and audience awareness in writing are closely allied. Because the events in theatre are happening “now,” both the participant in role and the writer in role share with their audience the common concern for what has happened, what is now happening, and what will happen.

Summerfield, J., & Summerfield, G. (1986). *Texts and contexts: A contribution to the theory and practice of teaching composition*. New York: Random House.

Role-play in reading and writing. Both are products of concrete social exchange. They rely on “what-if” propositions and “Imagine you were...” prompts to engage students in reading and writing tasks. The authors often have students write and reshape pieces of writing into the simulated roles of other persons. They claim that this role-playing is a powerful generative device.

Wagner, B. J. (1986). The effects of role-playing on written persuasion: An age and channel comparison of fourth and eighth graders. In R. J. Deasy (Ed.), *Critical links: Learning in the arts and student academic and social development* (pp. 52-53). Washington, D.C.: Arts Education Partnership. Documents effects of role-playing on written forms of persuasion and supports the efficacy of dramatic play as a prewriting strategy.



*Prewriting or rehearsal has an impact on writing quality. As it involves a creative product in itself, drama allows the writer to test out, evaluate, revise, and integrate ideas before writing begins. Thus, drama is a more complete form of rehearsal for writing than discussion.*

(Blaine H. Moore & Helen Caldwell, 1993, p. 109)

# Prewriting Process

## THEORY

Educators have known for some time that teaching the process of writing—traditionally categorized as prewriting, writing, and rewriting—is more important to developing strong student writers than is the finished product. Lacking serious and meaningful planning, many young writers are incapable of creating a decent finished product. Although experts have recognized for years the need to prepare for writing, many teachers do not give this important stage the time it merits. Too often, they only discuss ideas with their students. Usually, this is not enough for young writers, especially those who struggle with writing (Moore & Caldwell, 1993). Students tend to be more interested, and to write better, when they act out, tell, or rehearse their stories first (Bolton, 1984).

## BETTER PRACTICE

**Teachers who incorporate drama activities as part of the prewriting process improve student writing. They provide opportunities for students to work through the creative process, rehearsing their narratives and shaping their stories before writing.**

group using more traditional prewriting discussion models (Moore & Caldwell, 1993). Constructing stories through theatre before writing offers students needed planning and thinking time. Before students even sharpen their pencils, they explore character and plot, and develop details and dialogue—possible elements for narrative writing. In essence, they create their stories. The rehearsal of their narratives through theatre might even be regarded as a first draft—drafts that students may easily revise and edit before they actually begin the process of writing (Bolton, 1984).

In helping others perform their narratives, students invite each other into their unique creative processes. They challenge and help each other shape and revise their ideas into a story. Together, they decide what works in the narratives and what does not. Though the actual writing is done alone, the cooperative process of planning for writing involves the students in an exciting way.

The process of writing does not necessarily mean the act of writing. The cognitive and creative process used before writing is often as important as putting words to paper. When simple discussion falls short in planning to write, multimodal approaches may be instructive. Exploring stories through creative movement, theatre games, and improvisation prepares students for writing. In a 15-week experimental program, students who used drama activities to develop ideas and strategies for narrative writing displayed significant growth in style, content, and organization when compared with a control

## REFERENCES

Applebee, A.N. (1981). *Writing in the secondary schools*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.  
Despite our knowledge of the importance of prewriting to the writing process, teachers in most high schools fail to give this essential stage the time and attention it deserves.

Arnheim, R. (1969). *Visual Thinking*. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press.  
Students first flesh out and then revise their ideas.

Bolton, G. (1984). Changes in thinking about drama in education. *Theory into Practice* 23 (4), 151-157.  
The use of drama to teach a number of subjects in school, including writing. Bolton argues that it is simpler to add details to a drama, or even rerun an entire story, than to rearrange ideas in writing.

Moore, B. H., & Caldwell, H. (1993). Drama and drawing for narrative writing in primary grades. *Journal of Educational Research*, 87 (2), 100-110.  
Theatre and drawing help students achieve effective, meaningful prewriting. Novice writers may gain more control of their narratives by working out ideas through the artistic/symbolic means of drawing and theatre.

# Creative Drama, Storytelling, and Proficiency

## T H E O R Y

Developing proficiency in language goes beyond the mere ability to put together a string of words to form a complete sentence. Real proficiency occurs when students have enough control over the language to express abstract and complex thoughts. Theories abound about how best to achieve proficiency. Several studies show that theatre and storytelling can play a positive role in the process.

In one study, students who participated in nonscripted storytelling activities significantly improved their ability to produce complex linguistic structures (Schmidt, 1975). Other studies demonstrated that theatre enabled students not only to produce more complex sentences but also to bolster their total verbal output as well. This growth also occurred with students who participated in classroom work that was not in their primary language (Vitz, 1984).

## B E T T E R P R A C T I C E

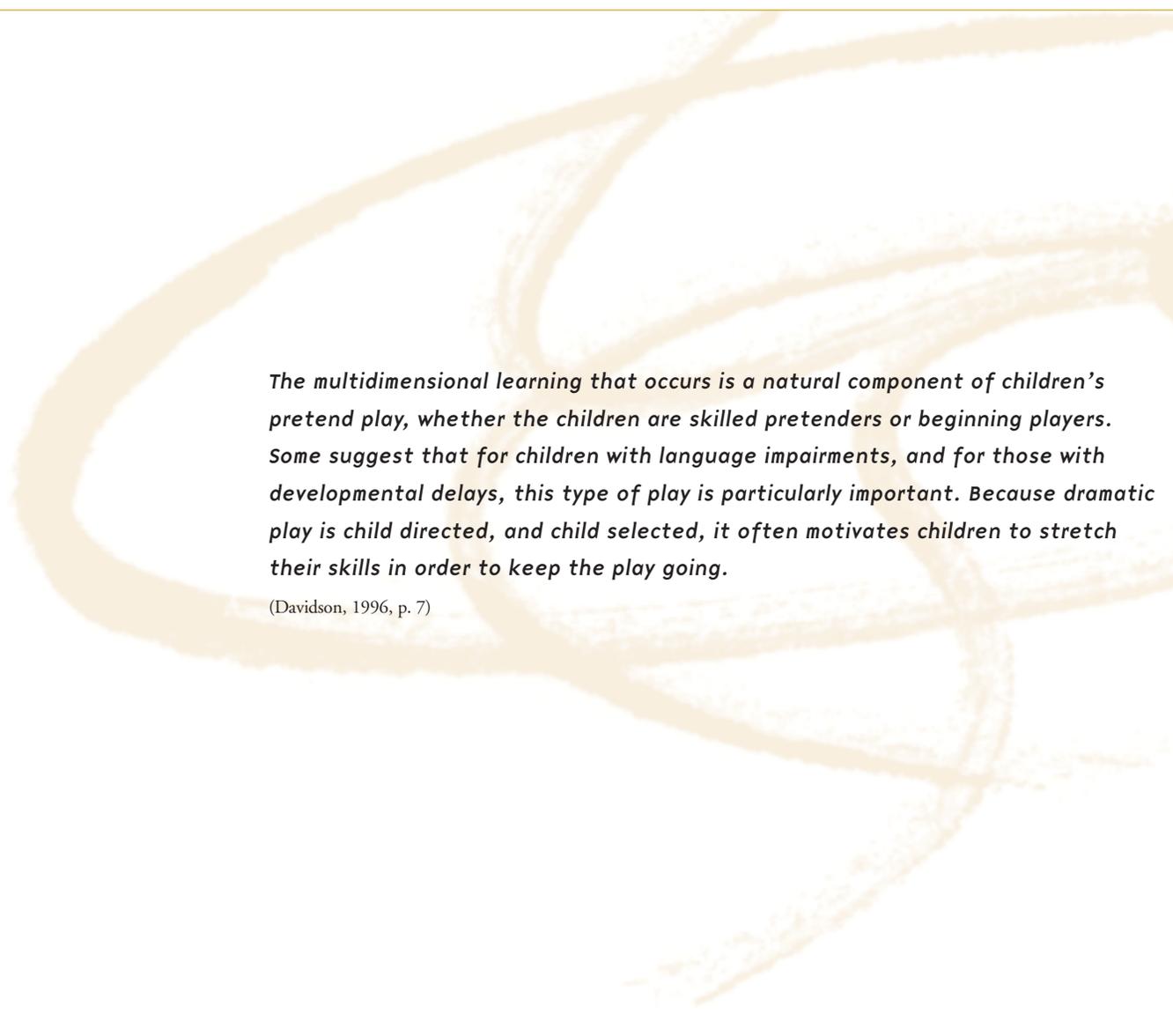
**Teachers who allow students time to practice acquired language skills through creative theatre and storytelling activities motivate them to stretch their language skills and produce more complex linguistic structures.**

Exactly why do students who participate in creative drama activities experience significant growth in their linguistic acumen? There are no definitive answers, but Holly Griffin (1990), in an article written for the *Youth Theatre Journal*, postulated that perhaps theatre leads to an “understanding of how to break out of experience and collectively shape it” (p. 20). Betty Jane Wagner (1998) expands upon this thought, conjecturing that “this ability to abstract and analyze as well as to participate in experience may contribute to cognitive maturity” (p. 40). Jane Davidson (1996) believes that dramatic

play lets students practice the language skills they know.

While it is often difficult to identify the multiple variables that may influence outcomes related to arts interventions, researchers have designed sound experiments yielding intriguing results. Proficiency in storytelling, for example, depends on an array of behaviors associated with literacy such as the ability to produce complex linguistic utterances or to recall and recreate a narrative for a specific listening audience. In a 1984 study, Pellegrini asked: With what relative effectiveness can children’s use of oral language (retelling stories to unfamiliar listeners) be facilitated through the use of alternative approaches, namely discussion, drawing, and dramatic play? The researcher discovered that children involved in dramatic play, after hearing a story read by an adult, were better able to construct an explicit and coherent retelling to an uninformed listener (Pellegrini, A., 1984). This outcome suggests a causal link between enactment and recall (a connection discussed elsewhere in this document). Further, and perhaps more subtly, students’ retelling strategies demonstrate an understanding of how the speaker/listener relationship influences communication/language choices. Recognizing the relationship between context, narrative, and the communication of meaning speaks to higher-level thinking skills.

Faced with a myriad of challenges to foster language proficiency in our students, teachers need a varied repertoire of instructional strategies. Creative drama, storytelling, and dramatic enactment may prove appropriate in a variety of settings.



***The multidimensional learning that occurs is a natural component of children's pretend play, whether the children are skilled pretenders or beginning players. Some suggest that for children with language impairments, and for those with developmental delays, this type of play is particularly important. Because dramatic play is child directed, and child selected, it often motivates children to stretch their skills in order to keep the play going.***

(Davidson, 1996, p. 7)

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A step-by-step how-to guide to dramatic play with supporting research and theory.
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The relationship between participating in the creative process and developing cognitive skills.
- Pellegrini, A. D. (1984). Identifying causal elements in the thematic-fantasy play paradigm. In R. J. Deasy (Ed.), *Critical links: Learning in the arts and student academic and social development* (pp. 42-43). Washington, DC: Arts Education Partnership.  
Research question: What are the relative effects of three modes of story reconstruction training—thematic-fantasy play, teacher-led discussion, and drawing—on the development of children's story comprehension?
- Pellegrini, A. D. (1984). The effect of dramatic play on children's generation of cohesive text. In R. J. Deasy (Ed.), *Critical links: Learning in the arts and student academic and social development* (pp. 44-45). Washington, DC: Arts Education Partnership.
- Research questions: To what extent does the informational status of a listener (whether familiar or not familiar with the story) affect a student's use of oral language to retell the story? (Do students use effective and appropriate language when told in advance the knowledge base of the listener?) With what relative effectiveness can children's use of oral language (retelling stories to non-familiar listeners) be facilitated through the use of alternative interventions, namely discussion, drawing, and dramatic play?
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The positive impact of nonscripted storytelling on student language development.
- Vitz, K. (1984). The effects of creative drama on English as a second language. *Children's Theater Review*, 33 (4), 23-33.  
The positive impact of drama in improving ESL student language facility.
- Wagner, B. J. (1998). *Educational drama and language arts: What research shows*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.  
An extensive overview of theatre education research.

# Speaking Proficiency

## THEORY

Proficiency in spoken language marks a major element of success. Spoken language is a social act. People need a good grasp of the language to function well, and must be able to adjust the way they use language for a variety of situations. Language proficiency and the ability to adapt to multiple environments develop with practice. Acting out text-based plays in the classroom can help students polish vital communication skills.

Language develops best when students engage in authentic experiences (Booth, 1998). The traditional classroom provides only two interactive settings—teacher/student and student/student. Theatre enables students to step into the shoes of characters who are involved in any number of situations. By performing as those characters, students gain insights. Acting also lets students talk the talk of the situation. They can use the language of a king, knight, or pauper. They can speak as a lawyer, doctor, politician, mother,

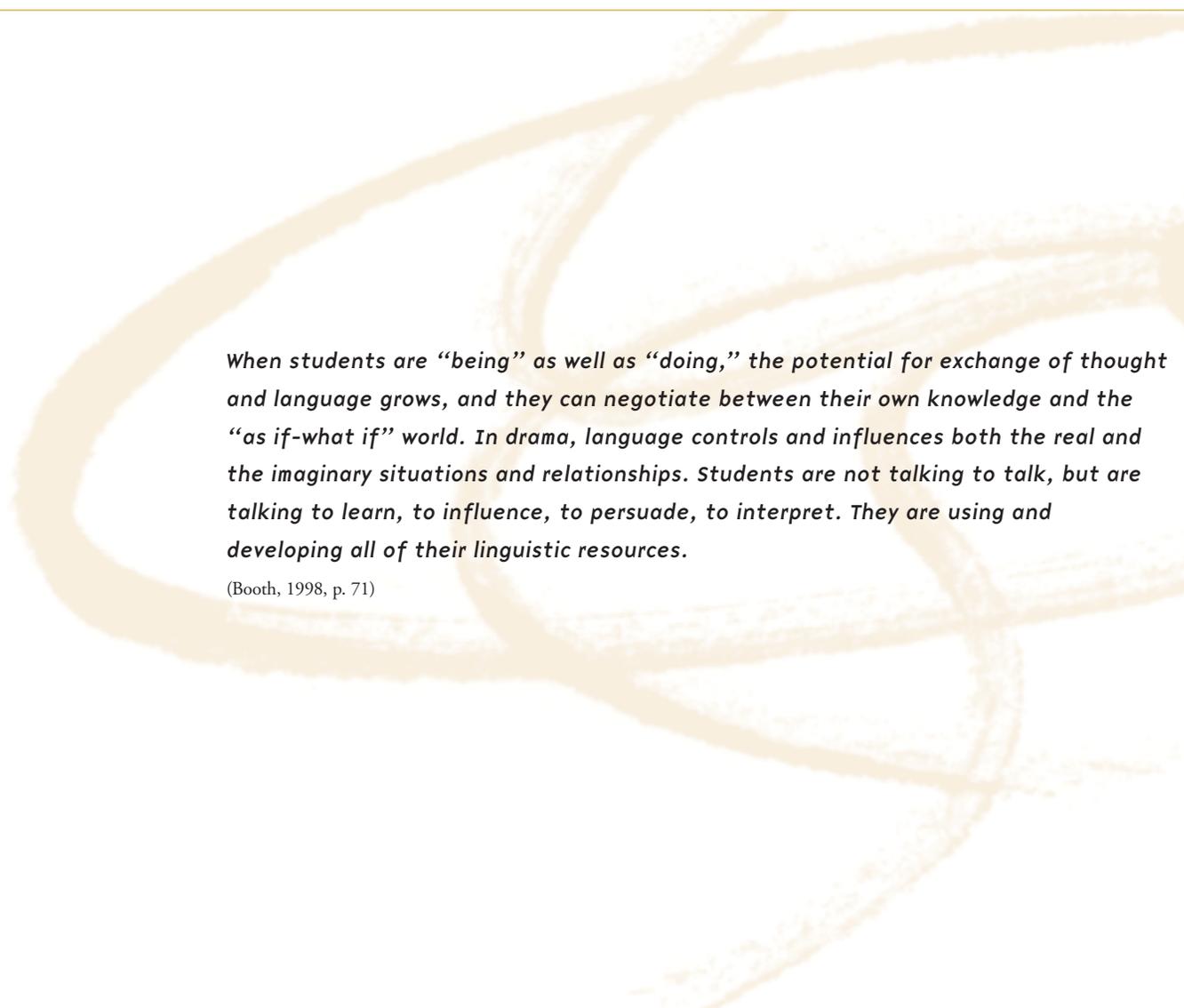
## BETTER PRACTICE

**Teachers who use theatre in instruction enable students to develop a deeper understanding of the communicative process, and provide authentic situations for testing and developing language proficiency.**

father, or friend. Charles Grover (1994) encourages teachers to have students ask themselves questions like, “What would I do in that situation?” “How do I like this character?” or “How am I different from this character?” The responses help students understand the character and context. In addition, the reflection and responses give students an opportunity to project themselves into the situation, identifying needs and feelings while exploring the meanings and nuances evoked by differing approaches to delivery.

Paulo Freire (1970) contends that learning begins with known reality. Teachers, through theatre, can encourage students to expand upon the known reality. By extending the boundaries of theatre beyond the formal representation of “characters,” authentic opportunities for oral expression can also be found in interpretive literary readings. Through the oral interpretation of literature (with appropriate guidance, experimentation, and discussion), students may gain an understanding of the power of language—discovering and giving “voice” to ideas while honing general communication skills. In a six-week workshop/study, students were introduced to poetry and wrote poems based on personal experience and perception (Kassab, 1984). Students were then offered instruction highlighting interpretive and presentational skills. Summarizing this strategy, Catterall notes, “The study found that the workshop on the oral interpretation and dramatic presentation of personal poems improves oral skills, increases comfort with oral communication, and enhances self-esteem and self-image” (Critical Links, p. 30).

In all, to encourage experimentation with expressive language, clear and balanced feedback shared in a supportive, nonevaluative, communal environment is critical. Through theatre, teachers create situations in which students learn that we play many roles in life, and we speak differently in each role. The dramatic process provides a vehicle for students to practice speaking in authentic situations. As students learn that context influences what is said, and that what is said also influences the context, theatre can provide a safe environment for written and oral experimentation (Halliday, 1977).



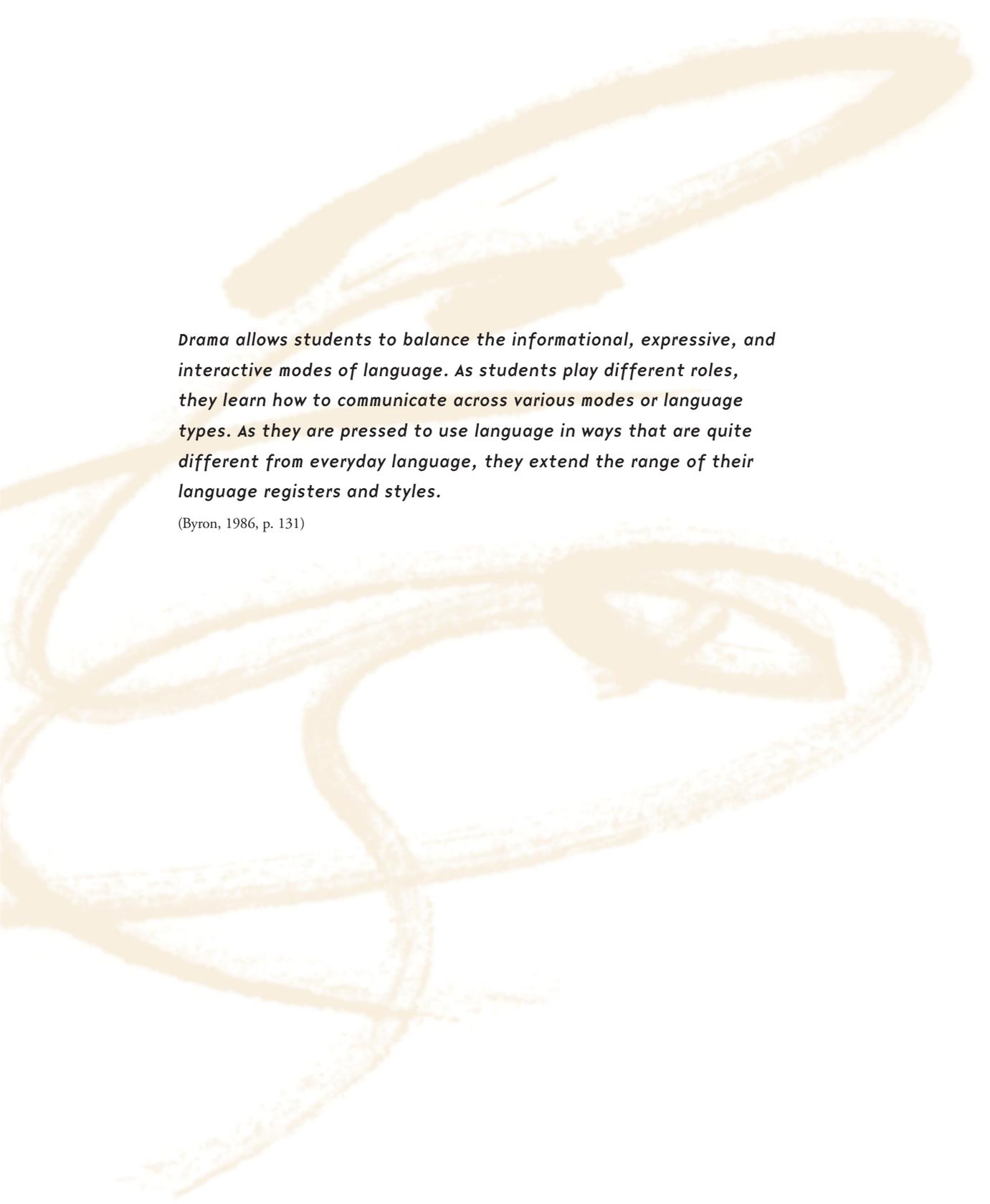
**When students are “being” as well as “doing,” the potential for exchange of thought and language grows, and they can negotiate between their own knowledge and the “as if-what if” world. In drama, language controls and influences both the real and the imaginary situations and relationships. Students are not talking to talk, but are talking to learn, to influence, to persuade, to interpret. They are using and developing all of their linguistic resources.**

(Booth, 1998, p. 71)

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- Grover, C. A. (1994, April). Why teach theater in the high school? *NAASSP Bulletin*. An argument for theatre education in the high school for all students, not just those with acting abilities.
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- Interacting in role, students explore the social functions of language that may not arise in the language forms of the traditional classroom. The context plays a part in determining what they say, and what they say plays a part in determining the context.
- Kassab, L. (1984). A poetic/dramatic approach to facilitate oral communication. In R. J. Deasy (Ed.), *Critical links: Learning in the arts and student academic and social development* (pp. 30-31). Washington, DC: Arts Education Partnership. This doctoral dissertation asks: What is the effect of a six-week poetry/drama workshop on the willingness of students to communicate orally, their oral communication skills, their feelings at the time of oral presentation, and their self-confidence and self-image?
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Talking to learn must be part of language interaction to help students make sense “out loud” as they come to grips with new ideas. Talk is a bridge that helps students explore relationships that arise between what they know and what they are learning.



*Drama allows students to balance the informational, expressive, and interactive 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.*

(Byron, 1986, p. 131)

# Oral Language

## T H E O R Y

Theatre offers a range of situations, language contexts, and modes of expression that promote language growth. Young people interact with various forms of language—that of home, class, friends, work, or athletic teams, for example. They are instinctively familiar with how language is used in different settings; the language of home may change when there is company or when the family is in a setting outside of the home. Drama activities can appropriate language styles and modes of delivery that are not experienced in traditional classroom settings. Through theatre, teachers can stimulate and encourage students to expand their language base and apply linguistic decisions to “more abstract and extended levels of thinking” (Wagner, 1998, p. 34).

The collaborative process of theatre and the production of oral language—as opposed to independent reading or writing in class—allows the teacher to observe the process of language rather than examine the

product. At any point in the process, the teacher can pause the action to challenge the students, to ask them to reflect on what they are doing, to consider alternative strategies. Using theatre, the teacher can create any dramatic situation or environment and stop the action at any place in the process to develop a salient teaching moment (Davidson, 1996).

## B E T T E R P R A C T I C E

**Teachers who provide opportunities for students to interact and express themselves as different characters in a variety of settings and situations enhance oral language development.**

People often interpret dramatic play as “doing a skit,” but the teacher is actually providing an exercise in language that helps

students become more literate. Studies clearly demonstrate that students, including those with learning disabilities, experience improvement in oral communication skills and language development when they participate in creative theatre experiences (de la Cruz, 1996; Podlozny, 2000).

## R E F E R E N C E S

Byron, K. (1986). *Drama in the English classroom*. New York: Methuen. Dramatic experience enhances oral language development as children recast their vocabulary and speech patterns to suit the roles they assume and to accommodate their listeners, whom they address in imaginary contexts.

Davidson, J. (1996). *Emergent literacy and dramatic play in early childhood*. Albany: Delmar. Examples and supporting research for the ways in which theatre can assist young children in language development.

De la Cruz, R. E. (1995). The effects of creative drama on the social and oral skills of children with learning disabilities (Doctoral dissertation, Illinois State University). *Dissertation Abstracts International* 5 610, 3 913 A. A 12-week creative theatre program for students with learning disabilities.

Felton, M., Little, G., Parsons, B., & Schaffner, M. (1984). Drama, language and learning. *NADIE Paper* No. 1. Australia: National Association for Theatre in Education.

Theatre provides opportunities for children to use language for a wide range of purposes. There is a higher incidence of interactive and expressive talk, compared to the high incidence of informational talk in traditional classrooms.

Podlozny, A. (2000). Strengthening verbal skills through the use of classroom drama: A clear link. In R. J. Deasy (Ed.), *Critical links: Learning in the arts and student academic and social development* (pp. 46-47). Washington, DC: Arts Education Partnership.

This meta-analysis of 80 studies explores connections between classroom drama and verbal ability.

Wagner, B. J. (1998). *Educational drama and language arts: what research shows*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Teachers can use theatre to enhance literacy. By offering imagined characters and situations—experiences students probably will never have in their lives—the teacher gives students a new, challenging setting in which to use language. The process expands understanding of language and makes students better readers, writers, and communicators.

Wilkinson, J. A. (1983). On the integration of theatre in language arts. *Youth Theatre Journal*, 3 (1), 10-14.

Theatre has the following positive effects: (1) greater use of language for a wide variety of purposes, (2) more frequent opportunity for otherwise rarely used expressed language, (3) greater use of abstract thinking and language evolving from expressive language, and (4) greater understanding of language as a powerful tool enabling its user to “act upon” rather than “be acted upon.”

# Motivation and Reading Comprehension

## T H E O R Y

There is nationwide concern about illiteracy. Test scores are not what they should be; students graduate unable to succeed in college or to find a job that pays a decent salary. For too many, literacy is at best functional and at worst seemingly impossible. This is especially true of student populations that are marginalized by society, raised in communities whose schools perform below average. These students face even greater difficulties in becoming literate.

Educators have found that these populations respond well to theatre in the classroom. Many students, including those who live in lower socioeconomic communities and those who are behaviorally disturbed, are motivated by theatre (Wagner, 1998). Rather than just reading or answering questions, these students have the opportunity to participate in the stories they read. Many struggle with reading and have even greater difficulty when working alone. When collaborating with peers, however, whether creating a performance or working together to understand the story to present it correctly and interestingly, students who normally are turned off by reading take more interest in it. They also have more fun with it. James Catterall documents a 20% increase in the reading proficiency of low-SES students involved in intensive drama instruction between 8th grade and 12th grade (Catterall, Chapleau, & Iwanaga, 1999), and a growing body of research supports connections between motivation, comprehension, and dramatic activities—especially in the lower grades. Teachers who use strong storytelling techniques and/or employ

story enactment strategies increase students' ability to identify characters, motivations, narrative sequences, details, and key ideas (Page, 1983; Galda, 1984). As future studies support gains in reading comprehension, it is reasonable to argue for the place of drama activities in the early grades as one mode of literacy intervention.

## B E T T E R P R A C T I C E

**Teachers who use strategies that enable students to participate in the stories they read improve motivation for reading and reading comprehension skills in student populations whose academic performance is statistically lower than that of their peers.**

*Results of the studies reviewed showing improvement in generalized story comprehension suggest that repeated enactment of stories should help students in reading as well as in remembering stories they have heard, since reading comprehension is dependent on the same story schemata... Improvisational drama, perhaps more obviously than other oral language activities, ties directly into both literacy and into nonverbal knowing. Dramatizing a story one has just read or pantomiming a poem or story as it is presented orally helps children internalize the meaning of language, extend their range of understanding, or make unfamiliar words their own.*

(Wagner, 1998, p. 197)

## REFERENCES

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- Allen, E. G. (1968). An investigation of change in reading achievement, self-concept, and creativity of disadvantaged elementary school children experiencing three methods of training. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Southern Mississippi. (University Microfilms No. 69-4683)
- African American elementary school students improved significantly in attitude and motivation toward reading when teachers included theatre activities in their reading lessons.
- Catterall, J. S., Chappelle, R., & Iwanaga, J. (1999). Involvement in the arts and human development. In E. B. Fiske (Ed.), *Champions of change: The impact of the arts on learning* (pp. 2-18). Washington, DC: Arts Education Partnership. Examines academic and developmental outcomes associated with student involvement in general or intensive arts experiences (music and theatre) as suggested, in part, by the results of the National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS:88).
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- Saltz, E., & Johnson, J. (1974). Training for thematic fantasy play in culturally disadvantaged children: Preliminary results. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 66, 623-630.
- Preschoolers who were trained in thematic fantasy play to enact stories were better at story comprehension. Both story comprehension and story production are considered essential for literacy development.
- Saltz, E., Dixon, D., & Johnson, J. (1977). Training disadvantaged preschoolers in various fantasy activities: Effects on cognitive functioning and impulse control. *Child Development*, 48, 367-380.
- Students trained in the thematic play and theatre performed better on measures of reading comprehension and retelling or re-performing of a story.
- Wagner, B. J. (1998). *Educational drama and language arts: What research shows*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

# Schemata and Reading Success

## THEORY

A growing body of research indicates that preexisting schemata (knowledge elements) have direct bearing on reading and writing abilities (Christen & Murphy, 1991). Children's knowledge and emergent literacy begin at home in the context of shared family experiences and ideas (Teale, 1987). Every day, however, teachers face classrooms of children from increasingly diverse backgrounds, and it is difficult to find reading materials that reflect common experiences. Nevertheless, teachers need to use reading and writing activities to impart knowledge about every subject area.

When students lack the knowledge necessary to read well, teachers may consider three instructional strategies: (1) teach vocabulary prior to reading; (2) provide students with experiences that relate to what they will read; and (3) introduce a conceptual framework that will help students build their own background (Christen & Murphy, 1991).

## BETTER PRACTICE

**Teachers who use instructional strategies that establish common experiences before reading help diverse student groups to succeed by enhancing their preexisting knowledge base.**

Theatre activities can create a shared information base for students. Watching a production of *The Andersonville Trial* gives students who are studying the Civil War insights into its horrors. Social studies students acting out a scene from *Inherit the Wind* assume roles and deliver lines in a play that addresses controversial philosophical, social, political, and religious issues. A group of science pupils studying the cell may grasp the subject by improvising mitosis.

Humans learn language in a social setting. To assist students in acquiring and developing language, teachers must foster an environment and context in which words, ideas, and experiences are shared (Schickedanz, 1990). Theatre is a social process that can help the teacher lay the framework for successful reading and writing experiences.

*When educators fail to build on students' preexisting schemata, gaps are produced in students' cognition. If a student does not know the farm concept, Old McDonald has little significance. One must have experienced the concept personally to truly gain additional knowledge. Otherwise, the knowledge is hollow, stored in the short-term memory bank, and soon forgotten.*

(Czubaj, 1997, p. 539)

## REFERENCES

Christen, W. L., & Murphy, T. J. (1991). *Increasing comprehension by activating prior knowledge*. (EDO-CS91-04 May 1991): ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service Digest #6 1)

An overview of research in reading comprehension and delineation of the classroom implications of that research.

Czubaj, C. A. (1997, Summer). Whole language literature reading instruction. *Education*, 538-539.

A comparison of the whole-language approach to reading with the basal reader approach. Czubaj emphasizes the importance of schemata to reading success.

Schickedanz, J. (1990). *Adam's writing revolution: One child's literacy development from infancy through grade one*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. The language development of Schickedanz's 2-year-old son, Adam.

Teale, W. (1987). Emergent literacy: Reading and writing development in early childhood. In J. Riddance & R. Baldwin (Eds.), *Thirty-sixth yearbook of the National Reading Conference* (pp. 45-74). Rochester, NY: National Reading Conference.

Literacy in children develops and changes continuously.

# Second-Language Learning

## THEORY

Theatre helps students grow and develop in regard to their primary language. It is also beneficial to students learning a second language.

Students who learn a second language through dramatic games, storytelling, interviews, and role-play make fewer errors and speak English as a second language better than students trained in traditional ESL methods (Planchat, 1994). Students who learn through theatre also improve in spontaneity, fluency, vocabulary, articulation, variety of speech patterns, and reading readiness skills (Maranon, 1981).

The traditional class may use innovative methods to teach vocabulary, but usually the class offers almost exclusively a teacher-student linguistic environment. Theatre allows students to create new characters and settings, thus expanding active involvement in the second language. Students can use reality-based theatre

for practice in using the second language to deal with life's daily occurrences, or theatre can be fantasy based, which really allows them to play with the language. They can be firemen, ship captains, or politicians, each of which brings new language challenges.

*Both observational and empirical studies show that theatre challenges students to use a second language in a wide range of registers and styles, and for a broader range of purposes than customary school dialogues.* (Wagner, 1998, p. 55)

## BETTER PRACTICE

**Teachers who use dramatic games and other theatre techniques for second-language instruction promote accelerated development of second-language skills.**

## REFERENCES

- Maranon, S. P. (1981). A descriptive analysis of a program of creative dramatics with bilingual/bicultural content (Spanish/English): Implications for English oral language development of Mexican American children (Doctoral dissertation, University of Colorado at Boulder, 1980). *Dissertation Abstracts International* 42/01 ~ 1'24A. (University Microfilms No. 81-13984)
- A study of bilingual Mexican American migrant children indicating that the Spanish speakers improved English oral expression through drama.
- Planchat, J. M. (1994). The usefulness of educational drama as a means of improving the communicative competence of early French immersion students (Master's thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland). *Master's Abstracts International* 33/03, 703.
- Students tend to have fewer errors and error corrections, and better oral production skills, after 10 weeks of varied drama experiences. Planchat also found

theatre to be more effective with above average and average students than with below average students.

Shacker, D. L., Juliebo, M. F., & Parker, D. (1994). Using drama in the French immersion program. *Youth Theatre Journal*, 8 (1), 3-10.

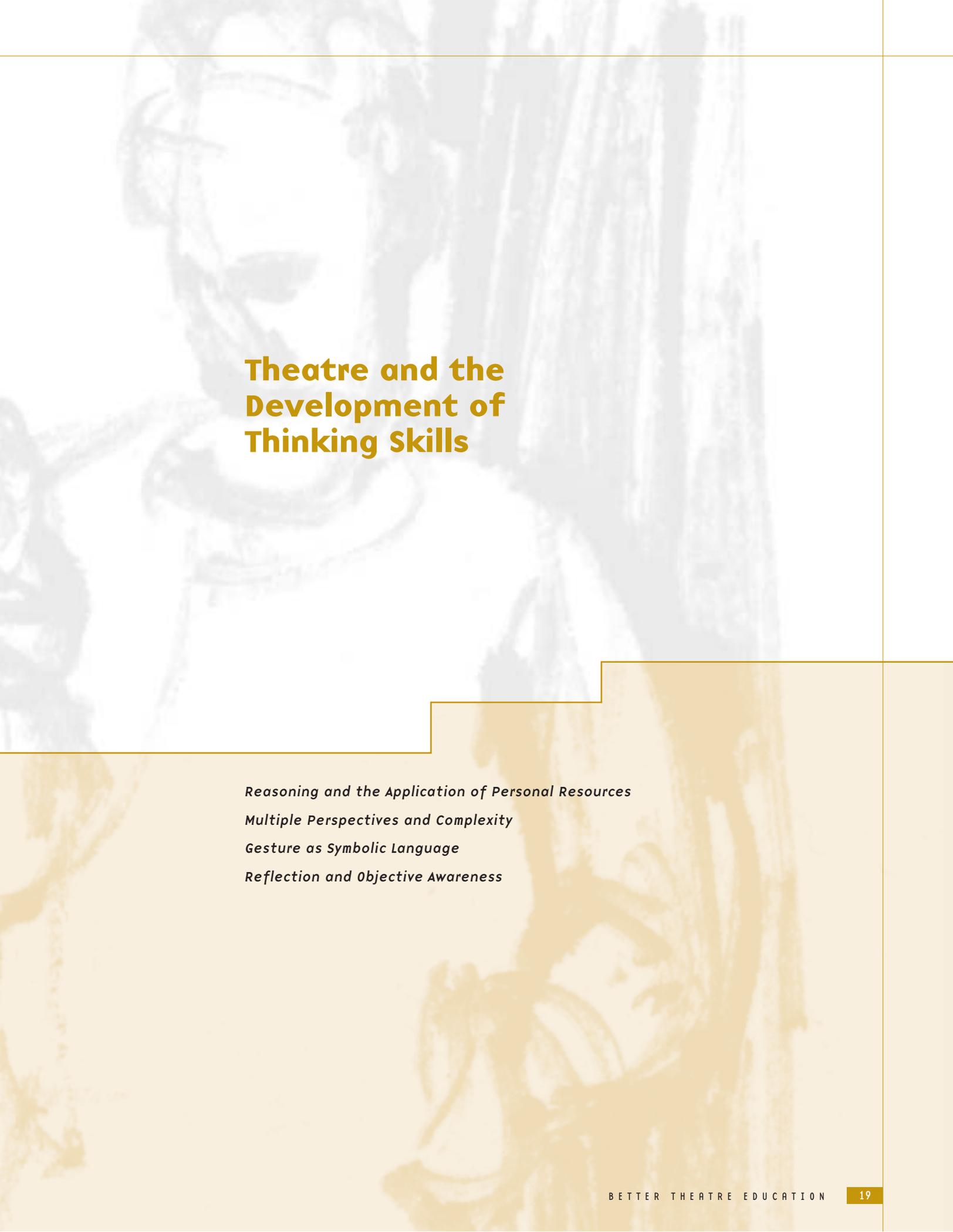
Vitz, K. (1983). A review of empirical research in drama and language. *Children's Theater Review*, 32 (4), 17-25.

Theatre promoted facility in English as a second language.

Wagner, B. J. (1998). *Educational drama and language arts: What research shows*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.

Studies that support the use of theatre to teach second-language learners. Teachers of students learning a second language can use theatre to expand and deepen the situations in which the student uses the new language.





## **Theatre and the Development of Thinking Skills**

*Reasoning and the Application of Personal Resources*

*Multiple Perspectives and Complexity*

*Gesture as Symbolic Language*

*Reflection and Objective Awareness*

## Reasoning and the Application of Personal Resources

### THEORY

The Battle of Bull Run, the splitting of a cell, obtuse and acute angles, two roads diverging in a yellow wood—all are sources of passion for teachers. However, they often mean little to the students who must learn them, having had no connection to their lives nor providing any inspiration.

How often have teachers taught something that students learn but don't actually "get"? They wish to please their parents and teachers; they wish to do well, to earn good grades. They do learn, but too frequently don't internalize that which they study; they don't own the material in a rich or meaningful way.

Teachers, hoping for more from their students, can use theatre strategies and activities to link learning and knowing (Wagner, 1997, p. 68). Theatre brings students to another zone of learning (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). The passive form of education, reading and answering questions, is replaced by kinetic,

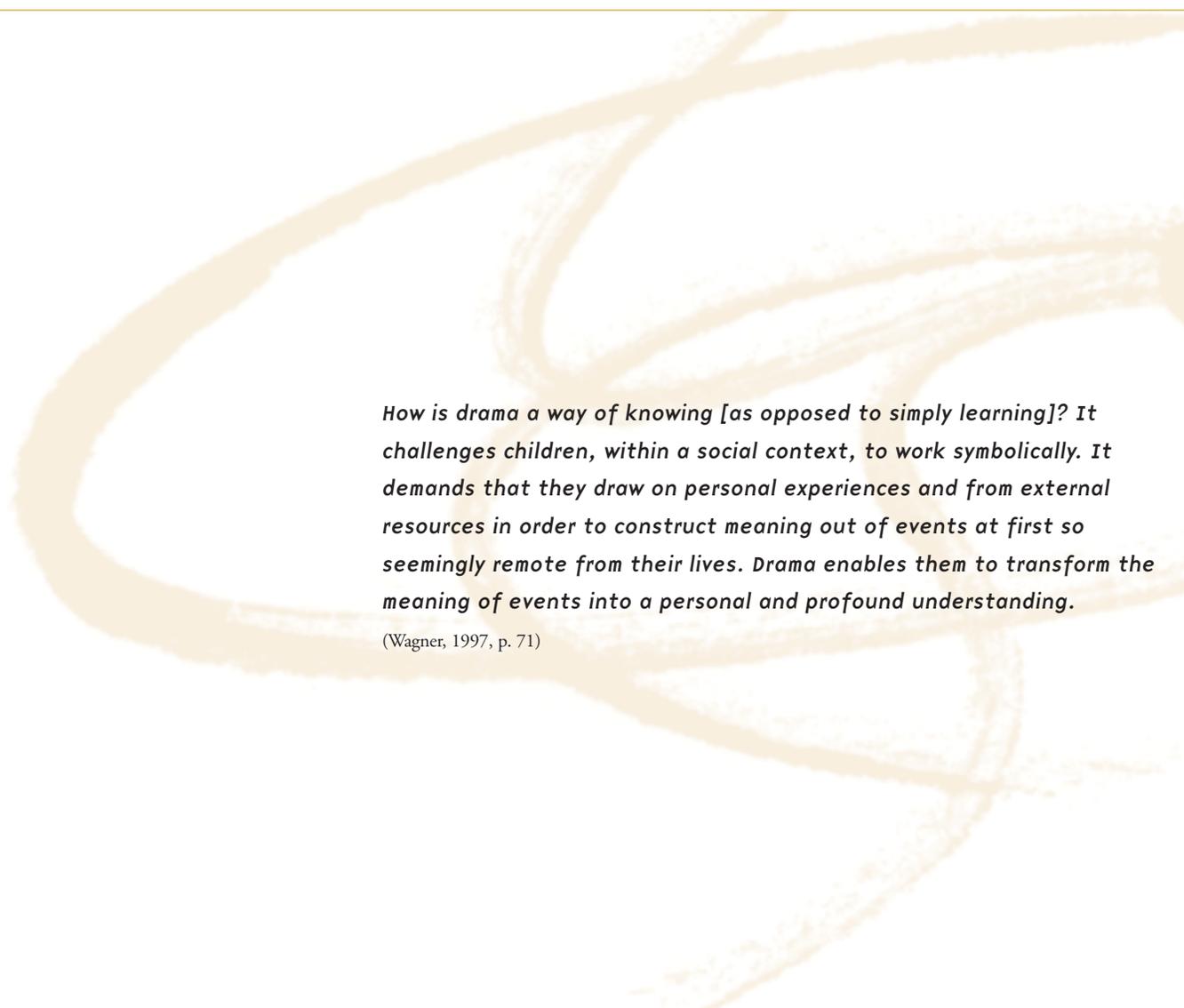
### BETTER PRACTICE

**Teachers who engage students in constructing meaning actively encourage and enrich learning. They model ways to connect personal resources with multiple modes of learning to internalize experience and develop reasoning ability.**

experiential learning. The student who dramatically performs the role of mitochondria in a cell must do far more than remember that they are "the powerhouse of the cell." To present mitochondria dramatically, a student must know what "powerhouse of the cell" means, its functions and operations; otherwise, his or her actions on stage are entirely uncertain. Knowing what it is, the student then draws on experience to create the role, translating knowledge into a different mode or a new "language" of expression.

With effort and teacher guidance, the child connects with the topic in a meaningful way. Creation, collaboration, physical involvement, the tension of presenting something of merit to teacher and peers all come together to involve the student deeply in the study of mitochondria. Rather than just reading about the cell, discussing it, bubbling in answers to multiple-choice questions, the student sees it and becomes part of it. The student completes a lesson using several ways of knowing.

Jennifer Ross Goodman addresses dramatic play and literacy in 5-year-old children. During a five-month observation, children "enacted" literacy in a variety of ways: adapting stories into plays, orchestrating material into narrative sequences, translating images into language, or producing and using written artifacts within enacted scenarios. Commenting on Goodman's work, Bruce Wilson notes: "The research provides evidence that dramatic play is an important vehicle whereby children can both practice and learn about literacy skills and knowledge," highlighting the need for an engaging and stimulating learning environment, and for opportunities to participate in potent teacher-student and student-student engagement around personal and relevant themes (Goodman, 1990).



***How is drama a way of knowing [as opposed to simply learning]? It challenges children, within a social context, to work symbolically. It demands that they draw on personal experiences and from external resources in order to construct meaning out of events at first so seemingly remote from their lives. Drama enables them to transform the meaning of events into a personal and profound understanding.***

(Wagner, 1997, p. 71)

## REFERENCES

Bruner, J. (1996). *The culture of education*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Three modes of learning—enactive, iconic, and symbolic representation. In enactive knowing, we learn “by doing”—by experiencing with the body. Iconic knowing is marked by comprehension and perception through an image—in gesture, in drawing, or in the mind itself with no external representation. Symbolic knowing encompasses translation of images and experience into language. Using theatre, teachers engage students in all three of these modes of learning.

Galda, L., & Pellegrini, A. (1990). Play talk, school talk, and emergent literacy. In S. Hynds & D. L. Rubin (Eds.), *Perspectives on Talk and Learning* (pp. 91-97). Urbana, IL: National Council for the Teachers of English.

As students collaborate with their peers to create an improvisation, they are pressured to behave and use language in new and previously untried ways. Taking on a new persona demands a word choice beyond the language used in everyday life. Children turn to their own experiences in the world of adults to create the language. Thus, they internalize a diction that had never before been a part of their repertoire.

Goodman, J. R. (1990). A naturalistic study of the relationship between literacy development and dramatic play in five-year-old children. In R. J. Deasy (Ed.), *Critical links: Learning in the arts and student academic and social development* (pp. 26-27). Washington, DC: Arts Education Partnership. Examines ways in which literacy is used in dramatic play.

Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological process*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

The “zone of proximal development.” When students are involved in a play, they assume the personae of their characters.

Wagner, B. J. (1997). Drama as a way of knowing. In J. Saxton & C. Miller (Eds.), *Drama and theater in education: The research of practice, the practice of research* (pp. 57-72). Brisbane, Australia: IDEA Publications.

The use of theatre for more than developing an aesthetic sense. Teachers should also employ theatre to promote the ability to reason.

# Multiple Perspectives and Complexity

## THEORY

Thinking frequently occurs in simple, concrete terms: This is good, that bad; this is better than this; this event happened as a result of that event. These simple notions are comfortable, but valuable learning occurs when questions are asked and when accepted notions are challenged. Often, it is discovered that what seemed so simple is, in fact, quite complex.

Theatre, specifically dramatic dialogue, can help students open their minds, ask questions, and explore an issue from multiple sides. Students don't need to place themselves in character to ask questions. Often, however, students pose questions that are merely informational in nature, seeking information that supports opinions they already hold. Through theatre, students must address the issue at hand. Whether the roles they assume depict the conflict in Vietnam, the Scopes trial, or violence in schools, students engaged in theatre become physically, mentally, and emotionally involved. Through dramatic dialogue,

they see the topic from multiple perspectives, causing them to review their original positions and perhaps even change their understandings (Edmiston & Wilhelm, 1998).

## BETTER PRACTICE

**Teachers who use dramatic dialogue effectively in their teaching encourage students to expand their understanding of complex issues.**

Theatre should not be a means of changing beliefs contrary to those held by students and perhaps by their parents as well.

Teachers should not undermine values held by the students and their families, but theatre can help students explore issues in more depth.

Teachers often use a common theatre device in all content areas. Students can dialogue as characters from a novel, as famous historical figures, even as inanimate objects or as abstract ideas. When they interact dramatically in character, they begin to see issues from different perspectives. Having more than a single perspective from which to judge, they review their positions, reconstruct what they know or thought they knew, and consider whether it is appropriate to change their beliefs. Regardless of whether a student actually changes, he or she gains a deeper and more complex understanding of the issue. That is what education is about (Edmiston & Wilhelm, 1998).

***No view is ever complete. To recognize the role of perspective and vantage point, to recognize at the same time that there are always multiple perspectives and multiple vantage points, is to recognize that no accounting, disciplinary or otherwise, can ever be finished or complete. There is always more. There is always possibility.***

(Greene, 1988, p. 128)

## REFERENCES

- Edmiston, B., & Wilhelm, J. (1996). Repositioning views/reviewing positions: Forming complex understandings in dialogue. In B. J. Wagner (Ed.), *Educational drama and language arts: what research shows* (pp. 90-117). Chicago: Heinemann.
- The use of drama to help students address issues from many perspectives.
- Elbow, P. (1986). *Embracing contraries*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rather than rest in an acquisitive desire to know more information, it is important for educators to help their students "embrace a sense of the unknown" as well.

Greene, A. (1988). *The dialect of freedom*. New York: Teachers College Press.

The importance of free expression. Greene uses examples from books and other media. She sees theatre as a useful way to expand students' understanding of topics.

Perkins, D. N. (1989). Art as understanding. In H. Gardner & D. N. Perkins (Eds.), *Art, mind, and education*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Understandings are better when they are more complex and thus more generative, more open-ended, and dependent not only on more knowledge but also on finer distinctions.

# Gesture as Symbolic Language

## T H E O R Y

By removing language from the classroom, the teacher can bring students closer to what they are reading and to what they wish to express. Initially it may seem preposterous, but by limiting students to hand, body, and facial expressions, the teacher can build their understanding and assess comprehension.

Though awkward at first, gesture is not as foreign as one might think. “Did you say something to me?” (raised eyebrows, head forward and up); “What stinks?” (nose scrunched, eyes questioning); “No thanks, I can’t eat another bite” (big exhalation and a pat on the belly); and how about, “Go that way” (try saying that without pointing or tilting your head). Appropriate and even necessary gestures accentuate much of normal daily conversation (Eastman, 1989).

## B E T T E R P R A C T I C E

**Teachers who challenge students to communicate using gesture strengthen understanding of other symbolic systems and enhance communication skills.**

In what way is gesture educational? Gestures, like spoken and written language, consist of symbols. Gestures symbolize feelings and ideas. They can be highly descriptive (who couldn’t show Santa Claus with gesture?). The symbols of gesture can convey almost any idea. Gestures

are rudimentary and basic, even pure. Gesture is to language as stick figures are to portraits. While a stick figure looks little like a human, it is a symbol that all can easily understand (Gardner, 1982).

The teacher asks a student to retell a story he or she has read, perhaps the legend of Johnny Appleseed. Rather than telling, however, the student is to gesture it. Like the stick figure, the telling omits many details, leaving the essence of the story. This can be difficult because many people do not know the difference between essential and nonessential details, or do not recognize that some scenes are not essential to plot. Students struggle in this new symbolic mode. Students understand the story more deeply and become more skilled in symbolic communication as they develop skill in gesture (Schwartz & Aldrich, 1985).

Students watching the silent, gestured retelling of a story are challenged in understudying a sequence of symbols in which they are not yet fluent. They become more attentive and involved than if the story were retold in words. Students use and comprehend symbolic language. Gesture provides an interesting and challenging way to communicate while bolstering other language skills.

***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.***

(Wagner, 1998, p. 18)

## R E F E R E N C E S

Eastman, G. (1989). *From mime to sign*. Silver Spring, MD: TJ Publishers. The use of gesture as a basis for language.

Gardner, H. (1982). *Art, mind and the brain; a cognitive approach to creativity*. New York: Basic Books.

Gestures as legitimate linguistic symbols. Like written and spoken language, they function as symbolic equivalents that “stand for” objects.

Schwartz, D., & Aldrich, D. (1985). *Give them roots and wings!* New Orleans: Anchorage.

A guide to theatre in the elementary grades that includes an introduction and suggested activities for using creative movement.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: the development of higher psycholog-*

*ical processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Drawing and theatre arise from gesture and from the symbolizing in drawing and theatre. It is a short step from gesture to writing.

Wagner, B. J. (1997). Drama as a way of knowing. In J. Saxton & C. Miller (Eds.), *Drama and theater in education: the research of practice, the practice of research*. Brisbane, Australia: IDEA Publications.

Gesture in the classroom leads students to a deeper understanding of what they are learning, and strengthens the foundation of reading, writing, and speaking.

Wagner, B. J. (1998). *Education drama and language arts: What research shows*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Insight into theatre education and language development.



*Drama offers no neat, quick solutions: indeed the further a particular problem is investigated the more complex it could become. In making provisions for reflection in the dramatic experience, the teacher is continually planning situations which move students from their subjective concerns to an objective awareness of the world in which they live and from a concrete, contextual use of conventional language to the use and awareness of the power of symbolic thought and language.* (Verriour, 1984, p. 130)

# Reflection and Objective Awareness

## T H E O R Y

One key skill necessary for student success is reflection. Studies demonstrate that classroom theatre activities stimulate and enhance student reflection. Through the performance of scenes, students become actors who interpret their characters while other students are audience. Actors can take moments to pause and step out of character. Teachers should encourage the actors and audience members to discuss and reflect on what they have just seen and heard (Wagner, 1998).

This is not always easy for a teacher to do. As in so many other aspects of teaching, the teacher must walk a fine line. The teacher must guide and facilitate but not force any theatre activity (Creery, 1991). Too much guidance becomes control, at which point students become players to the teacher's work, rather than thinkers. Students lose interest in the activity and miss the opportunity to reflect on a theatre they own.

Cooperating with classmates, students extend and expand their thinking. Throughout the dramatic process, teachers must provide as many opportunities as possible for students to reflect on their work with theatre (Edmiston, 1992).

## B E T T E R P R A C T I C E

**Teachers who plan opportunities for reflective thought expand their students' thinking processes by moving them from concrete to symbolic uses of thought and language.**

The teacher can engage the students in various activities to encourage reflection. Gavin Bolton (1979) suggested three levels of reflection—personal, universal, and analogous. Teachers who create a comfortable and open environment encourage student participation in theatre education experiences. They implement timely and probing questions along with carefully crafted activities.

## R E F E R E N C E S

Bolton, G. (1979). *Towards a theory of drama in education*. London: Longman. An argument for the use of drama in the classroom. Bolton suggests three levels of reflection (personal, universal, analogous).

Colby, R.W. (1987). A rationale for drama as education. *Youth Theatre Journal* 1 (4), 3-7.

Opportunities for exploration at the subjective level, where the deepest changes in understanding can be realized. Drama has the potential for achieving an understanding that transforms a previous way of thinking.

Creery, K. (1991). Being, knowing, acting: An exploration of reflection in educational drama (Master's thesis, University of Alberta). *Master's Abstracts International* 31/02, 522.

Input from experienced elementary drama teachers. Creery identifies five major themes of reflection.

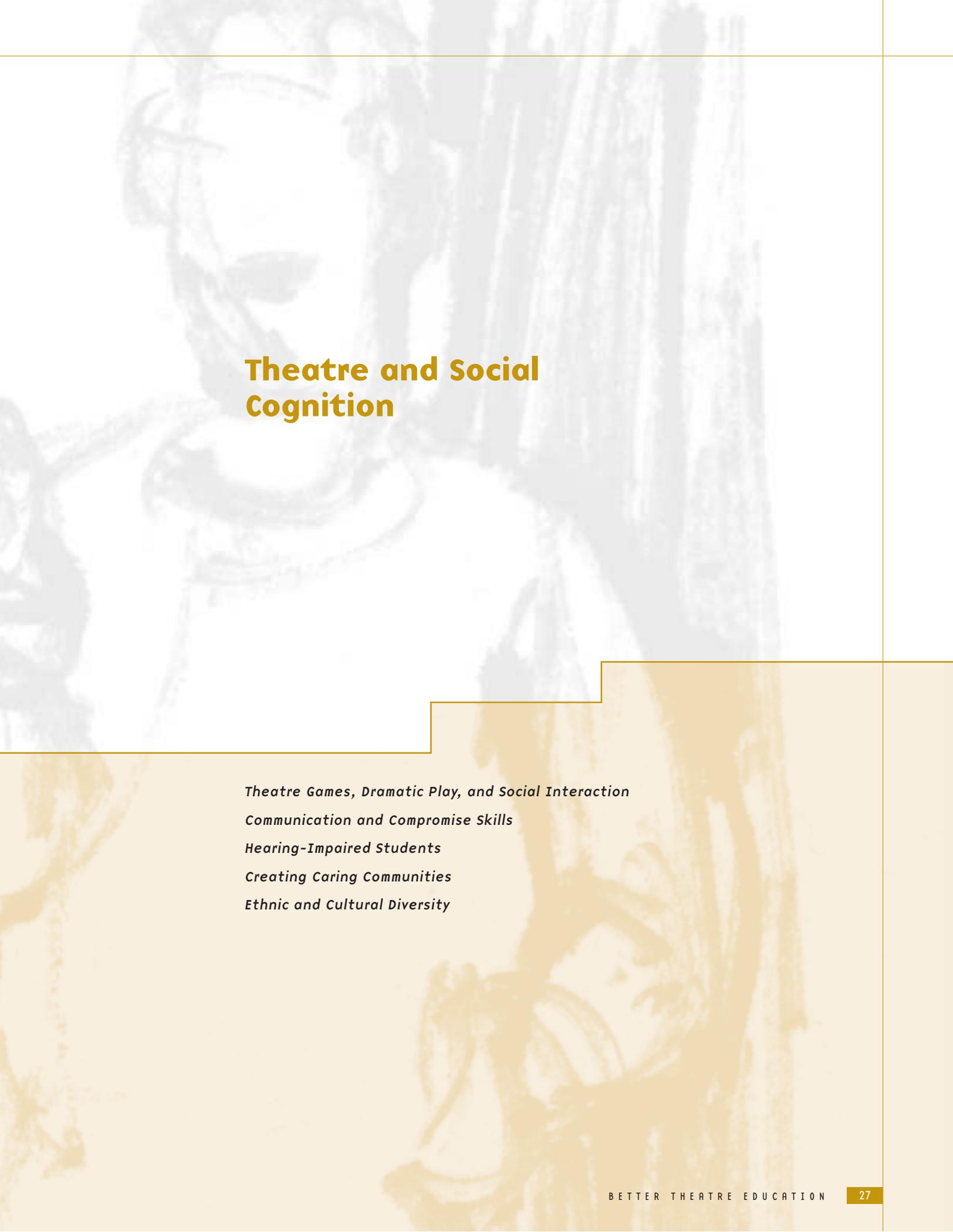
Edmiston, B. W. (1992). The dramatic art of theater and drama. *The drama theatre teacher*, 4 (2), 21-24.

The act of reflection as key to learning through theatre and key to performing good drama.

Verriour, P. (1984). The reflective power of drama. *Language Arts*, 62 (2), 125-130. Before, during, and after, the process of creating drama is rich with opportunities for students to pause and reflect on both themselves and their art.

Wagner, B. J. (1998). *Education drama and language arts: What research shows*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.





## **Theatre and Social Cognition**

*Theatre Games, Dramatic Play, and Social Interaction*  
*Communication and Compromise Skills*  
*Hearing-Impaired Students*  
*Creating Caring Communities*  
*Ethnic and Cultural Diversity*

# Theatre Games, Dramatic Play, and Social Interaction

## THEORY

In working with students with disabilities—whether psycho-emotional (aggression, depression), physical (minimal brain damage, hyperactivity), or any number of problems that fall under the category of learning disabilities (dyslexia, poor auditory memory)—educators often use drill and remediation to address academic and social challenges. When teachers use theatre games, children learn to work together as they develop a sense of the mutuality of give-and-take through the act of play (Bernstein, 1985).

In a study conducted by Bradley Bernstein (1983) to ascertain the impact of using theatre games based upon Viola Spolin's work, children with disabilities and their teachers participated in a series of 45 minute workshops given twice a week for 10 weeks. Prior to the workshops, the students tended to be noninteractive and stationary. Some demonstrated strained relationships with peers. The games encouraged social interaction and creative movement. As the workshops progressed, the students became less disruptive, more cooperative, and more respectful of fellow participants.

## BETTER PRACTICE

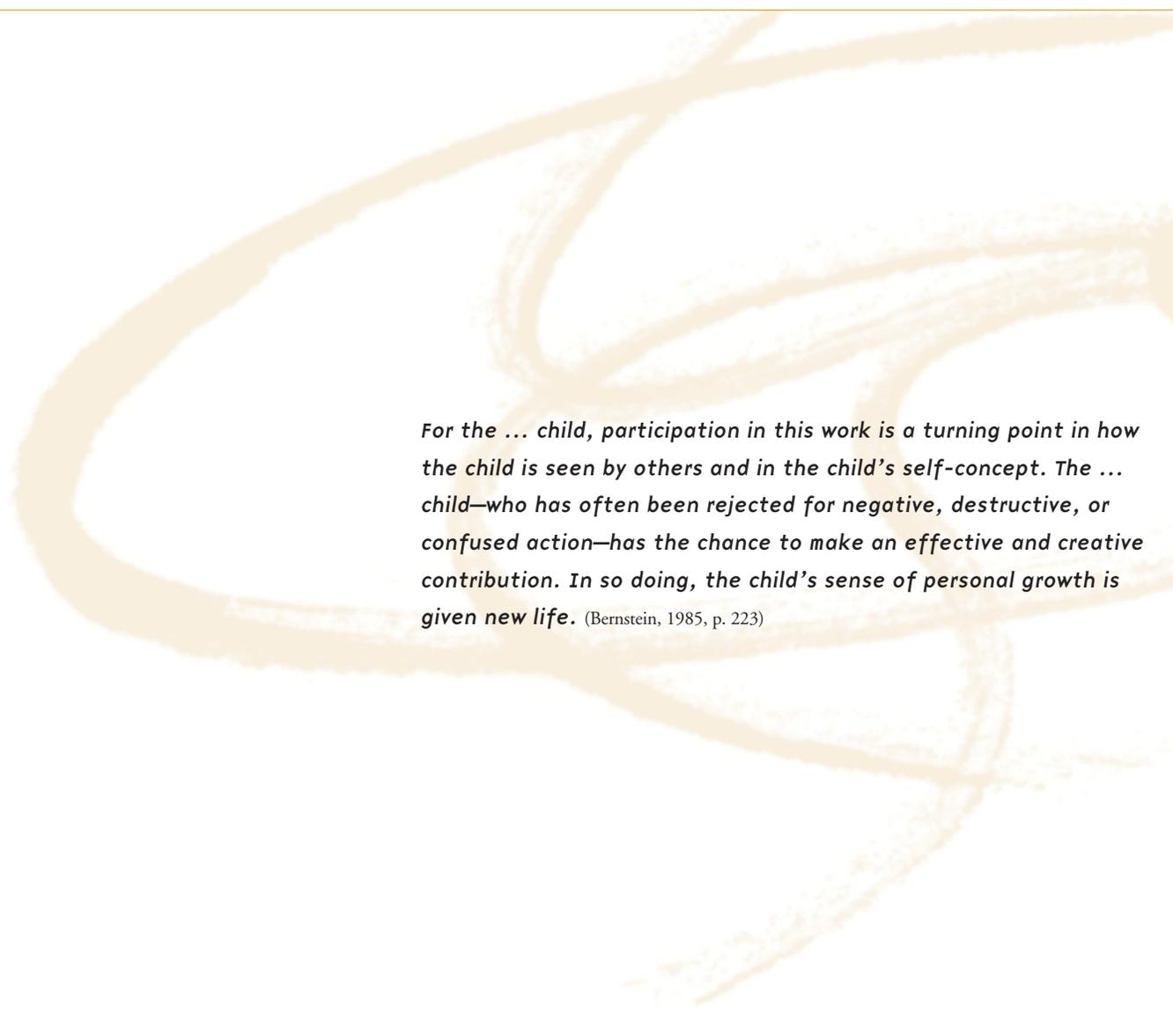
**Teachers who use theatre games in their classes with students with disabilities encourage social interaction and expression that enhance the students' concept of self and reduce disruptive behaviors.**

Bernstein discovered that the process of getting often isolated students involved with each other was not easy. Children came to the games with strained relations with their classmates that led to verbal abuse and even physical aggression. These students were not accustomed to the kind of social interaction that theatre provides.

Student behavior and social interaction improved as the workshops progressed. Improvement came not through punishment but through peer feedback. As students became accustomed to the process, they exhibited fewer disruptive and antisocial tendencies. Students began to contribute to the group effort; and as they found ways to include each other, the dynamics changed.

The students also enjoyed having their teachers participate in the workshops. Working with the teacher as a member of the group allowed the children to experience the teacher as a person. At the same time, teachers found a significant change in their perception of the children.

The findings of researcher Rey E. de la Cruz support many of the conclusions drawn by Bernstein. Following 12 weekly creative drama sessions (40 minutes each), de la Cruz examined the social and language skill development of primary and intermediate students with learning disabilities. Posttest results revealed significant gains in oral expressive language skills when compared with the control group, which received weekly language therapy only. Further, students displayed growth in the ability to focus, exhibiting greater self-control, social compliance, and courtesy to others (de la Cruz, 1995).



*For the ... child, participation in this work is a turning point in how the child is seen by others and in the child's self-concept. The ... child—who has often been rejected for negative, destructive, or confused action—has the chance to make an effective and creative contribution. In so doing, the child's sense of personal growth is given new life.* (Bernstein, 1985, p. 223)

## REFERENCES

Bernstein, B. (1985). Drama as a context for transformation. In J. Kase Polisini (Ed.), *Creative Drama in a Developmental Context*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

Theatre as a way to transform the traditional classroom relationship of student and teacher and allow real learning and growth to occur.

Bernstein, B. (1987). Becoming involved: Spolin theater games in classes for the educationally handicapped. *Theory into Practice* 24 (3), 217-223. Students with disabilities can benefit by participation in the arts. By focusing on group play and goals, individual personal problems are put aside. Contributing to a group generates a greater sense of accomplishment than external rewards.

de la Cruz, R. E. (1995). The effects of creative drama on the social and oral language skills of children with learning disabilities. In R. J. Deasy (Ed.), *Critical links: Learning in the arts and student academic and social development*. Washington, DC: Arts Education Partnership.

This doctoral dissertation investigates the effects of a creative drama program emphasizing social and language skills on the social and language skills of learning disabled children (ages 5 to 11).

Spolin, V. (1975). *Theater game file*. St. Louis, MO: Central Midwestern Regional Educational Laboratory (CEMREL).

Theatre games that challenge students not only to perform but also to think and express themselves.

# Communication and Compromise Skills

## T H E O R Y

A role of the teacher is to help young people get along well with others and function successfully in a larger social setting. Research demonstrates that theatre effectively encourages social and interactive growth in students (Bruner, 1983).

When children play, or are in a play, they are engaged in a social event. Participants make a decision that guides them in speaking and acting. Others react to what is said and done, and thus the play develops. The process requires commitment to the event, listening, processing, and responding. Consequently, the framework for the play is set. There is give-and-take. Communication and compromise, both foundations of social interaction, are intrinsic to theatre (Goffman, 1974).

## B E T T E R P R A C T I C E

**Teachers who teach communication and compromise through theatre activity promote the development of social problem solving skills and emotional intelligence.**

Participants in theatre learn quickly that unless they can agree and cooperate, the game is over. Even the starting point, choosing roles for theatre, poses a problem that helps students learn and grow. Students learn about negotiation and compromise, problem solving, and fairness. Their social cognition matures as they learn about themselves and others.

Proponents of Daniel Goleman's theory of emotional intelligence advocate training all students in social and emotional competences, and not restricting the training to students who are troubled or who cause trouble. Through training, students favor choice over impulse and solutions over anger (The Center for Applied Psychology, 1996). Additional studies indicate training in social skills reduces disruptive behavior, drug abuse, and other health risks. These studies also show that teachers in schools that employ social competencies training are more satisfied (Hawkins & Catalano, 1992). Theatre activities offer students structured opportunities to test the appropriateness of verbal and nonverbal communication strategies in specific situations and contexts.

The work of Shakespeare & Company speaks to the rich potential of theatre to foster personal and community-based competencies. Working with high school students, Shakespeare & Company programs use a project-based curriculum to promote learning in four areas: (1) introducing participants to Shakespeare and offering an engaging and systematic approach to the language/text of the plays; (2) developing acting skills; (3) exploring work in creative communities; and (4) promoting "learning about oneself: linking self-knowledge to social and intellectual development." Behavioral and cognitive concepts associated with the company's pedagogical approach include promoting high expectations and strong content, building time management skills and discipline, suspending judgment, acknowledging individual contributions, encouraging high levels of inclusion, and developing an understanding of and empathy for others while recognizing that problem-solving strategies used in theatre are transferable life skills. These basic principles define successful learning environments, characterize behaviors critical to effective communication, and illuminate conditions that support social and cognitive growth (Seidel, 1998).

***Because drama is a social act, it differs from the act of reading or writing. Participants have to construct their meanings collaboratively. Without a group, there is only a monologue, not a drama. When participants respond to one another, they are challenged to create meaning together, and in the process there are surprises and discoveries. The multiple voices in a drama echo the dialogic nature of the creation of meaning in all of human interactions.***

(Wagner, 1998, p. 30)

## REFERENCES

Bakhtin, M. (1981). Discourse in the novel. In C. Emerson (Ed.) & M. Holquist (Ed. and Trans.), *The dialogic imagination: Four essays by M. Bakhtin*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

The classroom as a complex community in which students learn to function. Theatre is an excellent way to provide students with practice in collaboration and social problem solving.

Bruner, J. S. (1983). *Child's talk: Learning to use language*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company.

The use of play in children's language acquisition. Bruner postulates that children build social frameworks for their play.

Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis: An Essay on the organization of experience*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional Intelligence*. New York: Bantam Books. The importance of an individual's emotional intelligence. Goleman sees his work as an expansion of Gardner's personal intelligences (intrapersonal/interpersonal).

Hawkins, J. D., Catalano, R., & Associates. (1992). *Communities that care: action for drug abuse prevention*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. The value of including social competencies training in schools for drug abuse-related issues.

Heinig, R. B. (1977). *Creative drama as an aid in children's development of communication strategies*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 090 541) Theatre provides students a means to practice and develop communication strategies.

Hembree-Kigin, T., McNeil, M., & Eyberg, S. (1996). Short-term play therapy for disruptive children. King of Prussia, PA: Center for Applied psychology.

Seidel, S. (1998). "Stand and unfold yourself": A monograph on the Shakespeare & Company research study. In E. B. Fiske (Ed.), *Champions of change: The impact of the arts on learning* (pp. 80-90). Washington, DC: Arts Education Partnership.

This study explores the power and efficacy of Shakespeare & Company's work with high school students by delineating key program elements, expectations, and pedagogical approaches.

Shapiro, L. E., & Shore, H. M. (1996, June). Emotional literacy: Teaching mental health to children. *The Child Therapy News*.

An overview of emotional literacy and citations of studies that support the concept of teaching social competencies as part of the regular school day.

Paley, V. G. (1978). The use of drama in kindergarten. *The Elementary School Journal* 78, 319-323.

The skills of negotiation and compromise are important to social interaction. They are developed through the use of theatre in the classroom.

Wagner, B. J. (1998). *Educational drama and language arts: What research shows*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Theatre may help teachers develop students' social understanding and social skills.

# Hearing-Impaired Students

## THEORY

Nearly 75% of all deaf and hard-of-hearing students are in mainstreamed programs. Schools have a considerable challenge in meeting their needs because most programs serve only one deaf or hard-of-hearing student. Movement training to develop visual theatre skills is essential for these students (Wisher, 1979). Research also indicates that teaching creative movement and dance to students who are deaf or hard of hearing enhances their creativity (Reber & Sherrill, 1981).

Reber and Sherrill provided 20 deaf and hard-of-hearing students, ages 9 to 14, with 45-minute creative movement/dance classes, twice weekly for 10 weeks. The teaching was creative rather than directive. Students were given opportunities to create movement on their own, rather than copying from the

## BETTER PRACTICE

**Teachers who provide creative movement and dance training experiences for students with hearing impairments stimulate students' imaginations and enhance their abilities to demonstrate original movement patterns.**

instructor. Instructors frequently posed questions or situations, and the students would interpret the challenges with movement. Results of the study indicated that students participating in the movement and dance classes demonstrated significant growth in movement skills. They also improved in figural originality, figural elaboration, and creativity.

Dance and movement training has often been denied to deaf and hard-of-hearing students. Don't you need to hear the music to dance? The answer is "No, you don't." Deaf persons

can be creative, graceful in movement, and skilled in dance. Marcia Freeman, a dance/creative movement instructor at the Model Secondary School for the Deaf for more than 20 years, says, "The arts can be a real opportunity for [deaf and hard-of-hearing students] to excel and communicate without the usual barriers by allowing self-expression" (Freeman, 1991, p. 13).

*It is often said that the deaf child lacks imagination. It may be more accurate to say that he lacks opportunities to put his imagination to work .... Educators of deaf children often look for new ways to stimulate imagination but they usually have in mind verbal stimuli and they usually overlook art. To the extent that art experience can enable deaf children to engage in imaginary play, and possibly sustain or prolong it, it can provide opportunities for abstract thinking as well as reinforce patterns set by language and set patterns for language to follow.* (Silver, 1977, p. 354)

## REFERENCES

Bragg, B. (1972). The human potential of human potential—art and the deaf. *American Annals of the Deaf*, 117, 508-511.

The need for theatre and other visual arts as an artistic outlet and an educational tool for deaf students.

Freeman, M. (1991). Dancing through the barriers. *Preview* (Fall), 11-14. An overview of creative movement and dance programs for deaf and hard-of-hearing students who attend the Gallaudet University Model Secondary School for the Deaf.

Reber, R., & Sherrill, C. (1981, December). Creative thinking and dance/movement skills of hearing impaired youth: An experimental study. *American Annals of the Deaf*. 1004-1009.

Deaf students trained in dance and movement performed better on the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking.

Silver, R. (1977). The question of imagination, originality, and abstract thinking by deaf children. *American Annals of the Deaf*, 122, 349-354.

Criticism of studies indicating that deaf students have greater concrete thinking and less originality than their hearing peers. Silver points out that results are often based on verbal findings rather than nonverbal creative abilities such as those demonstrated in the visual and graphic arts.

Wisher, P. (1979). Dance for the deaf. In C. Sherrill (Ed.), *Creative Arts for the Severely Handicapped*, Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.

Arts that are both visual and related to movement are ideal for deaf people because they communicate through American Sign Language. Deaf people can embrace dance, though some hearing persons think it inappropriate for deaf students.

# Creating Caring Communities

## T H E O R Y

Students reflect societal differences, tensions, and conflicts in the classroom. Difficult social situations, which many adults try to avoid in the greater community, are frequently intensified and unavoidable in the smaller social cosmos of the classroom. Often viewed as a problem, these difficulties might instead be seen as an opportunity to prepare students for the greater community in which they will function as adults. In writing and performing dramatic presentations, students of varying social, cultural, and economic backgrounds come together to address and ultimately understand and respect their different experiences.

“Influenced by Vygotsky, those working from a socio-cultural perspective have stressed the link between students’ literacy and language and their participation in community life” (Dyson, 1998, p. 149). Since theatre is a social event, students who participate in dramatic activities interact with their peers. Yet student populations reflect the diversity of the community at large. Differences in ethnic and cultural backgrounds, as

well as divergent economic status, gender, and religion, create a challenging and sometimes conflicting arena for discourse (Bakhtin, 1981). In writing and performing, students bring order to their inner thoughts as they reach out to address others.

To untangle the complexities of identity and community is a difficult task even for adults. Students, working together to prepare a dramatic performance, deciding the details of character, action, language, and conceiving and enacting that creation, face the complexities of community. In

manipulating words and actions, students also manipulate ideas, feelings, and points of view. Simultaneously, their writings and performances reflect and act upon their relations with their fellow students (Dyson, 1998). What too often appears to the casual observer as no more than a skit is actually an exercise in introspection, in issues of human relations, and in a deepening of community.

## B E T T E R P R A C T I C E

**Teachers who engage students of varying social backgrounds in preparing and performing an original dramatic piece develop a common community by providing opportunities for students to work through their differences.**

*In the intersection of social processes of affiliation and negotiation and the ideological processes of reflection and refraction emerged issues of human relations, including those related to gender, race, and class. These issues were in no way caused by the children’s composing, dramatizing, and talking. But they were thus made visible in the official world and, at least potentially, made subject to more deliberate manipulation, more conscious control.* (Dyson, 1998, p. 164)

## R E F E R E N C E S

Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). Discourse in the novel. In C. Emerson & M. Holquist (Eds.), M. Holquist, (Trans.), *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. Bakhtin*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

The classroom as a complex community in which a number of conflicts in human relations affect student learning.

Dyson, A. D. (1998). The children’s forum. Linking writing, drama, and the development of community in an urban classroom. In B. J. Wagner (Ed.), *Educational drama and language arts: What research shows*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Examples of methods for using writing and drama to build community in the school.

Moll, L., & Whitmore, K. (1993). Vygotsky in classroom practice: Moving from individual transmission to social transaction. In E. Forman, N. Minick, & C. A. Stone (Eds.), *Context for Learning: Sociocultural Dynamics in Children’s Development* (pp. 19-42). New York: Oxford University Press. The link between literacy and learning and a child’s participation in community life.

Volosinov, V.N. (1986). *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. (L. Matejka & I. R. Titunik, trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. The ideological processes through which texts reflect and refract children’s professed values, interests, and beliefs about human relations.

# Ethnic and Cultural Diversity

## THEORY

Most prejudice reduction programs have shared a single shortcoming—they assume that increasing student knowledge of other groups of people will clarify misconceptions or false stereotypes. Knowledge, by itself, does not reduce prejudice (Gimmestad & de Chiara, 1982).

What's missing? Programs that focus on knowledge, the cognitive aspect of the situation, ignore both the affective and behavioral dimensions of prejudice. A teacher's facts cannot have the same effect as working with persons of a different ethnic or cultural group and getting to know them. Theatre classes provide one way for schools to address the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of many of the issues surrounding concepts of prejudice.

## BETTER PRACTICE

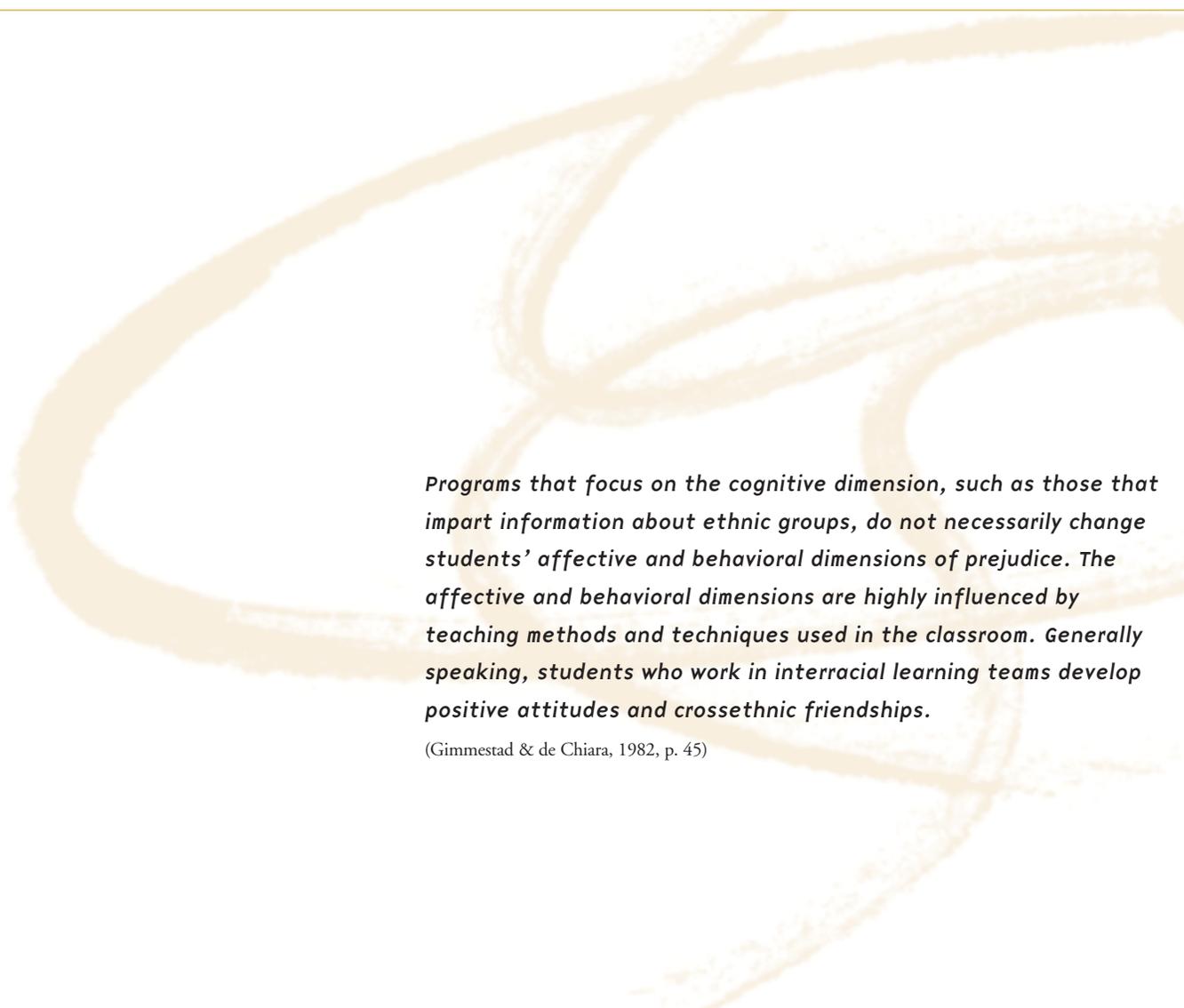
**Teachers who provide experiences in theatre that focus on diverse cultural themes enhance student knowledge and understanding of other cultures and ethnic groups.**

The success of this approach is reflected in the assessment of the Gallaudet University Young Scholars Program (YSP), a four week summer institute in the performing arts for deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing teenagers. The YSP performing arts component celebrates a different culture each year, with artists from the cultural focus leading hands-on activities. The program assessment indicates participants experience significant improvement in motivation to learn, creativity, and sense of

control of the future. The assessment reflects a profound enhancement of understanding and appreciation for a particular culture, and a greater regard for all cultures (Meisegeier, 2000).

In a study of the impact of theatre on student cultural sensitivity, Gimmestad and de Chiara developed a series of dramatic plays focusing on cultural themes. Working with upper-level elementary students in New York City, the project featured a control group that studied cultural issues and an experimental group that employed a theatre-based approach to the same issues. Both groups showed greater knowledge of the cultures they studied. The posttest results, however, indicate greater reduction in prejudice among those students who participated in the dramatic plays (Gimmestad & de Chiara, 1982).

These studies are encouraging because they indicate that the dramatic process enhances comprehension of complex ideas and issues, and serves as a strategy for addressing one of this country's most challenging problems—the relationship between diverse groups in a multicultural environment.



**Programs that focus on the cognitive dimension, such as those that impart information about ethnic groups, do not necessarily change students' affective and behavioral dimensions of prejudice. The affective and behavioral dimensions are highly influenced by teaching methods and techniques used in the classroom. Generally speaking, students who work in interracial learning teams develop positive attitudes and crossethnic friendships.**

(Gimmestad & de Chiara, 1982, p. 45)

## REFERENCES

Gimmestad, B. J., & de Chiara, E. (1982). Dramatic plays: A vehicle for prejudice reduction in elementary school. *Journal of Educational Research, 76* (1), 45-49.

Prejudice can be reduced when elementary students attend dramatic plays that portray the heritage and lifestyles of various ethnic groups in a positive light. The positive impact of theatre is furthered by students in racially mixed groups performing scenes from, or related to, the plays.

Kraus, S. (1972). Modifying prejudice: Attitude change as a function of the race of the communicator. In A. Brown (Ed.), *Prejudice in Children*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.

Plays that deal with race issues and have integrated casts had more effect on prejudice reduction than either an all-white or all-black cast.

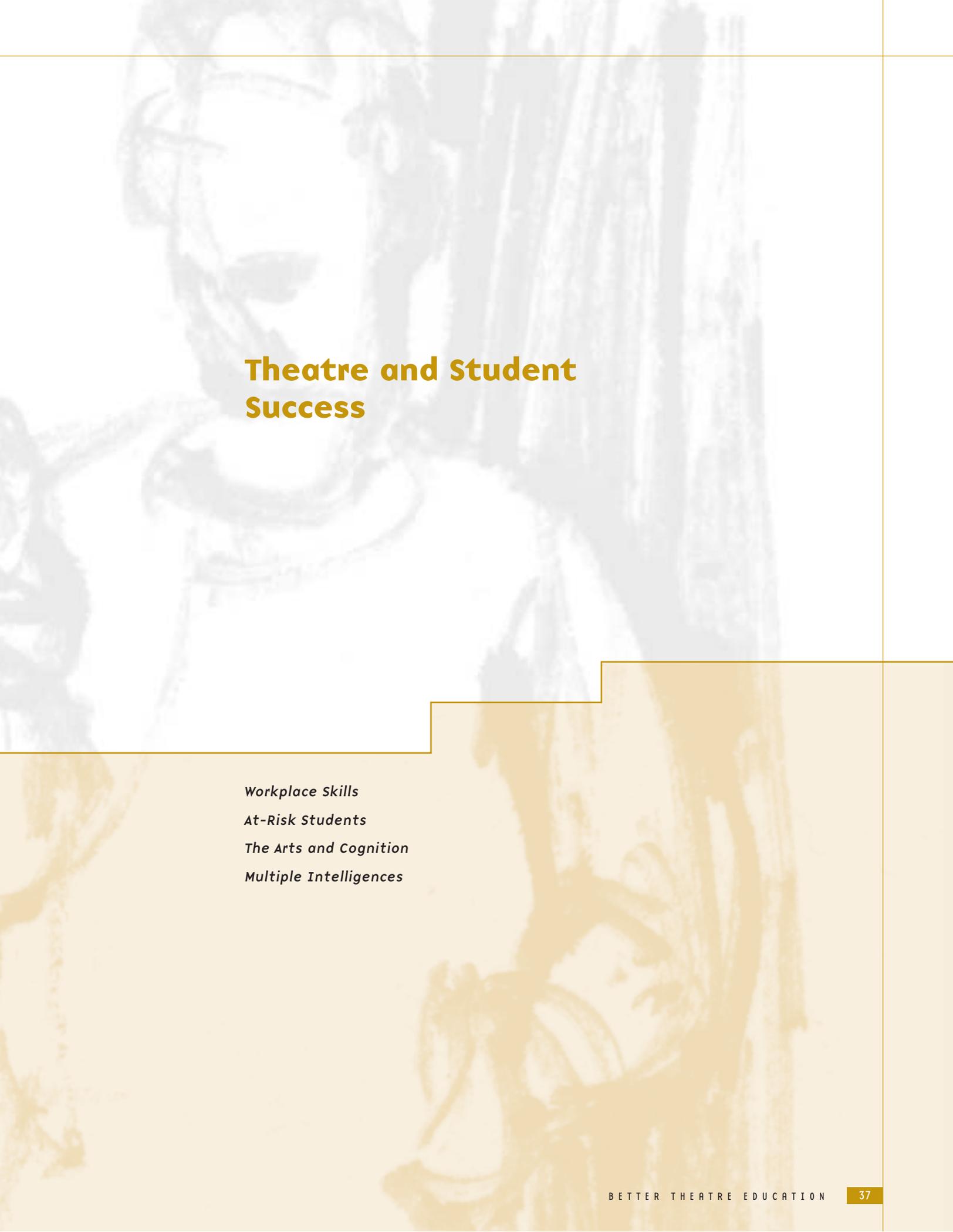
Meisegeier, R. (2000). *Gallaudet University young scholars program—Program assessment*. Unpublished report, Gallaudet University, Washington, DC.

A four-week summer program in the performing arts for deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing teenagers. Results indicate significant student growth in critical thinking, creativity, motivation for learning, and attitudes toward other cultures. Nineteen students from the United States and 17 young people from India gathered at Gallaudet University in Washington, DC, in a celebration of Romanian culture.

Weasel, R. H., Wiser, P. L., & Cook, S. W. (1975). The impact of cooperative learning experiences on cross-ethnic relations and attitudes. *Journal of Social Attitudes, 31*, 219-244.

Interracial learning teams develop positive attitudes and cross-ethnic friendships.





## **Theatre and Student Success**

*Workplace Skills*  
*At-Risk Students*  
*The Arts and Cognition*  
*Multiple Intelligences*

# Workplace Skills

## THEORY

The workplace has become more complex and more global. Schools that once had responsibility for producing good citizens are now responsible for developing graduates who can survive and thrive in this rapidly changing world.

Saxton and Miller (1998) summarize the profile of a valued employee. “Employers are looking for what can be termed generic employability skills. They seek out people who are creative, adaptable, and flexible, who are excellent communicators with highly developed interpersonal skills, who possess the skills of

problem solving, problem posing and of leadership, who can work collaboratively and cooperatively as well as independently, who are capable of making independent decisions, who are able to understand the full meaning and implications of responsibility and who are lifelong learners” (p. 173). These skills will help students succeed in the workplace, whether on the factory floor, in the small family owned business, or in the head office of a multinational corporation.

The 1991 United States Department of Labor report, “What Work Requires of Schools,” identifies five competencies that students will need to be successful in the workforce:

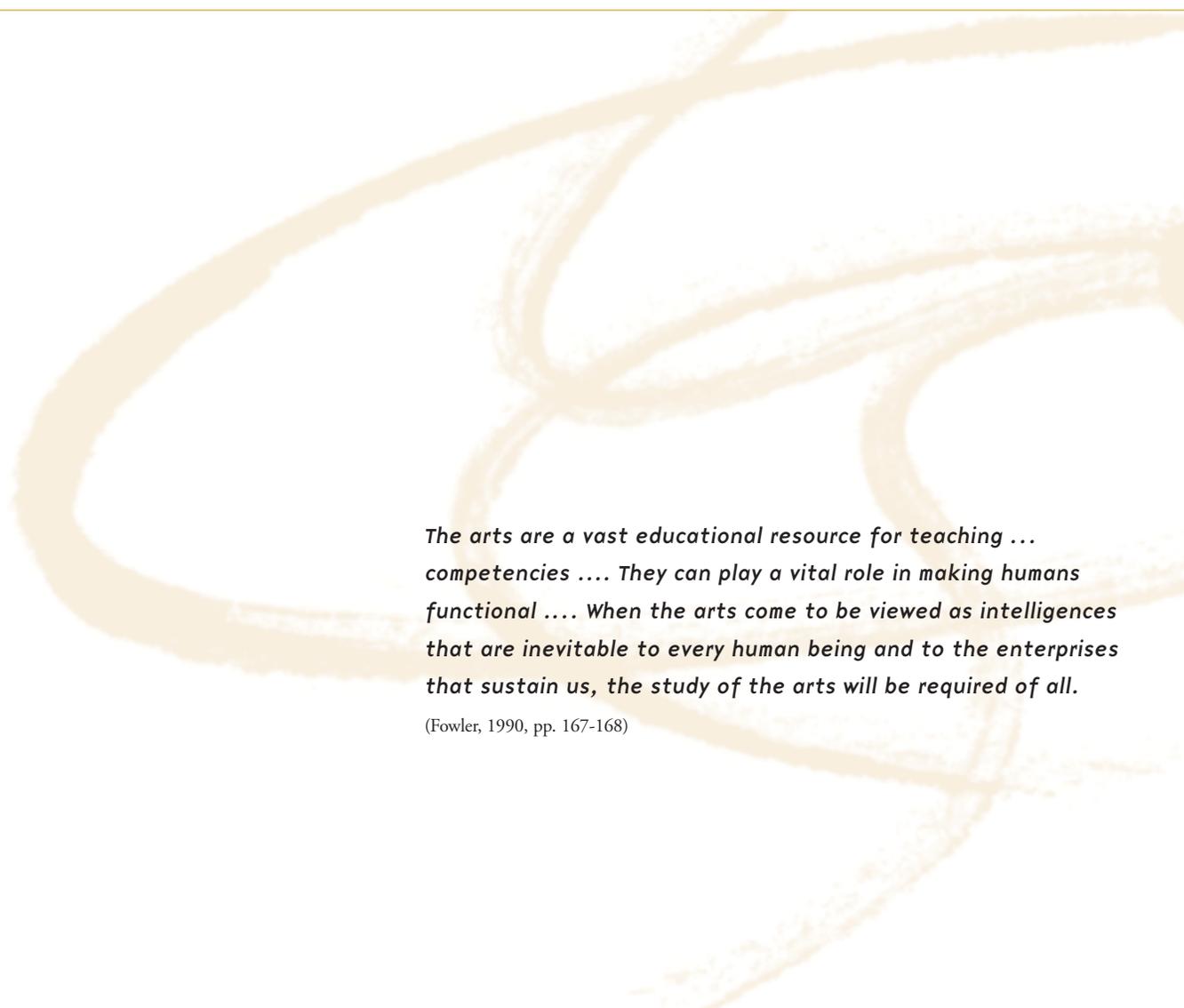
## BETTER PRACTICE

**Teachers who encourage creative thought, effective communication, and the value of hard work in theatre activities develop expectations for student performance in the workplace. They nurture the very skills required for the 21st-century workplace.**

- Resources: identifies, organizes, plans, and allocates resources
- Interpersonal: works with others
- Information: acquires and uses information
- Systems: understands complex interrelationships
- Technology: works in a variety of technologies

These are the very skills that students develop through many of the arts but especially through theatre. Through the ambiguity of the freedom of creation and the rigor of discipline, students involved in drama programs grow stronger in these skills. They think creatively, communicate effectively, and learn the value of hard work (Fowler, 1990).

The world is becoming a smaller place. In a global economy, employees are required to travel and be open to cultures and customs different from their own. Experiences in theatre can help students learn about and understand world cultures. (Ackroyd & Pilkington, 1997). A strong program in theatre has a pragmatic vocational outcome of considerable significance, and will help develop students ready to face the workplace of the 21st century.



*The arts are a vast educational resource for teaching ... competencies .... They can play a vital role in making humans functional .... When the arts come to be viewed as intelligences that are inevitable to every human being and to the enterprises that sustain us, the study of the arts will be required of all.*

(Fowler, 1990, pp. 167-168)

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## REFERENCES

Ackroyd, J., & Pilkington, A. (1997). Toward a non-essentialist multiculturalism in drama in education. *NADIE Journal* 21 (2), 5-16.

The significant role of drama in developing student abilities to function in a diverse environment.

Fowler, C. (1990). One nation, undercultured and under qualified. In W. J. Moody (Ed.), *Artistic intelligences: Implications for education*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Drama is essential for schools to produce students ready and able to thrive as adults.

Greene, M. (1995). *Releasing the imagination: Essays on education, the arts, and social change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Theatre and the other arts address skills that educators often ignore. Greene believes that to best teach students in nurturing all of their intelligences, the arts should play a major role in education.

Leavitt, J. (1997). *Second language acquisition in cultural understanding through theatrical metaphor*. Unpublished master's thesis, University of Victoria. Drama as a powerful medium in the acquisition of language, gesture, and culture as a holistic package.

Saxton, J., & Miller, C. (1998). *Drama and theater in education: The research of practice, the practice of research*. Victoria, BC: IDEA Publications. The value of theatre in education and its impact on students transitioning to the workplace.

Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills. (June 1991). *What work requires of schools: A SCANS report for America 2000*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor. Skills that students will need for work.

# At-Risk Students

## THEORY

The past decade witnessed an increase in the number of children who are considered at risk of educational failure. The at-risk population includes students with disabilities, as well as those living in environments of poverty, crime, and abuse. One of the problems confronting at-risk children is the use of free time. At-risk children range from those who spend hours alone watching television to those who participate in gang activity and commit crimes.

One strategy communities and schools across the nation use to address at-risk issues is to create after-school recreational and remedial instruction. Some of these programs incorporate arts instruction. The United States Department of Education sponsors a grant program called 21st Century Community Learning Centers, in part to address the challenges of at-risk youth (Peterson & Magrab, 1989).

## BETTER PRACTICE

**Caring, effective teachers in after school programs in theatre and other arts forms design safe and healthy experiences so that at-risk students can profit from meaningful enrichment alternatives.**

Theatre and other arts programs have effectively met the needs of at-risk students. Reported benefits of these programs, in addition to simply keeping young people out of trouble, include: (1) positive development and channeling of student creativity; (2) increase in self confidence and self esteem, and a greater willingness to freely express themselves; (3) knowledge and appreciation of the arts; (4) learning to get along with others, showing greater self control and autonomy and less aggressiveness; (5) development of friendships; (6) enjoyment;

and (7) having what students apparently lack too often at home and school—a place to shine (Scott, Witt, & Foss, 1999).

The work of Shirley Brice Heath corroborates conclusions offered by Scott, Witt, and Foss. Exploring the potential of after-school community-based programs to affect the lives of young people, Heath identifies several factors that typify successful arts-based interventions: (1) a strong achievement ethic marked by high expectations and responsibility; (2) a connection to “school-related activities” (academic skills and content areas); (3) peer critiques; (4) conditional reasoning (hypothesizing); and (5) risk-taking (Heath & Roach, 1998). Similar factors and expectations define the acclaimed educational programs of Shakespeare & Company (cited elsewhere in this document).

Critical to the success of after-school programs is the involvement of caring, effective leaders. Studies show that this aspect of meaningful after-school “at-risk youth programs cannot be understated” (Scott, Witt, & Foss, 1999, p. 13). An after-school theatre program helps at risk children avoid getting into trouble and offers them meaningful enrichment alternatives.



***What is interesting is that protection, in the eyes of parents and ... staff, went beyond simply keeping kids occupied and, by implication, out of trouble. Virtually all of the parents interviewed wanted their children to be meaningfully involved in a program ... with its potential to provide children with developmental benefits.***

(Scott, Witt, & Foss, 1999, p. 13)

## REFERENCES

Carnegie Corporation of New York. (1992). *A matter of time: Risk and opportunity in the non-school hours*. New York: Author.

Targeting for intervention those students particularly at risk in regard to completing school and avoiding problems associated with drugs and alcohol, sexual activity at an early age—and possibly being infected with a sexually transmitted disease or becoming a teenage parent—and joining a gang with resultant delinquent activity.

Heath, S. B., & Roach, A. (1998). Imaginative actuality: Learning in the arts during the nonschool hours. In E. B. Fiske (Ed.), *Champions of change: The impact of the arts on learning*. Washington, DC: Arts Education Partnership. Investigates the characteristics of effective after-school programs and identifies program elements that contribute to student success in and outside of school.

Peterson, L., & Magrab, P. (1989). Introduction to special section: Children on their own. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology*, 18 (1), 2-7.

The hours immediately following school, before a parent returns from work, are the most troubled. Unstructured and unsupervised, some young people with wide gaps of free time will find trouble. Programs designed by schools and communities have been effective in helping individual students use that free time in a positive way.

Scott, D., Witt, P. A., & Foss, M. G. (1999). *Evaluation of the impact of Dougherty Art Center's creativity club on children at risk*. College Station: Texas A&M University.

Positive results of an after school arts program for students at risk. In light of all the programs designed to help at-risk students, the authors maintain that arts programs reach the highest number of students and offer the greatest amount of enrichment.

# The Arts and Cognition

## THEORY

High school can be frightening to a young person. Teachers who have taught in secondary school have seen students enter as bright, funny kids loaded with potential and interested in learning but whose performances gradually diminished. Many children leave school dull and apathetic, or worse, involved in behaviors that threaten their futures. Some never graduate.

Year after year, educators shake their heads and ask the same question: What is to be done? Though not the only answer, theatre and other arts seem to play a positive role. Students involved with theatre are far less likely to be troubled students, usually have higher reading levels, and maintain better grade point averages. They usually earn higher grades on standardized tests than students not involved in the arts. They have better attendance records and more positive attitudes about themselves. Students engaged in the arts have better communication skills and are more likely to be active in their communities in

positive ways. Theatre and the arts have a truly remarkable impact on the education and development of students (Catterall, 1997).

## BETTER PRACTICE

**Teachers who involve secondary students in theatre and other arts programs help them adopt more positive attitudes about school, cognitive development, and academic success.**

Why is this so? James Catterall's research indicates that "the arts play a role in promoting cognitive development [and] serve to broaden access to meaning by offering ways of thinking and ways of representation to a spectrum of intelligences scattered unevenly across our population." Catterall's research shows that

the arts motivate students in various aspects of their lives, contributing to academic achievement, team spirit, and connection and responsibility to the community (Catterall, 1997, p.14).

*Academic grades, standardized test scores, measured reading levels, attitudes about commitment to community—all are higher for students maintaining high levels of activity in music, chorus, drama, and the visual arts.... Our data support the contention that rubbing shoulders with arts-involved youngsters in the middle and high school years is, on average, a smart idea when it comes to choosing friends and activities.* (Catterall, 1997, p. 14)

## REFERENCES

Catterall, J. S. (1997). Involvement in the arts and success in secondary school. *The Imagination Project at UCLA Graduate School of Education & Information Studies*. Los Angeles: University of California at Los Angeles.

The National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS: 88). This study followed about 25,000 students in 1,000 schools throughout the United States. Data are based on student surveys, achievement tests, parent surveys, teacher surveys, and school principal surveys. Analysis of the data reveals that students who are involved with the arts are far more likely to be successful than students not involved in the arts.

Catterall, J. S. (1987). On the social costs of dropping out of school. *The High School Journal* 71 (1), 19-30.

Economically disadvantaged students, on average, have the greatest difficulties

succeeding in school and as adults. Many more poor children than affluent children fail in school and drop out. Often, as adults, they are dependent on public programs and involved in criminal activity. Despite the odds, this group also benefits greatly from strong drama and arts programs.

Gardner, H. (1983). *Frames of Mind*. New York: Basic Books. Multiple intelligences and levels of cognitive skills beyond paper-and-pencil tests. Gardner sees theatre as key to addressing linguistic, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and bodily kinesthetic intelligences.

Morrison Institute of Public Policy, Arizona State University & National Endowment for the Arts. (1995). *Schools, communities, and the arts: A research compendium*. Tempe, AZ: Author.

Involvement in the arts is linked to student motivation and engagement in school and to attitudes that contribute to academic achievement.

# Multiple Intelligences

## THEORY

Educators must stay abreast of theories and research related to cognitive growth. Theatre educators must not only be aware of new theories of mind but must also know how to use them in the classroom and rehearsal studio. Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences posits that each individual possesses a unique cognitive profile. It has had a profound effect on education in general and arts education in particular (1983).

One of the central tenets of the theory of multiple intelligences holds that "a school is responsible for helping all students discover and develop their talents and strengths. In doing this, the school not only awakens children's joy in learning but also fuels the persistence and effort necessary for mastering skills and information and for being inventive" (Campbell, 1997, p. 2). The arts effectively awaken students.

## BETTER PRACTICE

**Teachers who use theatre teaching strategies engage students in activities where they can discover their own talents and strengths. They create an environment that encourages learning and expressing through different intelligences.**

Students who study acting engage in activities that can develop linguistic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and bodily kinesthetic intelligences. Theatre is a uniquely collaborative process in which actors, musicians, dancers, visual artists, public relations staff, box office staff, purchasing staff, and accounting staff work together to produce a show. Because of its collaborative nature, theatre provides a foundation for logical mathematical, spatial, and musical intelligences.

Montana's Framework for Aesthetic Literacy takes an interdisciplinary approach with a multiple-intelligence base curriculum. Teachers use the visual and performing arts to teach English and language arts. Students pose questions and then use the creative process to seek answers (Campbell, 1997). Students and teachers in the Montana program have discovered, as have others, that a multiple-intelligences/arts approach to learning succeeds because it focuses on the whole student by encouraging self-expression. This approach draws on production, reflection, and perception—the three pillars of student development (Oddleifson, 1990).

*Recent work in the field of cognitive psychology suggests the arts are intelligences beyond the merely logical, sequential, verbal, and rational to which the schools most exclusively teach. Howard Gardner at Harvard University suggests seven seats of intelligence, only one of which is purely logical/mathematical. Others are spatial (visual arts), bodily kinesthetic (dance), musical, and personal intelligence involving knowledge of others found in drama and musical performances in groups. A child's discovering his capability in these other intelligences reinforces his selfworth and builds his confidence.* (Oddleifson, 1990, p. 2)

## REFERENCES

Campbell, L. (1997). Variations on a theme: How teachers interpret MI theory. *Educational Leadership* 55 (1), 110.

Several approaches to employing the multiple-intelligences theory in schools. Campbell contends that all of the approaches she outlines are valid.

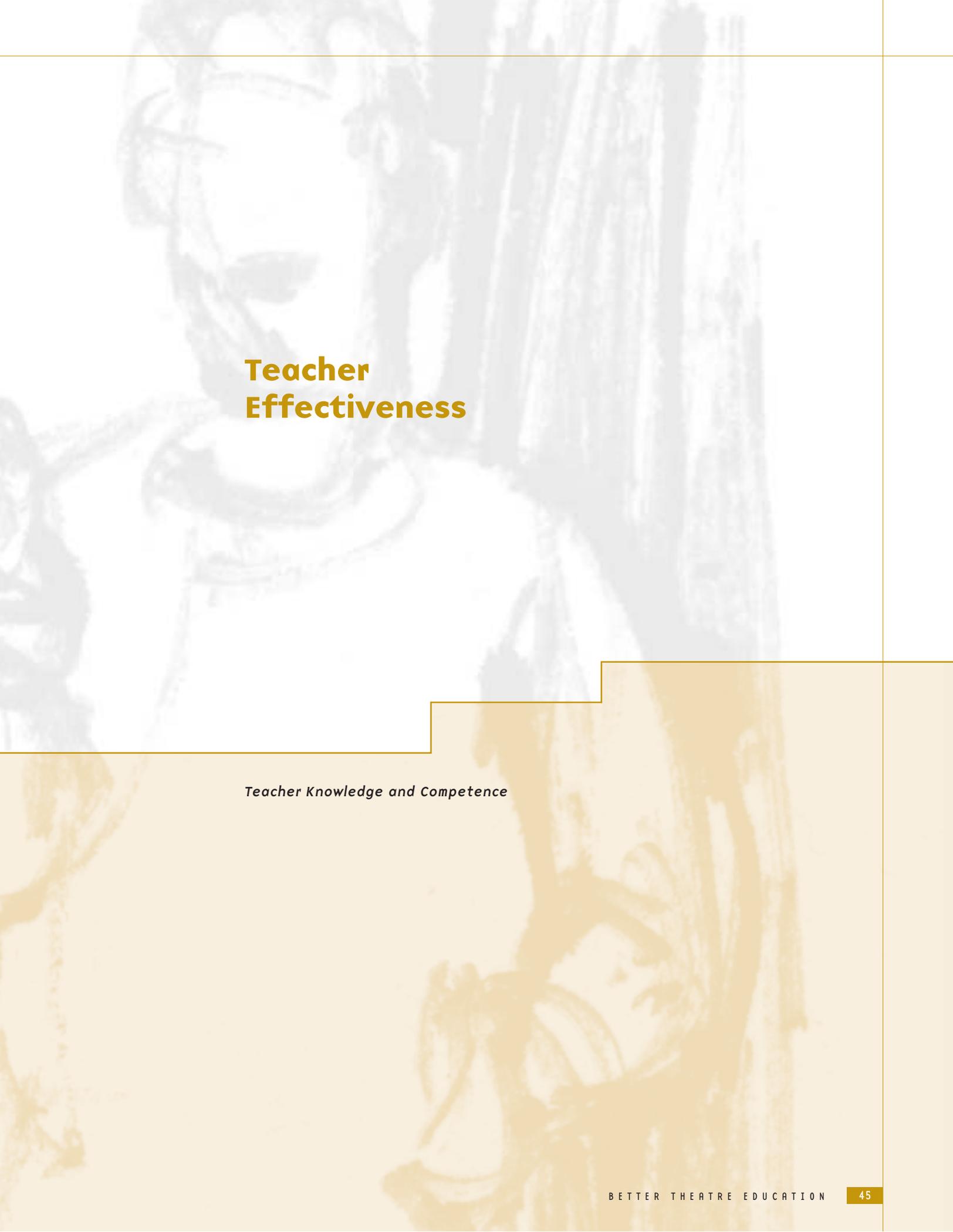
Gardner, H. (1983). *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*. New York: Basic.

Humans possess multiple intelligences. In the past, schools attended mostly to linguistic and logical mathematical, but contemporary educators must address themselves to the whole person.

Oddleifson, E. (1990). A fifty school arts education demonstration project. *On the Beam* 11 (1), 1-5.

An argument for arts in schools. Oddleifson provides examples of success stories and demonstrates the link between arts education and Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences.





## **Teacher Effectiveness**

*Teacher Knowledge and Competence*

# Teacher Knowledge and Competence

## T H E O R Y

Findings in the literature make it clear that theatre is a social act. Integral to this social milieu is the teacher, whose critical role in theatre and in theatre in education activities structures learning relationships. Throughout the school year, the theatre teacher will have to assume many roles in the classroom—catalyst, prodder, prompter, referee, cheerleader, director, audience member, fellow actor, editor, and sounding board (Johnson & O’Neill, 1985).

What does it take to be an excellent theatre teacher? Dorothy Heathcote wrote on the subject:

For me, an excellent teacher is one who knows the difference between relating to things and relating to people.

If I am to aspire to excellence as a teacher, I must be able to see my pupils as they really are.

As an excellent teacher, I must not be afraid to move out of my center, and meet the children where they are.

I must also have the ability to see the world through my students, and not my students through it.

## B E T T E R P R A C T I C E

**Teachers who maintain high standards, set expectations, and demonstrate fairness with students contribute to student success by providing a nurturing environment that enriches and encourages learning.**

I must also have the ability not to be lessened by my students, to withstand them, to use my own eyes sometimes, and be myself.

If I wish to be an excellent teacher, I must also have the ability to dominate the scene for my students when it is necessary, and in the guise of one thing, do another, so that the pupils can grow.

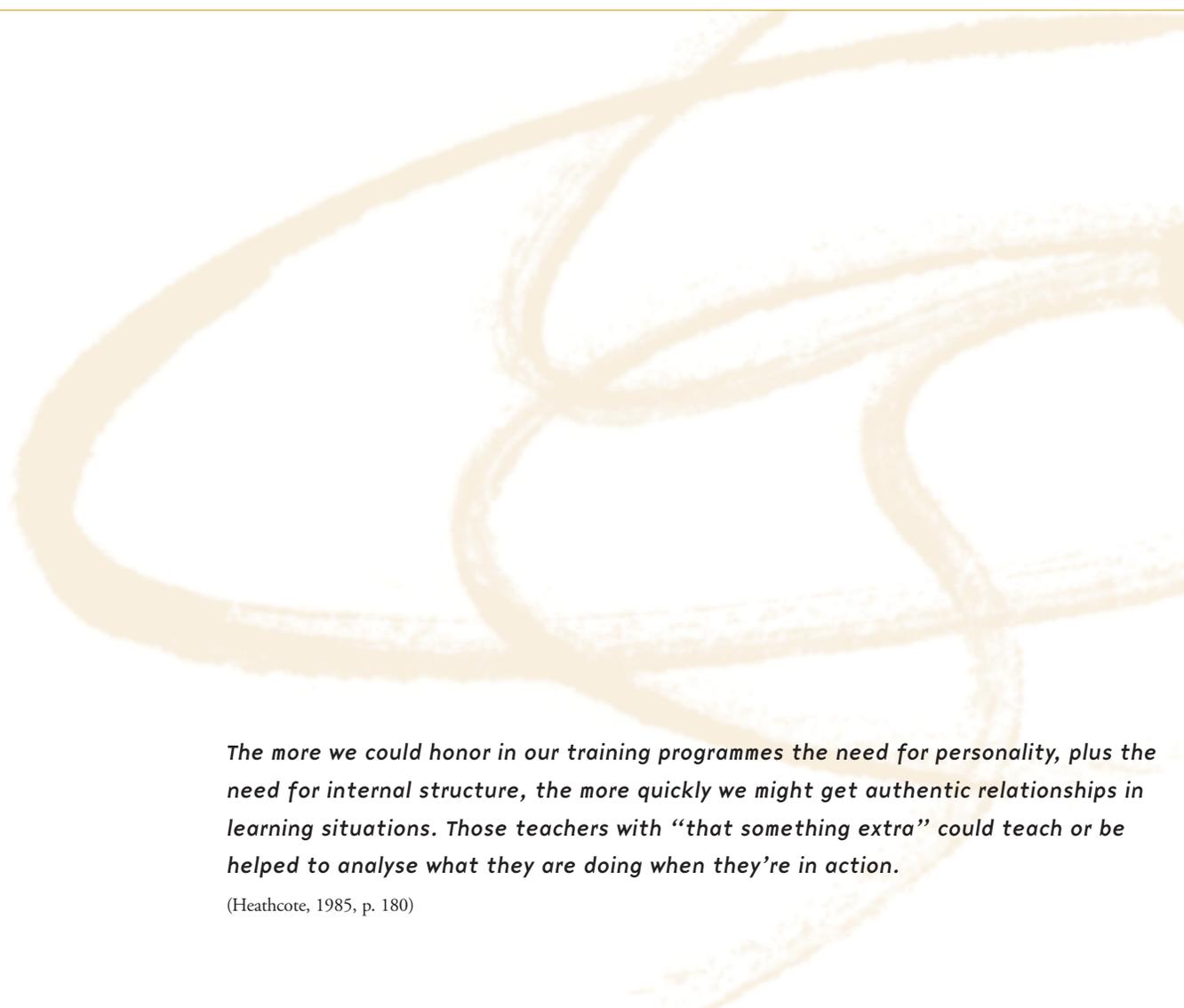
As an excellent teacher I must be able to bring power to my students and to draw on their power (Heathcote, 1978, p. 18-21).

Heathcote (1985, p. 195) states, “I am suggesting that teacher power has enormous potential for these changing times.”

Nellie McCaslin, in her book *Creative Drama in the Classroom and Beyond* (1996), gives us insight into successful teachers:

“Successful creative drama teachers guide rather than direct. Teachers of creative drama find their own way. A sense of humor helps teachers over those periods when nothing is going right. Teachers maintain high standards, knowing that what they accept in the beginning is what the group is capable of at the time, but that they can expect more from them later. Finally, a successful creative drama leader keeps abreast of the times” (pp. 412-413).

There is no single way to do theatre in schools. Armed with training in his or her discipline, coupled with an understanding of the learning and growing process, the theatre teacher embarks on a journey of exploration and discovery. The explorations and discoveries lay the foundation for the most valuable research setting available to a teacher—the classroom—where, through years of experimenting, cajoling, inspiring, observing, and learning, the excellent teacher begins to know the true value and impact of theatre in the school.



*The more we could honor in our training programmes the need for personality, plus the need for internal structure, the more quickly we might get authentic relationships in learning situations. Those teachers with “that something extra” could teach or be helped to analyse what they are doing when they’re in action.*

(Heathcote, 1985, p. 180)

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McCaslin, N. (1996). *Creative drama in the classroom and beyond*. White Plains, NY: Longman.

A how-to for creative drama teaching.

