
The Transformative Principle In Applied Drama

As Maurie Scott reports in *Human Drama*, 'there is, in fact, a well-established reciprocal relationship between drama (as communication, as craft, as art and as a contributor to the processes of human development) and certain of the activities of psychology, sociology, education and, of course, the ethical, moral and conceptual considerations of philosophy.' (Scott 1979.)

Transformation means causing a marked change in someone or something. In applying the term, 'Transformative Principle', to the process of Applied Drama, we need to interrogate briefly what that term implies. As a Drama and Dance specialist in the educational arena, I have experienced the transformative power of the arts in both children's and adult's lives. Philip Taylor (2003:1) argues that Applied Theatre operates from a central transformative principle. How this is applied and how it can facilitate experiential learning, raise self-awareness and empathy towards others and heal and transform victims into empowerers, needs to be examined.

Practitioners such as John Hodgson and Dorothy Heathcote have used elements of drama within the educational field and developed the terms: Drama in Education or Development Drama. I prefer the term, Process Drama. To me, it indicates that the individual is developing along a pathway that is not linear and finite. There are, in fact, infinite paths that lead a person towards self-development, self-awareness and therefore, change.

In Process Drama, participants are placed in an educational, non-theatrical context. However, the basic concepts of drama are still used. Issues are explored in a dramatic way that is not theatrical. Dorothy Heathcote referred to the 'mantle of the expert' – a term that resonates with me as an educator. Placing people in the role of an expert immediately raises self-esteem and in the case of marginalised persons, it allows them to raise their voices.

In this way, Dorothy Heathcote asserts that "Drama is a means of learning, a means of widening experiences even if we never act in a play or stand upon a stage." (Hodgson 1977, 158) Applied Drama, used as a means of change and catharsis, can be the means to the transformation of self.

In consciously creating spaces for people to explore their emotions and imagination, I have seen them change from closed, unemotional beings into expressive, warm and responsive persons. It has been both a challenge and a joy to facilitate these changes. I taught for 6,5 years at Lebone Independent College of the Royal Bafokeng. The children ranged in age from 5 – 18 years. I taught Drama to 5-18year olds and worked on productions with the FET phase students. to 5- 18year olds. Dance,Music and Art were introduced to the 5-18 year olds, who had never experienced anything like this before. Most of the children were from orphaned or child-headed households. They came from poverty-stricken homes. Our work yielded such positive results that it motivated me to reach both teachers and children in other areas. During my search for other projects, I discovered the MotherTongue Project, the first all-women collective in the Western Cape. Artistic Director, Sara Matchett (MotherTongue Project Annual Report 2017) states:

“We envision a society in South Africa where (self) recognition, (self)honouring and (self)celebration of women, youth and children is commonplace.

We exist to promote the wellbeing of those most excluded and have identified women and youth as the groups consistently disempowered and silenced in society.”

Through the MotherTongue Project in the Langeberg area, youth and children in the area have been creatively engaged in changing both their own and their society's worldview. Through workshops, Theatre performances and leadership and entrepreneurial skills, young people have been enabled to both imagine and bring into being, more productive life for themselves.

How have they achieved this? The participants have been trained in acting, voice, movement, theatre making, and communication. They create theatre performance pieces, together with facilitators from MotherTongue, the University of Cape Town Drama Department and the MotherTongue internship programme. They then present the play to the community. The first project in 2011 was called:” ‘n Tas vol Drome/A Suitcase Full of Dreams. This raised questions around the concept of Reconciliation.

A second play was performed, in 2012, “ ‘n Klein- Groot Wêreld”, which explored what home is and the paths that connect.

In a rural, poverty-stricken society, where children and women do not have much say in how their lives are lived, it is important to have a safe place where your thoughts, your emotions are allowed. This ability to release negative emotions such as fear, despair, and anger can lead to forgiveness and reconciliation and a real sense of empowerment.

In July 2012, MotherTongue Project launched the Langeberg Youth Arts Project, an Arts, Leadership and Entrepreneurship Programme. The Programme enables unemployed youth between the ages of 18-30, to gain the skills necessary to make them aware of who they are and what they are capable of. They are taught finance management, computer literacy, and mentoring skills. Since January 2017, the company members have been employed on a full-time basis. They established drama youth groups in the different areas in which they live, thus reaching more of the community.

In addition to self-development and awareness, the MotherTongue Project was involved in collaboration with SATVI and UCT Drama Department, a project called:” Beat TB”. This performance was developed to educate the Worcester community about TB and their response and choices about their health.

The importance of reaching young children (ages 0-7) cannot be overemphasized. Stimulating children during this crucial time of their lives is vital for their physical, sensory and intellectual development. I have successfully used both Drama and Dance with the age groups 3-6 years old and the difference is remarkable in children when you compare them at the end of the year from what they were like at the beginning of the year! Language is stimulated, communication, both verbal and non-verbal, is increased and play is allowed. The imagination is developed and stimulated, and this leads to children who can think for themselves, are questioners and independent workers. Through Dance, children are exposed to exercises that stimulate various motor pathways. For example, a child who struggles to skip at aged 6, maybe the child who struggles to read in school. Dance routines involving crossing the midline will help in the

academic life of the child.

The Early Years Theatre Project is aimed at children living in the rural and peri-rural area of the Langeberg. In 2017, four Youth Interns were employed to perform plays at Early Childhood Development Centres, Primary Schools, and Creches. The audience consists of both children and their parents or caregivers. There is a high rate of teenage and single mothers. The theatre pieces and projects are aimed at strengthening the mother-child bonds. The project also reaches caregivers and teachers in educating them about creativity and imagination and literacy in the classroom.

It is important to reach educators, parents, and caregivers, as well as the children themselves. So many parents and teachers/carers have not experienced the transforming power of Drama themselves and as a result, they do not always see the need for it in their classrooms or places of care. At Lebone II Independent School, we would have a 'messy day' and encourage parents to join the teachers and children in 'messy activities' like playing in the mud, arts and crafts and drama. Many children were not allowed to get their uniforms dirty and hence rolling on the floor, or climbing onto apparatus, was difficult for them. In the pre-school classes, one parent, who had never played with a puzzle before, completed one delightedly with her daughter. It was a revelation to many of the parents, how important play was for their children. In a society where children are marginalised, not allowed a voice and expected to work at home in the afternoons, the concept that play is learning and work too, was novel.

The Early Years Theatre Project created 5 Theatre pieces: "Tinnetsjies", "Pampiri", "Pieces of Wood", "Fountain of Stones" and "In2Out". They have also developed a draft toolkit for Early Childhood Development educators, which focuses on the pedagogy and methodology employed in Early Childhood Development. The kit gives educators and caregivers ideas about working with music, pattern and repetition and ways to engage children's imagination and creativity. They offer workshops for educators to be trained to use the toolkit. The emphasis is for educators to use creative play and imagination to teach, instead of purely a didactic approach.

Hodgson states: 'Educators and therapists are now recognising that the dramatic experience can have value and needs to be kept vital both as a means of helping individuals to establish improved psychological well-being and helping society in understanding, facing and overcoming its problems. (Hodgson 1977, 16)' Participants in Process Drama situations are not acting. They are experiencing. The re-enactment of problematic experiences can lead to insights that enable them to take the therapeutic steps toward healing, self-realisation, and action.