UCET/AACTE Travel Scholarship

Report on Visit to New York University Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development 'Drama Across the Curriculum and Beyond' Conference.

April 2007

Rebecca Patterson
Senior Lecturer
Manchester Metropolitan University

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1. Introduction

This report is a summary of the findings from my visit to New York University (NYU) Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development. In January 2007 I made contact with Dr Philip Taylor at the New York University, Department of Music and Performing Arts Professions and was subsequently invited to participate in the 'Drama Across the Curriculum and Beyond' conference in April of this year. The visit was made possible because of a travel scholarship I was awarded by the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers and the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (UCET/AACTE). Prior to my visit I began to develop a research project involving the exploration of the nature of different learning styles and in particular kinaesthetic learning, within the context of teacher training across the curriculum. I am interested in how we can encourage trainee teachers to be more creative in their classroom approaches to learning. Essentially, I would like to develop trainees' ability to relate what is observed to that which is not, at first sight, relatable by making links with apparently unconnected areas. My research focuses on the notion that through practical kinaesthetic exploration they will develop the ability to use elaborative thinking.
At the conference I was very fortunate to be able to share experiences and expertise from a global perspective which has further informed my thinking. By sharing these experiences, I hope that we may become better equipped to help our students gain the knowledge and skills they need to succeed and, by nurturing ways of thinking and working, we can encourage imagination, independence and risk taking in learning approaches.

2. Background

The NYU programme in Educational Theatre was established in 1966 by Lowell and Nancy Swortzell. The programme in 2007 boasts an impressive number of courses including the B.S. in Educational Theatre with Teacher Certificate in Theatre K -12, MA Dual Certificate Programme in Educational Theatre, EDTA: M.A. in Educational Theatre with Teacher Certificate in Theatre all grades, M.A. in Educational Theatre with Teacher Certification in Theatre, all grades and English 7-12 M.A. in Educational Theatre for Teachers of Colleges and Communities and Doctoral Study EDTC: Educational Theatre for Teachers of College/Higher Education. The School hosts a population of approximately 250 students and since 2002 there have been four fulltime faculty appointments to accommodate the expansion in student enrolment. The Faculty has a high profile both nationally and internationally particularly in relation to innovative praxis and also their commitment to a variety of interdisciplinary initiatives.

3. Government Agendas and responses to shifts in thinking.

The intention of the conference was to build upon the discussions and topical issues that are shaping the field of educational theatre around the globe at present. In Britain we are developing similar forums as we battle with the challenges that are presented in various government mandates. We are also continuing to we investigate the particular responsibilities of cultural organisations, universities, schools and artists-in-residence as

we generate innovative partnerships that enrich and encourage a more reflective teaching practice. Over the course of the three day conference we would draw upon the scholarly activities of our pioneers as well as contemporary commentators and explore some of the most pertinent questions that are being raised at present. We were looking forward to creating a fruitful dialogue on the important contribution of drama in education both in schools and in the wider communities.

The Conference highlighted many similar issues to those we face in the UK. For example, there was a feeling that the place of continuing professional development (CPD) for practicing teachers should be prioritised and that it should contain an element of broadening and deepening of knowledge as well as having a strong focus on comparative and varied methods of teaching.

In the US, similar to the UK, some battles are being fought against assessment and league tables and an overpowering drive to make our children succeed at everything regardless of their aptitude, ability, skill and understanding. They, like us, are re-visiting and experimenting with new approaches to teaching and learning in an attempt to help students identify what, when and how they are learning, i.e. a sense of process and personal development that motivates the learner to acquire a deeper knowledge and understanding rather than have it foisted upon them. This, for me, is a constant dichotomy in classroom practise and one that Doctor Phillip Taylor recognises as being just as prevalent in North American schools as it is in Britain. He suggests;

"The ultimate compromise can be best characterized by a prioritized concern with the rubric, the standard, the apparent need to neutralize teachers' professional judgements, to silence children out of their learning". (2006:13)

In the US, important lobbying by the National Arts Education Associations has enabled arts disciplines to have a more significant profile. There have been arguments at government level to ensure that the arts are better represented by crafting curriculum policy frameworks to ensure the next generation will benefit from an arts entitlement, but as Robert Landy points out;

"…in a culture that values science above art, that values product over process, that values the real over the fictional, stereotype over prototype, surface over depth, function over form, matter over mind, quantity over quality – where does that leave the artists and her audience? And where does it leave the arts educators and arts therapists who assume that the making and viewing of art have transformative qualities for students and clients?"(2006:84)

In Britain, Ofsted are suggesting that schools are failing on the basis that they lack inspiration.

<u>New Curriculum Guidelines.</u>

In July 2007 the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority presented the New National Curriculum for Secondary Education and announced that,

"…the new curriculum will cut clutter and reduce duplication and enable schools to do much more with the traditional school day to prepare pupils for the demands of today's world. As well as an even sharper focus on literacy and numeracy and retaining established subject knowledge, the new curriculum places greater emphasis on equipping

young people with the personal, learning and thinking skills they need to succeed in employment and adult life".
(QCA website) *New Secondary Curriculum Creates Time To Focus On The Basics And Stretch High Achievers*. 12 July 2007)

This also asks children to be able to demonstrate their creative learning skills which they define as; the ability to identify new problems rather than waiting for problems to be identified for them, the ability to transfer knowledge, a belief in learning as an incremental process and the capacity to focus attention in the pursuit of a goal or set of goals.

This thinking follows similar threads to those introduced in the Children Act of 2004 which focused on the use of cross referencing and multi agency working, (To be Safe, Healthy, Enjoy and Achieve, Achieve Economic Stability, Make a Positive Contribution). Equally, the Every Child Matters agenda attempts to 'prepare children to make a positive contribution to society'.

Evidently we, like the United States are experiencing a shift in emphasis. The new National Curriculum 2008 also focuses on Globalization, Sustainability and Awareness. Cynics might say that this is just a move away from a subject specific curriculum to a more politicized curriculum but there is no doubt that it requires some new thinking in terms of pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning.

4. Responses to the present climate for drama in education and what might the future look like?

Historically, the United States has not had the same active debates concerning process and product that dominated drama conferences in England throughout most of the 70s and 80s. When British drama pioneer Dorothy Heathcote went to America in 1969 to speak at Northwestern University, the creative drama movement was challenged and the positive effects can still be seen as Heathcote continues to be an active contributor to the NYU programme. Consequently the notion of 'process drama' has been warmly welcomed by many practitioners. It has been embraced and celebrated as a method of teaching and learning that provides a more critical reading of the curriculum.

"The implementation of classroom drama practice enables pre-service teachers and their students to make their own voices heard within the 'third space' in which meaning 'evolves out of dialogues, confrontations, accommodations, risk-taking and unplanned discoveries" (Greenwood 2005 p4).

The inherent pedagogy of drama in education is ever present in the creation of art, but not always necessarily in the performance of art. In the context of theatre training, an actor learning lines and in following the directions of another is, arguably, no more creative than a child learning facts and regurgitating them in an examination. However, a director, a composer, an artist, a choreographer, a designer, a performer, are all given the freedom to improvise and thereby genuinely create. Such creativity is still perceived to be a somewhat radical move in teaching 'theatre' in the US but the enormous growth in theatre education programmes across the continent appears to be addressing the importance of the acquisition of such skills.

In the UK, I believe we have found a middle ground that encompasses the idea of 'learning through drama', one which searches for a common understanding between the two extremes of process and product. Essentially, what we are now aiming for is a way of making meaning as we go along by constantly posing new questions but in a more trans-disciplinary and cross – curricular context with drama pedagogy as a central focus for framing and structuring the learning. Indeed, in some schools in the UK, drama pedagogy is being adopted across subjects and is being seen as a valuable teaching and learning tool rather than a subject in its own right. This development presents a wider debate for teachers of drama but in truth, however it is used, we should appreciate and embrace the freedom we have to work in this way. Our present curriculum does not necessarily equip children with independence of thought. It does not wholly trust them to make decisions, to make mistakes and to find the solutions to rectify them. It often seeks to control and measure, not to release and discover. Until we can find a way of freeing children from this model, I believe that we will continue to fail many of them.

Over the course of the three day New York conference there were a number of workshops that addressed these issues and made connections between drama and core curriculum standards and the ways in which drama can support the course criteria, enhance classroom atmosphere and advance student learning. We were offered an overview of the positive results of using the arts in school which was reminiscent of the HEARTS project that MMU and six other UK universities were recently involved in and which was the subject of a UCET presentation in 2006.
The HEARTS project echoed many of the questions that were being posed at this conference. In our attempt to answer some of them in my own institution we began by addressing what QCA (Qualifications Curriculum Authority) have suggested are the priority areas:

1. Performance based learning which values a wide range of intelligences and capabilities and which sees knowledge as something which helps define who we are and our place in the world.
2. learning which reaches out to the world beyond school
3. learning which has an international context
4. learning which contributes to social justice
5. learning which gives weight to personal, social and emotional education
6. learning which is futures orientated including issues of social and cultural change, globalization, the sustainability and survival of the planet and which encourages active participation
7. learning which encourages innovation, including the creative personal use of ICT
8. learning which is aims-led, based on learners needs.

In the UK, QCA are now recommending that testing in schools be addressed to " minimise the narrowing of the curriculum" and to discourage "teaching to test". They are recognising that the segmentation of subjects, the emphasis on testing a core number of these subjects and judging schools on their outcomes has had a negative impact on teaching and on the students now entering the workforce for the first time. Current practise in schools does not always encourage creativity, spontaneity and risk taking. Some classrooms are led by teachers who believe that if they plan content-led lessons with a variety of tasks, perform with the help of new technologies and devise elaborate assessment activities to cater for different learning styles, they will achieve the required results. By placing an objective on the board many believe a successful lesson is born.

The system is led by results and when pupils have been told what to do and how to do it, they can, and often do, pass the test. But can they really learn? Does busy work produce busy minds? Many think not, and judging from the consultation process taking place in the UK and, as I have discovered, in the USA this view is being increasingly offered. Unfortunately we have struggled to present a satisfying solution as to how educators can balance the external pressures to deliver a prescribed programme of study with their own understanding of what is valuable and worth knowing.

At MMU the HEARTS project concluded that the skills and competencies being flagged at present as having most 'value' are those commonly associated with arts based teaching and these were certainly being recognised as essential qualities in the delivery of a strong arts based curriculum, namely:

1. An ability to view a situation from several perspectives.
2. An ability to anticipate problems and take evasive action.
3. An ability to innovate.
4. A capability for resilience; a view that failure is simply an incremental part of a journey to success.
5. An ability to collaborate
6. An ability to review and reflect
7. An ability to transfer knowledge from one context to another.
8. An ability to ask questions and seek alternative interpretations
9. A capacity to adapt to change
10. A capacity to embrace risk

All of these skills or qualities are inherent within the teaching methods of the arts and creative processes that give rise to 'art'. It seems common sense to recognise that creativity and imagination have always been at the heart of good teaching and whilst in the UK we have begun to feel the results of this recent move towards a relaxation of the national curriculum, overcrowding and time pressures still remain a major concern for most teachers. But in the UK the futures curriculum is asking for more. It asks that attention be paid to the social, moral and emotional education of our children. It asks that they grow up with a sense of responsibility for the state of the world. That they become global citizens and recognise the interconnectivity between the lives and experiences of all human beings and that they make a positive contribution to the world.
It is therefore, to the area of Drama in Education that many curriculum innovators are turning as they seek a pedagogy that addresses these issues. Drama in schools is at present not shackled by a fixed curriculum although, historically and to some extent in the US it is still perceived to be shackled by a perception that it is a subject fixed in the world of theatre. It is not. It is a subject fixed in the world of human experience; theatre is simply a reflection of this world.

Drama, at its best, seeks to make a shift in the perception of a child. It values empathy above all human capacities. It encourages enquiry and investigation and independence. It can deliver every element of the priority areas outlined in the futures curriculum. The emphasis in Drama on thinking and on the continuing reflection on one's own thinking (metacognition) is inextricably linked to human experience in a social/cultural context and it is a necessity for children to be able to relate their learning to the world around them in a more holistic manner.

In the UK it appears that efforts are being made to create a coherent and integrated curriculum that children can experience as relevant and connected learning and it is certainly a belief, if not a common practice, that the use of drama pedagogy within a teacher training programme enables the exploration of social experience, inquiry and integration as methods of critical analysis.

5. Overview of the workshops

As the NYU conference progressed it became clear to me that there is a similar movement in the US. For those who have a profound belief in the use of these tools in any teaching and learning encounter recognise how the different dimensions of curriculum inquiry that constitutes the explicit, the implicit and the yet to be understood, are coalesced within the various drama frameworks. There was a strong perception that perhaps things have gone full circle, but that we have found is a renewed enthusiasm for ideas that can now be placed in a wider context with a wider audience.

This was evident within the research that was presented at the conference. It was suggested for example that the use of theatre education helps to develop a sense of voice and identity in young people. Within the humanities curriculum, this sense of self, juxtaposed against a dramatic exploration of literacy and historical material, students will develop a greater understanding of the wider world. This notion was beautifully explored through Nancy Smithner's workshop 'Devising within the Humanities Curriculum: A Kinaesthetic Approach.' Here we explored themes from within the humanities curriculum through dramatic interpretation. By using various physical theatre techniques we embodied roles and re enacted moments of historical significance and mythical events using original text and invented dialogue. (Nancy Smithner is a full time faculty member at NYU).

Other workshops explored such ideas as; 'Learning language through drama', (Penelope Johnson and Sylvana Cardillo, Italian language teachers from Sydney, Australia). They suggest through drama, students develop a deeper knowledge and understanding of skills, values and attitudes in creating, performing and appreciating language. It was argued that drama provides a form of expression that liberates the learner and at the same time increases their vocabulary in the target language.

This notion was further explored in Regina Ress's workshop, 'Storytelling in the ESL/Foreign Language Classroom'. As teachers we are constantly looking for ways of tapping into the richness of the world through multicultural awareness and stories can often offer us that route. Regina spoke about how language learners can improve their skills rapidly in the context of a communicative classroom and that storytelling not only addresses the four main strands of the literacy strategy but provides an essential tool for encouraging the acquisition of vocabulary and grammar. It also provides a forum for the exploration of meaning.

"Dialogue is a moment when humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make it and remake it"

Friere (1987)

Other curriculum based workshops included Education Director, Melissa Friedman's offering; 'Connecting Arts with Citizenship'. A demonstration of the central role of the arts in a healthy democracy. This was an exploration of the ways in which drama makes connections between the schools' curriculum content and the wider community through text – based projects such as 'Antigone-in-progress' and 'Trial of Robespierre'.

There were also a series of presentations that took their focus beyond the classroom. For example; Joe Salvatore (Faculty member at NYU) and Rebecca Ashley (Assistant Director In School Program for Wingspan Arts) presented, 'Live Theatre = Living Reality: Polaroid Stories'. This was a workshop that galvanised a series of experiences of working with a group of homeless young people at a shelter in New York. It explored the process of devising a piece of theatre that was designed to spark dialogue about current events and personal experiences.

I was particularly interested in the presentation delivered by Russel DiNapoli, Associate Professor at the University de Valencia, '*emotional aptitude development through dramatic scene-study*', This was a study on the union of human reason and emotion through left and right-brain activity and the ways in which drama can help achieve a more harmonious cognisance between the two. In support of this theory, the conference also addressed the issue of teaching for inclusion and diversity through the development of 'applied drama' techniques.

Using drama to optimise learning is not a new concept. For centuries, educators have used dramatic activities to enhance skills in elocution and rhetoric, as well as to deepen the conceptual understanding by 'living through' the experience. Whilst these general objectives have been honed in to theoretical package of 'drama in education' as a means of developing effective psychomotor and cognitive skills, current theories of teaching and learning combined with an increased awareness of the diverse makeup of societies, corroborate the need for the embedding of drama practice in to general education as well as developing the 'brain-based' research.

It was with this in mind that I developed the workshop that I subsequently presented at the conference, the title of which was; "The intelligence of thought and feeling" which is a reference to the work of Bertolt Brecht. It was suggested that Brecht wanted to answer Lenin's question, 'Wie und was soll man lernen?' (How and what should one learn?) and during his formative years he created an influential theory of theatre, the *epic theatre* wherein he believed that a play should not cause the spectator to emotionally identify with the action before him or her, but should instead provoke rational self-reflection and critical view of the action on stage. He believed that the experience of a climactic catharsis of emotion left an audience complacent. Instead he wanted his audiences to use a critical perspective to identify social ills at work in the world and to be moved to go forth from the theatre and effect change. I mention this in the context of this report as I believe it is pertinent to the central debate of the conference. The same theory supports the recent shift in educational thinking towards recognition that the Drama must play a more significant pedagogical role in education if we are to move to a more dialectic approach to teaching and learning, i.e. to enable children to identify how and what it is they want to

learn. This shift has arisen partly as a result of the evidence that is emerging from the scientific community as mentioned in the presentation above. The development of knowledge about the nature of the brain and of its capacity to learn is largely responsible for sparking the renewed interest in the educational theory of 'learning by doing' (Pammenter 1993), it is the notion that teaching and learning is more about the creation of a forum for the stimulation and development of the imagination, the development of social behaviour and the extension of creative play that is at the heart of this movement. In effect it is another attempt to access and free the potential of the child. Much of the research that was being presented supports the suggestion that a multi-disciplinary, multiple intelligence approach to teaching and learning is the way forward.

4. Conclusion

All of the workshops and presentations, including my own, were designed to engage participants through the exploration of different learning styles and with particular emphasis on the aural, visual and kinaesthetic senses. Again, most of the workshops and presentations that I attended recognised that students respond to drama activities within a variety of contexts and, therefore, if we continue to research and analyse these responses in order to help shape our thinking productively, we may be able to address some of the gaps in our children's learning.
It is particularly interesting to see these ideas being assimilated in an international forum where further dialogue can be stimulated and a shared practice can be developed that harnesses and frames techniques to provide absorbing and challenging experiences for students.

Within the context of these workshops much of what was explored was the notion of cross referencing teaching and learning styles from drama with other subject areas; to allow the development of thinking and learning skills rather than simple subject knowledge in discrete subject areas. Because of this recent and emphatic shift towards learning how to learn, we cannot but support the belief that drama pedagogy offers students experiences that appeal to a range of dominant intelligences (referring to Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences) and varied learning styles. This increased interest in Drama as a pedagogical toolkit seems a sensible one that can allow a teacher to "hit" almost all of the key intelligences in unique way. In addition, Drama is a way of imparting and developing what Bruner (1976) describes as "narrative" knowledge; one of the two universal forms of knowledge in human kind (the other is scientific).

What was beginning to emerge at the conference was a common understanding of the world we live in and a similarity in the ways we are finding to navigate our way through it in an educational context. At its best, I believe drama teaching helps students to explore their own and other's cultural values and experiences through the exploration of narrative, thereby creating empathy and reflection.

None of this is new of course; those who have taught drama for some time will instantly recognise many voices in the sentiments addressed above. But to have this thinking move into an international mainstream education debate is exciting. It might still be perceived as radical but it is, in my view, very much overdue. Although, clearly this view is permeating current educational practices and government manifestos both in the UK and in the US, there is still much work to be done in order to clarify how learning through drama will help

us to find a common understanding and a model for the future that is feasible, plausible, practicable and irresistible!

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