

A Dramatic Approach to Native Teacher Education

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The basic precepts and methods of educational drama are reviewed and compared to some of the distinctive Native learning patterns discussed in the literature, with specific reference to the patterns of Native learning discussed by More (1987). Based on the author's experience, on systematic observation, and with reference to participant evaluation, it appears that the inclusion of educational drama as an approach to Native teacher education is recommended.

There is a "moment" that occurs during rehearsal for any theatrical production. It is the moment when the cast, crew, design and script suddenly merge into an ensemble. It is the moment for which directors and producers hold their breath. From this moment on, nothing is the same as it was before; the struggle to make meaning in the play has taken on new energy. Everyone realizes the actors are beginning to own the play and that the job of director is beginning to lose its all-encompassing control. When this same kind of moment occurs in a classroom, the teacher had better "get out of the way" and let the learners teach themselves until guidance is needed. In a drama classroom this moment is called a "dramatic explosion": self-motivated learners enthusiastically and thoughtfully pursue their collective imaginary creation in order to learn more about themselves, about others, about relationships and about the implications of actions taken in the real world.

Repeatedly, over a four-year involvement with the University of Calgary's Native Teacher Outreach Education Program, I experienced dramatic explosions with diverse groups of Native teacher education students. Regardless of whether the groups of learners were culturally homogeneous (e.g., predominantly Blackfoot), or were from diverse Native cultures (e.g., urban residents or prison populations), the reaction to a dramatic teaching style and learning experience was consistently positive, creative and productive.

Across Canada, educational drama is a component of several university teacher education programs (Canada: Ministry of Employment and Education, 1988, p. 220). These programs recognize the art form of drama as a vital contributor to developing teacher communication skills and to offering an experientially based teaching methodology. However, the overwhelming positive response to the drama courses in Native learning environments was unprecedented. The following are examples of student self-evaluations written at the end of a drama course:

Chipewyan Student: *Watching other people coming out with their ideas—that was really fantastic. I didn't know people had this talent in them.*

Blackfoot Student: *The course had something to do with the growth of the personality—that is, to be me again, in full—Blackfoot! The Blackfoot belief literally means "to take the challenge of life." True living requires an active mind not a self-hypnotized one. It is refreshing to experience personal introspection and growth in the form of a scheduled course.*

Métis Student: *It [drama] helps to develop a balance between internal and external realities.*

Blackfoot Student: *My philosophy is to retain the legacy left by our forefathers and incorporate this into present day society. Drama, in terms of coping, understanding and sharing my experience, fits into my goals.*

Evelyn Moore-Eyman (1984), when she was director of the University of Calgary's Outreach program, said that Native students have flourished in the milieu created by developmental drama everywhere it has been offered. Such experiences motivate a research question—how does educational drama offer Native students a teaching/learning methodology which is compatible with a Native teaching/learning style. In approaching such a question, the author's non-Native cultural perspective must be acknowledged, as well as the danger of stereotyping and misrepresenting Native points of view. Another caution comes from Couture (1985) who notes not just cultural diversity but diversity along a continuum of "traditional" to "highly acculturated." This research includes (1) traditional Native teaching/learning methods; (2) Native learning style research; and (3) the relationship of the findings of Native teaching/learning style research to the teaching/learning styles utilized in educational drama.

Learning style research developed with the awareness of individual learning preferences and strengths, and with the acknowledgement of a variety of approaches to the learning process. Native learning style research evolved by focusing on cultural orientation as one possible aspect that might affect an individual's approach to the learning process (More, 1987, p. 26). Native learning style research suggests that some of the problems experienced by Native learners in non-Native-dominated educational situations are culturally based. Caught between the educational and behavioural expectations of two different cultures, it is difficult for Native learners to adjust to and succeed in both home and school settings. The conflict is responsible for the patterns of failure and withdrawal documented through generations of Native learners (Hawthorn, 1966, p. 122). It has been observed that traditional teaching/learning patterns and child-rearing practices exist in contemporary Native cultures and are practised in the preschool home setting (Kaulback, 1984, p. 27). Thus many Native learners enter the school environment with developed learning strengths and a preferred learning style. The history of Native education in Canada illustrates the unfortunate reality that the Native learning tendencies have not been recognized or utilized by past standard educational curricula and teaching methodologies.

Every culture has an educational process that systematically instructs its members how to live successfully within their particular physical and social environment. Affected by and dependent on the natural environment, Native cultures evolved educational systems that were highly adaptable. Every person was an active learner in educating the young. Child-rearing practices of Native cultures embody values that consider children to be full members of the

community (autonomous beings) by the age of mobility, and includes them in family and community activities. As members of that community, children are given the same respect and expected to follow the same social expectations as all others. This treatment allows for autonomy, but demands self-discipline and socially acceptable conduct. Behaviour is modelled and guided informally in all aspects of living and the development of the whole person—intellect, emotion, spirit, and physical body—all are important in the development of individual members of the whole community (Hawthorn, 1966, p. 112). Informal teaching/learning is part of everyday activities and is not restricted to specific places, times or people. More formal teaching and learning relies on observation, listening, minimal oral instruction, modelling, demonstration, moral instruction through stories, non-evaluative feedback, and direct application of learning (Archibald, 1984, p. 4). Clive Linklater (1974), while with the National Indian Brotherhood, wrote that "in the world as it was, the education of the Indian people was participative and dynamic and involving the total community, at every level of community life, every day, all day. Education was a life-sustaining force (p. 5).

Early Native learning style research defined the possible Native learning style as "trial and error" learning (Hawthorn, 1966, p. 133), but more recent research suggests the Native method of learning is more specifically a

Watch-Then-Do (e.g., learning to make a fishnet) or Listen-Then-Do (e.g., learning values through legends taught by an elder) or Think-Then-Do (e.g., thinking through a response carefully and thoroughly before speaking). (More, 1987, p.28)

The difference is that trial-and-error learning implies that the learner adjusts the learning approach after corrective feedback from the teacher, while in watch-, listen-, think-, then-do learning, an autonomous learner is allowed to self-evaluate against what has been observed as a model approach or product. The learners then adjust their approach to their own understanding of what is required to be successful (More, 1987, p. 30).

In Canada at the present time, more Native adults are actively involved in formal educational pursuits than at any other time in recent history (More, 1987, p. 1). In order to become the certificated teachers of their children, they must obtain their education for the most part through provincial universities.

Within the larger institutions, Native Indian Teacher Education Programs (NITEPs) have been set up to focus on the needs of Native education students. A survey of the NITEP programs, for the Canadian Education Association, asks the question

Are the programs training Indian people, who in the long term will be virtually identical to the majority of society, or are the programs truly providing native Indians with the opportunities to maintain and develop components of their own cultures—components that may differ significantly from those of the non-Indian cultures? . . . We must somehow find a balance between developing skills and knowledge necessary for all teachers, and developing skills and knowledge that will give Indians real choices in their cultural development. (More, 1987, p. 5)

Research and drama theorist, Richard Courtney (1986) from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), has observed in his studies of Amerindian education that the approach of world renowned drama educator

Dorothy Heathcote to teaching and learning "reveals many communalities with tribal ways of understanding the world and we can use it as exemplary." Heathcote is a major influence on the current dramatic teaching style. In her approach to educational drama she is

Specifically not concerned with theater but with "living through" spontaneous dramatic experience. Improvisation is not a subject area (like history) but a tool for learning... . Drama as a learning medium has, as its content, the problems of life itself... . By spontaneously working in roles, children imaginatively experience a social situation through identification; as a result, they learn it better. In other words, spontaneous dramatic experience has the same ontological and epistemological status in Heathcote's classroom that ritual drama does within a tribal community (Courtney, p. 60).

Educational drama offers Native teacher education students the opportunity to experience an alternative teaching/learning methodology that complements the Native teaching/learning style, offers "bridges" to other teaching/learning styles, and provides challenging expressive structure for individual learners within a collective learning environment. Courtney also notes that "while directly paralleled to tribal attitudes, Heathcote's attitude has significance for all teaching attitudes in all cultures" (p. 60).

The attitudes that shape the patterns of interaction between teachers and learners are similar in both the Native and dramatic teaching/learning styles. Individual autonomy is respected within the boundaries of collective existence, but individuals are expected to respect and to adhere to consensually established rules of the community. Developing self-discipline is necessary if individuals desire to stay involved in the collective activity and social group. Embedded in this attitude are the principles of sharing, working together, non-competitiveness, and the acceptance of individual differences. The socially based learning preferences and interactional patterns are supported, challenged, and extended by the dramatic learning style.

Native learners have demonstrated preferences for more socially oriented learning environments in contrast to non-Native traditional classroom configurations. The preference for a more informal classroom atmosphere allows for small group work, freedom of movement and flexible transitions between activities (Pepper & Henry, 1986, p. 58) that are easily facilitated by and used to the ultimate advantage by the dramatic teaching/learning approach. Classroom setup may be decided upon by the needs of the group and the parameters of the activity, requiring learners to function in a variety of settings during a lesson—individually (imagination/drawing or writing exercises), in pairs (physical/verbal improvisations), or small group (collective creation) and whole group (role drama), thus developing learner flexibility in individual work and collective collaboration.

While respecting Native verbal interaction patterns, dramatic learning provides opportunities to experience the use of verbal expression in a variety of modes, including small group and whole group discussion, dialogue in role, personal reflection and questioning. Educational drama is concerned with communication both with oneself (intrapersonal) and with others (inter-personal), and evokes the expressive languages of movement, sound, music, visual interpretation, and speech. The dramatic learning style offers Native learners opportunities to use their non-verbal communication strengths in "the no-penalty

area of art. That is, participants will be able to test out their ideas, try them over again, and generally examine them without necessarily having to fulfill in actual life situations the promises they have tried out in the depicted one" (Johnson & O'Neill, 1984, p. 129).

Through drama activities Native learners are encouraged to experiment and to develop their verbal communication skills. The theatre genres of choral speaking, story and reader's theatre, improvisation, masque, and puppetry are structures that challenge and extend the learning experience into verbal and written expression. Learners may contribute the content (e.g., dramatizing a family fishing trip) or the teacher may choose a culturally relevant topic (e.g., aboriginal history or contemporary issues) or a story (e.g., traditional trickster story or contemporary Native fiction) as the source for learning through the dramatic medium.

The use of narration and metaphor in dramatic situations is similar to the storytelling tradition of Native cultures. The traditional function of storytelling in Native teaching and learning is moral instruction. Through retelling the stories, understanding of relationships, situations and social rules evolve for the learners at their personal pace (More, 1987, p. 28). In dramatic learning situations stories may be listened to, or enacted and observed, or created in order for the learners to discover a deeper understanding of the meaning inherent in the stories. In the creation of new stories, the learners collectively develop their own significant metaphors, symbols, rituals, and so forth. Dramatic learning structures are flexible enough to accommodate preferences with regard to theme, plot, character and imagery of culturally diverse narrative structures. The creation of imaginary situations, through which learning is facilitated in drama, utilizes visual, spatial and image-based learning strengths. Within the dramatic learning setting there are ample opportunities for learners to utilize and demonstrate their understanding through the creation of physical and visual images (tableau, dance drama, mime, mask-building, puppets, map-building, model-making, etc.) in order to make meaning with, and as a result of, their dramatic exploration. As well, the big picture must be created and understood in order for the content to gain significance within a particular situation, and determine individual and collective application in the real world. The creation of dramatic situations enfolds specific information and details in a context relevant to the learners.

Native learning styles, involving watch-then-do, listen-then-do, think-then-do approaches, exist within the dramatic teaching/learning style. In an effort to promote creativity and to decrease imitation, drama teachers rarely demonstrate for the class in a watch-then-do format (e.g., mime techniques) but they constantly model the behavioural expectations of the collaborative learning environment (Morgan & Saxton, 1987, p. 21). At the same time, learners model and demonstrate their understanding and skills for each other. Within the dramatic learning environment, learners engage in discovery learning—learning to discover and learning through discovery—and this involves some trial and error application (Day, 1983, p. 83). Error, however, does not necessarily imply failure, certainly not individual failure. The group may discover that their initial

solution was not the best one and the problem might require rethinking. Failure is not defeat, it is an alternative that doesn't work.

Listen-then-do is utilized in dramatic learning through language-based teacher techniques. Instructions for a drama activity generally outline the structure and rely on learner input to solve the problem, create an image, improvise the dialogue, explore the alternatives, and supply the content. If instructions become too dictatorial, learners become puppets, not participants. Clarity and detail are required, but instructions must allow for learner contribution.

Direct didactic instruction is a technique not culturally appropriate in the Native learning environment. "Telling someone what to do" is in direct conflict with the value of personal autonomy (Pepper & Henry, 1986, p. 56). However, the fundamental approaches of consensus decision-making, group planning and activity intrinsic in the dramatic teaching style function as indirect instructional devices and offer teachers an instructional alternative that respects learner autonomy within the collective situation.

Questioning is an essential element of the dramatic teaching style used to engage learners in dramatic situations. This type of questioning is not based on "right" or "wrong" answers, but rather on promoting learner consideration and on eliciting response. Questions presented in the dramatic context tend to be presented to the group, rather than to individuals, and this kind of interaction includes the teacher as part of the group. This technique allows the teacher and the learners the opportunity of discovering what they think and feel about the learning material and the situations.

Within the watch-, listen-, think-, then-do teaching/learning structures of Native cultures, direct questioning is not appropriate and may be considered impolite or intrusive (Pepper & Henry, 1986, p. 1). Therefore, questioning as a teaching/learning technique within a dramatic context appears to be incompatible with a Native teaching/learning situation. However, questioning, as employed within the dramatic teaching style, is a flexible technique allowing the teacher to be sensitive to the reaction of the learners. A question may be posed as something to consider or a challenge to work on, rather than something that demands an immediate response. If questioning appears to intrude on learner autonomy and is met with withdrawal or resentment, it should be used sparingly and carefully, building up a precedent based on trust and genuine interest. This approach to questioning could provide a bridge between the Native learning style and more language-based styles.

The think-then-do aspect of the Native learning style is illustrated in the use of reflection in dramatic teaching/learning. In order for learners to experience a change in understanding, demonstrated by a change in behaviour, they must be encouraged to reflect on their attitudes, approaches, actions, and the inherent implications affecting themselves and others. The essence of the think-then-do approach to learning and speaking is captured in the remembrance of a West Coast Native grandmother telling her grandson

You have two eyes, two ears, and a mouth and you use them in that order. When you've understood what you've seen, when you've understood what you've heard, then you may speak, but not before. You don't change the order. (Bill White, personal communication, April, 1988)

The reflective component of dramatic learning, and the time allowed for that reflection to occur, supports, utilizes and extends into verbalization and action the reflective aspects of the Native learning style.

Success in a learning environment is enhanced when the teaching style closely matches the prevalent learning style and/or is flexible enough to accommodate and challenge the variety of learning styles that may exist within the classroom setting (Lawrence, 1979, p. 17). Native learning style research has documented a Native teaching style that is culturally sensitive and supportive of the Native learning style (British Columbia Ministry of Education [BCME], 1984, p. 2). Where educational drama has been a component of the Native teacher education programs, it has been the author's experience to observe the strengths of the Native learning style, as well as to observe demonstration of the Native teaching style. Native teachers appear to utilize a sense of timing that is culturally based, sensitive to the energies of the learners, and which facilitates easy transitions between learning activities. This sensibility is compatible with the learner-centred and progressive structure of the dramatic teaching style.

The Native teaching style and the dramatic teaching style share the following similarities in teacher/student interactional patterns: (1) sharing of authority, leadership and initiation of activities; (2) exerting control over the whole class while still connecting with individual learners, but rarely singling them out; (3) addressing questions to the whole class, using few imperative commands, accepting silence and thinking time, and giving non-judgemental feedback; and (4) working at the students' pace and encouraging cooperative learning groups.

Research observations of Native teachers and drama teachers indicate that they share the following classroom practices: (1) cooperative project-oriented learning tasks; (2) groupings that allow for informal classroom settings, freedom of movement, and peer teaching/learning; (3) activities are experientially based, providing opportunities for tactile stimulation and for a variety of forms of expressive interpretation; (4) problems and materials are presented holistically, in context, utilizing visual and spatial depictions; (5) use of stories (metaphor, image, analogy and symbol); (6) verbal activities include personal expression in a variety of forms and are stimulated by practical and relevant experiences based on learner interest; (7) questioning techniques are based on a genuine collective need to know and generally are directed to the whole class; and (8) games and presentations are frequently used that depend on learner enthusiasm and input (BCME, 1984, pp. 1-2; Morgan & Saxton, 1987, pp. 150-153).

It is essential that Native learners, regardless of age, experience success within institutionalized learning situations so that the failure/withdrawal pattern is broken. Native learning strengths, in combination with culturally sensitive teachers employing the supportive and challenging teaching style and methodology intrinsic in educational drama may increase Native learners' chances of success.

The first step is for learners to gain confidence in their ability to learn successfully within the school setting. The second step, once that confidence has been established, is to provide opportunities for learners to learn using other methods that challenge and develop their potential. The dramatic

teaching/learning style offers Native learners (Native educational students and school-aged learners) a methodology that holds the potential for success in formal learning environments. The differences in the various styles do not appear to be obstacles but alternatives that offer two-way "bridges" for Native and non-Native teachers and learners. Native teachers and learners are offered practical access to more verbally based learning strategies and to alternative learning methods used more frequently in non-Native educational settings. Non-Native teachers and learners would benefit from exposure to the Native strengths of fostering and respecting learner autonomy, use of narrative structures, non-verbal communication, and reflective disciplines.

Incorporating the dramatic teaching/learning methodology of educational drama in Native teacher education programs demonstrates the cross-cultural and cross-curricular potential of this learning medium. It is not to say that all Native teachers are drama teachers, but rather that the incorporation of dramatic teaching and learning, its methods and manifestations, within any teacher education program provides the balance between the cognitive, affective, physical and cultural aspects of a complete and quality education program.

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