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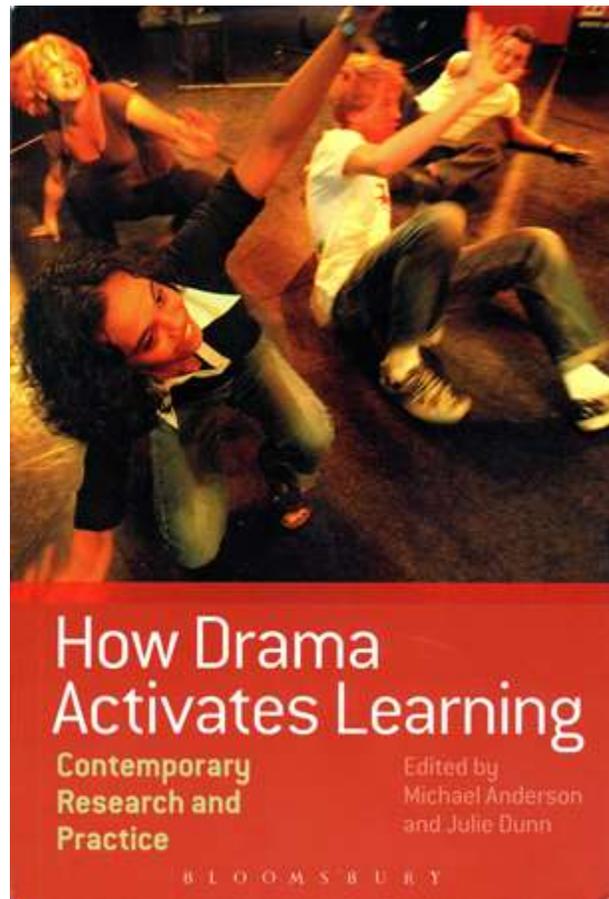
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The notion of using drama as an educational vehicle is not new, but it is still a much needed and much welcomed message. That message is clearly communicated in the text, *How Drama Activates Learning: Contemporary Research and Practice*. Michael Anderson (University of Sydney, Australia) and Julie Dunn (Griffith University, Australia) serve as the editors for, as well as contributors to, this volume and present a collection of case studies that showcase the utilization of drama and applied theatre within the broad context of learning.

The target audience for this text would be a practitioner, researcher, educator, or scholar with some previous knowledge of drama and its various techniques. While the text is very accessible, its short chapters (ranging from 10-20 pages, including references) offer a limited amount of space to sufficiently delve into any one technique with great detail. While some techniques like pantomime and improvisation are a little more “mainstream” and familiar to most readers, other techniques like dramaturgy, tableau, or mantle of the expert may not be. As such, readers without a basic understanding of dramatic techniques might need to consult additional sources for clarification.



In the introduction, Anderson and Dunn state that their goal in editing this book was to demonstrate through research and practice how dramatic techniques impacted diverse learners from a variety of milieus. To achieve this goal, the editors select and present the scholarly work of 29 contributors, representing 18 chapters in the text. The text is organized into three main sections: Activating Communities, Activating Learners, and Activating Curriculum, with each section containing six chapters.

The first section, *Activating Communities*, emphasizes how drama is being used to build a sense of community among its participants. The chapters explore interpersonal skills, social justice, bullying, immigration, culture, global citizenship, identity and social perspective taking. A common theme connecting these case studies is the promotion of reflective engagement in order to achieve a deeper understanding of the social world. The chapters in the *Activating Learners* section discuss drama in relation to aspects of learning skills (e.g., oracy, creating and imagining), concepts (e.g., beauty, ideologies on terrorism), and subject matter (e.g., health and human relations). An interesting chapter in this section is by Bundy, Ewing, and Fleming (Chapter 11) which, instead of focusing on the participants creating the dramatic context, considers the impact of drama upon the participants as audience members.

In the final section, *Activating Curriculum*, the chapters address drama and its connection to history, science, literature, and writing, as well as how drama techniques may be utilized for additional language learning and embracing and incorporating technology. The material presented in these chapters is consistent with the message of the inclusion of drama into educational practices promoted by the National Core Arts Standards (2014) and the National Advisory Committee on Creativity and Cultural Education (1999). Collectively these chapters demonstrate that dramatic techniques do not

just have to be relegated to the drama class, but can be integrated into any subject discipline in order to promote learning. Ultimately, it's what the teachers do with drama that makes the difference (Neelands, 2009).

Overall, how well does this text meet its stated goal from the introduction chapter? One area mentioned in the goals was diversity in approaches. There are different drama techniques utilized as the basis for the case studies, which include dramaturgy, applied theatre, process drama, improvisation, pantomime, tableau, forum theatre, and mantle of the expert. It is refreshing to see the diversity of the dramatic approaches as well as encouraging seeing that they could be utilized as a mechanism to impact participant learning.

A second area stated in the goals was diversity of participants. While there is a sampling of the age of the participants ranging from 4 years old through adulthood, the majority of the case studies present populations over 13 years old. In fact, only 4 of the 18 chapters include participants below the age of 13. While more even-balanced age coverage would have been helpful, it does not detract from the quality of the work or the communicated findings. The reader with some previous knowledge of dramatic techniques should be able to imagine how the methodologies could be modified to fit contexts for the younger child.

The third area stated in the goals is diversity in context. The diversity in the geographical locations where the studies were conducted (e.g., United States, China, Australia, Africa), the settings (e.g., community, school) as well as in the research approach (e.g., surveys, interviews, ethnographic) are clearly evident across the various case studies.

The last area mentioned in the goals relates to how drama activates learning. Two concerns arise throughout the text, though, in trying to demonstrate causation between the dramatic techniques and their impact on

learning. First, there is a wide sampling of dramatic techniques presented across the chapters, as well as some studies that employ multiple dramatic techniques to achieve their results. This makes it difficult to conclude which dramatic technique might be more effective than another, or if a specific technique is effective alone or only in conjunction with other dramatic techniques. The editors suggest as much in the conclusion section (see page 296).

The second concern stems from short chapters, which limit the amount of discussion that occurs regarding how the studies were conducted and what their results and implications are. A few contributors cited this limitation, like Dunn, Hardin, and Marino (Chapter 17). They state that “the limitations of this chapter means that there is insufficient space to explore in detail key data...that underpins these findings.” (p. 253). As such, while one has an idea of what occurred in the various studies, there is generally not enough detail provided to the reader where these studies could be exactly replicated or clear causation can be determined.

As a related side note to chapter length, this reviewer found it odd that in a text about how drama activates learning that the Activation of Learners section would be the shortest in the text. It is approximately one chapter length and shorter in pages than either of the other two sections.

With all that being said, however, the intent of the text does not appear to be looking for the one “magical” technique that would demonstrate its effectiveness in all contexts, nor would one expect that such a technique would be found. The intent is to showcase how various dramatic techniques, in general, could be utilized to try impacting participant learning. Each case study does indicate some benefit or positive outcome to the participants that the contributors attribute to the drama technique utilized.

What is it about drama that makes it effective? The editors offer some insight

based on the various studies’ findings: participants can be reflective, gain deeper understanding, identify with roles, and develop empathy (Anderson & Dunn, 2013). Beyond this, the heart of drama’s effectiveness might be what Boal (1979) refers to as *metaxis*; participants have the opportunity to simultaneously belong to both a real world and an imagined world. This allows for some level of distancing while at the same time presenting a safe environment where one might consider important issues and take imagined risks without penalty. Another aspect might also be more attitudinal, where one is allowed to engage with concepts and ideas in a more “playful” manner (Erikson, 1977).

There still appears to be more work warranted in exploring the relationship between drama and learning. The editors call for more examination of the long term effects of drama techniques on participant learning. Are the effects short-term or do they carry over beyond the current setting? This implies the need for more longitudinal studies or those that focus on a delayed post-intervention assessment. Additionally, will the learning effects generalize or transfer to other settings?

The reader may speculate if drama is actually the impacting force on learning or just a vehicle in which the underlying elements can exist. Would other activities that promote reflection, metaxis, and playful engagement, and are integrated into the participants learning experience, be effective as well? For example, while drama can be integrated into science, can a science activity that does not include drama, but still promotes reflection, metaxis, and playful engagement, still impact learning? So is it drama or its underlying contexts that appear to make an impact on participant learning? A stronger message needs to be made on what drama can uniquely offer that other activities might not be able to replicate.

Additionally, the editors cite a continued need to not just produce research,

but to create a convincing plan or mechanism that makes a strong case for dramatic techniques playing a more central pedagogical role. Not only is this statement accurate, but it strikes at a deeper core issue that has plagued instruction for decades: the continued need to see the value in pedagogical methodologies that deviate from traditional and/or assessment-driven instruction. This message has long been the battle charge for those calling for play-based curricula and methodologies in education, at all grade levels, not just the early childhood grades (e.g., Elkind (2007) and Ohanian (2002)). For these types of methodologies offer a vehicle for participants to learn in a deeper and more meaningful way, and one that allows for variation in learning abilities, styles, and intelligences (Gardner, 2000). So even though research may support the benefit of these techniques, the challenge is still to incorporate them more widely into educational practice.

Even if these methodologies were given more credence and incorporated into the classrooms, though, there would still be the hurdle of staffing or training that would need to be addressed. Schools or organizations would need to either staff a drama specialist to create learning activities and curricula, or train teachers in dramatic techniques so they could incorporate these activities into their own instruction. This would also impact university teacher training

programs and the types of education and experiences they require of their pre-service teachers. While hiring, training, and redesigning tasks are all doable, one must still confront an educational system that has institutionalized its belief that play-based techniques are in opposition to its assessment-driven agenda; in short, if they're playing, they're not working. There does need to be a widespread change in institutional mindset in order to see play-based or dramatic techniques make any headway into the standard curricula. How and when this might be achieved is anybody's guess.

Ultimately, the strength of this edited text comes from the creation of praxis, the symbiotic nature of theory and practice. The scholars who contributed and edited this text have used their knowledge, experience, and practice to inform and generate theory and research, which in turn, will hopefully inspire the reader to use the research presented from this text to inform their own practice. Each chapter presented contains some piece of information or approach that can easily be utilized by a practitioner and scaled to fit their particular grade level, age group, and/or setting. "[...]Learning does not just occur during periods of active participation within the art form, but also through processes of reflection." (Anderson & Dunn, 2013, p. 298). In short, this text offers much to reflect upon.

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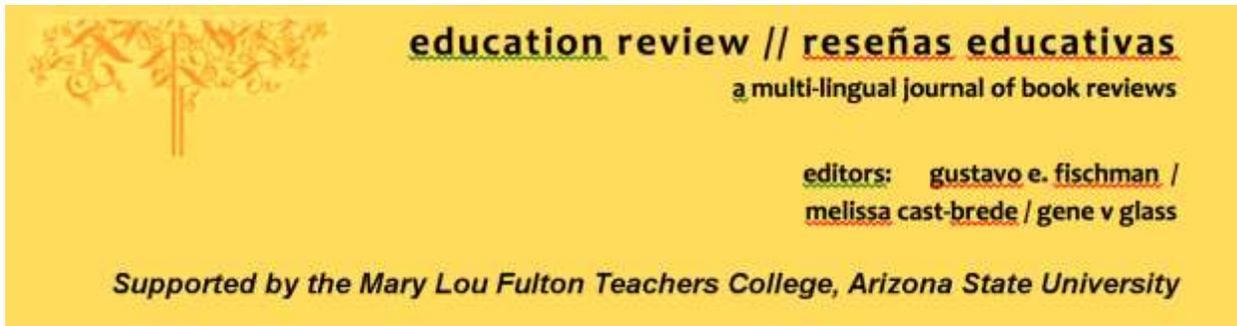
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