

ABSTRACT

Process Drama: An Investigation into the Paradox of Negotiating Fictional Contexts for Meaningful Learning

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Process Drama uses the direct application of theatre form to individual and community education as an alternative approach to more traditional models of instruction within a broad range of formal and informal learning situations. The main advantages of Process Drama methodologies reside in the ways in which they use the subjunctive, ‘as if’ mode to negotiate the acceptance of fictional contexts through which a vast range of human experience can be interrogated by the participants themselves rather than by being performed as theatre for an external audience. In addition these methodologies readily adjust themselves to a wide variety of language situations, cultural settings and levels of ability, in order to forge meaning in different types of learning communities and training conditions.

This study adopts the research methodologies of the Critical Reflective Practitioner and Arts-based Research to interrogate the apparent paradox of negotiating into existence the fictional circumstances of the drama in order to create opportunities for meaningful learning. Namely, it situates the Paradox of the Truth of the Theatre against the Mythologies of so-called reality. It also draws on fieldwork conducted in both the Caribbean and Africa, to build a case for Process Drama as a most viable, efficacious and cost-effective method of involving learning communities in developing strategies for promoting education for self-direction.

It examines a number of issue-based dramas, which interrogate hardened essentializing, theoretical positions, while they resist those hegemonies, which shut out and silence the voices of the marginalized. It further illustrates ways in which this approach to drama opens up debate on issues of historical injustice, racism, gender, sexual orientation, homophobia, HIV/AIDS, substance abuse and other health concerns, as well as broader political, economic and social issues.

Keywords: Brian Starmer Heap; process drama; drama education; the reflective drama teacher; critically reflective practitioner