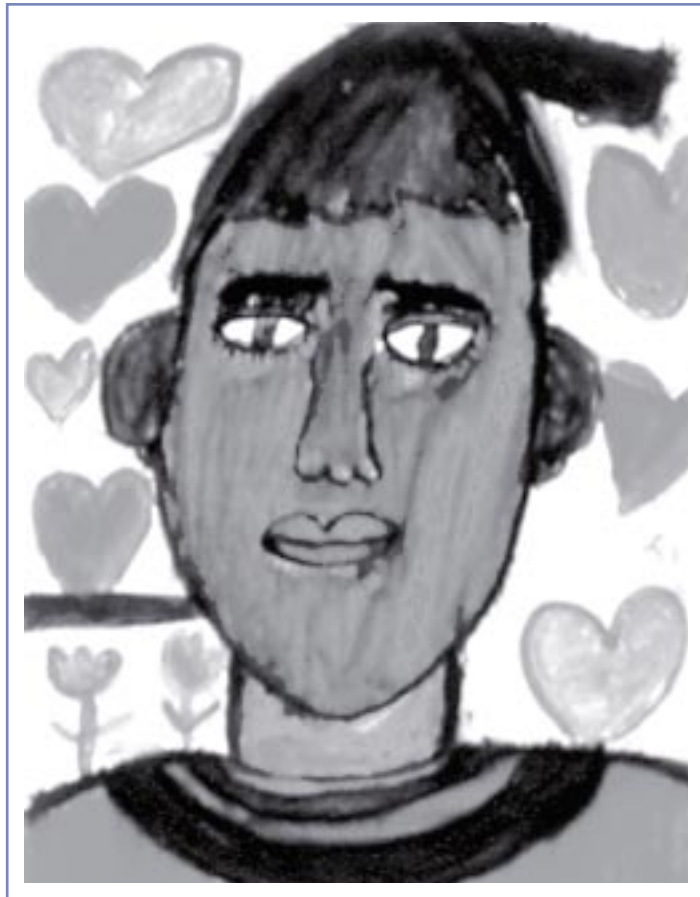


Now More than Ever

Changing Lives
in an After School
Theater Program



by carol macy

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All of us are aware that young people today are facing challenges far greater than the ones we ourselves faced growing up. Now more than ever, the music, television and film industries are busy parenting their young consumers at an alarming rate and with a fierce intensity. And the products of these industries are, for the most part, stripped of any magic or true inspiration so essential to childhood, often giving our young people access to far more information than they are able to process. In addition, recent news events have deeply shaken our children, leaving many of them vulnerable and uncertain about the future.

Waving a magic wand will not alleviate the pressures children feel at school, the messages communicated through movies and television, or the heartbreaks of home life so many children bring with them to the after school program. We, as after school educators, can balance what is happening

by finding ways to *slow our children down*, and to help them process all that they are exposed to each day. My work during the past twenty-five years as a workshop leader and theater director in public schools, and, in my own after school program for young people, has clearly shown that theater exercises and the dramatization of stories and poetry are vital to the education of young people.

The Village Theater in Brattleboro, Vermont, is an after school workshop for children and adolescents that involves young people aged 6-15 in the dramatization of poetry, stories and scripted plays. As the program's artistic director, I wanted to explore the relationship between the dramatization of stories and poetry and the development of self-esteem and empathy in the participants. In addition, I was interested in learning more about the role of the facilitator in contributing to the self-esteem of each actor and in bringing forth authentic, exciting work from student actors. This article will share what I have come to know both through my graduate research and in my practice over the years: After school programs can make a major contribution to the education of the *whole* child.

The very nature of the after school program allows practitioners the *extraordinary* opportunity to nurture, support and engage participants of many different ages in experiences designed to increase feelings of self-worth, develop intuition, foster empathy and bring forth the creative spirit in young people.

What the facilitator needs in order for theater experiences to succeed in meeting humanistic and artistic objectives with young people in after school programs are the following:

1. An understanding of how to foster self-esteem and develop empathy in young people.
2. An understanding of how the facilitator contributes to the self-esteem and moral growth of each child.
3. The ability to see the ways in which theater can address the whole child.
4. An understanding of how the discussion and dramatization of stories can contribute to the development of empathy.

5. Knowledge of the process involved in leading participants of all ages in theater games, exercises and the dramatization of poetry and stories.

6. A list of references that will give facilitators the much-needed tools for creating with young people.

7. An empty space, which, for a given period of the afternoon, becomes the stage.



Nicole, grade 4,
Staten Island

The Question of Self-Esteem

In order to see how we, as after school practitioners, can increase self-concept and moral growth in young people, we must formulate questions that will provide a foundation upon which we can build a case for theater in the after school arena. What, for example, do we mean by "self-esteem"?

In *Educational Psychology* (1998) Anita Woolfolk tells us that people tend to confuse the terms "self-concept" and "self-esteem." Woolfolk states that the term self-concept means "our attempt to explain ourselves to ourselves." She believes that our self-concept is ever-changing and that the perceptions we have of ourselves will vary in different situations and in every phase of our lives. In differentiating between self-concept and self-esteem, Woolfolk says that our self-esteem emerges from our evaluation of our self-concept (p. 74). If a child has a positive self-concept, if the child likes what she sees, then we say she has high self-esteem.

Woolfolk believes that our self-concept evolves from a very simple definition, or attempt to explain ourselves, to an increasingly complex definition. The complex definitions are related to one another but remain separate. For example, a young child might define himself as a boy with brown hair. As he grows older,

he might define himself as a boy with brown hair who is tall and friendly and who likes to play tag at recess. As an adolescent, his thinking becomes more abstract. In high school, he begins to form beliefs about the nature of things, about his philosophy of life, his sexuality and what he wants to be after he leaves school. Woolfolk believes that this complex definition of self might include feelings of adequacy in certain subject areas and inadequacy in others, for example. By looking at this construct, we can begin to understand how these definitions of self can be related but separate.

The Role of the Practitioner

As after school practitioners, we have the privilege of responding to the children who come to us each day in ways that will help to build both self-concept and self-esteem. And we can present theater experiences in such a way that children and teens will experience success 100% of the time, leaving the workshops feeling more confident about who they are as individuals.

Anita Woolfolk lists 13 guidelines which she feels contribute to the self-esteem of young people, giving us an important key to meaningful interaction between director and actor and to successful work with students in the field of theater. And although it is possible to bring forth exciting performances from actors without following these suggestions, approaching participants with these objectives in mind creates an experience which builds confidence and encourages authentic work on the part of young people. I have chosen four of her guidelines, which are particularly helpful in the realm of theater education:

- Value and accept all pupils for their attempts as well as for their accomplishments.
- Create a climate that is physically and psychologically safe for students.
- Remember that positive self-concept grows from success in operating in the world and

from being valued by important people in the environment.

- Help students learn to evaluate their own accomplishments. (p. 78)

Equally important in looking at the role of the theater practitioner are Carl Rogers's beliefs about the role of the facilitator in creating an atmosphere where true learning can take place. In *Freedom to Learn for the 80's* (1983), Rogers insists that for true learning to take place:

- The facilitator must be genuine.
- The facilitator must value the learner, acknowledging where the learner is at any given moment, and seeing his/her potential.
- The facilitator must be empathic to the lives of the individuals with whom s/he works. (p. 21)

Developing these qualities as after school practitioners is not always easy. But understanding how important the guidelines set forth by these two authors are in bringing forth success make them worthwhile qualities to strengthen in ourselves. The role of the facilitator in fostering self-esteem in young people through theater experiences is a vital one.

In *Impro: Improvisation and the Theater* (1981), actor, playwright and teacher Keith Johnstone shares information that is crucial to this discussion. In the early pages of his book, he talks about the educational experience that helped shape his philosophy of education and his life's work. At a low point in his career, Johnstone decided to enter a training college in the hope of improving his teaching skills. By a stroke of good fortune, he found himself in Anthony Stirling's art class, and for the first time in his life he was "in the hands of a great teacher." Mr. Stirling believed that "art was 'in' the child, and wasn't something to be imposed by an adult" (p. 20). This idea again recalls the literal meaning of education: "to bring forth." He also believed that every session should be presented in such a way that each child will experience a feeling of success. This task is,

When the barriers of fear are dropped, the four year-old boy who clings to the practitioner and the fourteen year-old girl who smirks at the idea of taking herself seriously onstage will express the artist within and be as amazed as their peers that such creativity is possible.

perhaps, harder for a seventh-grade math teacher, but as practitioners working with children and teens after school, it is the opportunity to change a life for the better.

As a new teacher, Johnstone chose to take a position in a poor working-class neighborhood in England and was given the “backward” and “uneducable” students, the ones that none of the other teachers wanted (p. 24). In a section called “Right Relationship,” Johnstone shares his approach to learning. He noticed that these same children who looked dulled and defeated when it came to learning, came alive when they were doing something unrelated to “being educated.” Johnstone shares the following guidelines necessary to developing the “Right Relationship” between teacher and student.

1. Take responsibility. Johnstone argues that good teachers can bring forth wonderful experiences with students no matter what method they are using, and that bad teachers will prevent children from learning in the most important ways, using the very same methods. He believes that teachers are sometimes quick to dismiss a group that seems uninterested by blaming the children or teens involved rather than taking responsibility for the lack of group motivation.

2. Encourage support within the group. Johnstone always explains to his children and adolescents on the first day that each actor is going to work for the other actors in the group, that each child needs to be interested in the progress of the other actors sitting there on the floor because “if a group supports its own members strongly, it’ll be a better group to work in” (p. 29).

3. Play “low status” when beginning a theater workshop. When Johnstone first meets with a

group, he sits on the floor with them, creating what he calls “low status.” Playing the role of low status in the initial meeting helps the fearful seven-year-old and the streetwise (and fearful) fifteen-year-old to feel relaxed immediately, communicating emotional safety to them. The flexibility of the after school program, once again, provides an opportunity to sit together in a circle on the same level.

4. Guarantee success for each child. Johnstone goes a step further by sharing with his new students that, if they fail, they are to blame their teacher. Theater workshops can and must ensure success for each child because many of the children and teens who come to after school programs have been crushed by their inability to succeed academically and/or socially at school.

5. Connect with each child in the group. In his early years as a teacher, Johnstone trained himself to make eye contact with each actor in the group as he spoke. He believes that consciously remembering to make eye contact with every person present is crucial to the development of what he calls “a ‘fair’ relationship with them” (p. 29).

6. Accentuate the positive. It is also important to be conscious of staying positive when giving feedback to any age group. Johnstone, for example, says “Good!” when he is ending a scene that actors are improvising, rather than “That’s enough.” In *The Village Theater*, I find that looking at “what works” in an improvisation and then looking at ways to make the scene even better is a good approach to take in giving actors a response to their work. Our aim here is to frame what we say in a manner that will ensure the development of confidence, and in doing so,

contribute to authentic work on the part of the actors involved and the resulting growth in self-esteem.

7. "Relaxation is incompatible with anxiety." (p. 30) One of the reasons that I continue to see authentic, interesting work on stage—work that isn't diminished by the presence of an audience—is because children and adolescents will blossom as performing artists if encouraged in an atmosphere of support and trust. The young people who come to us are not lacking in creativity, but they are lacking in the *confidence* to create. The ten-year-old boy who "breaks character" by laughing during an improvisation, or the fourteen-year-old girl who constantly looks at the director for approval, rather than staying focused in the scene, are simply saying they don't yet feel comfortable.

When the barriers of fear are dropped, the four-year-old boy who clings to the practitioner and the fourteen-year-old girl who smirks at the idea of taking herself seriously onstage will express the artist within and be as amazed as their peers that such creativity is possible. Of

course there will always be the gifted seven-year-old who startles us with her confident dramatization of a lonely frog by the side of a pond, or the fifteen-year-old boy who delivers a spontaneous monologue about life in his neighborhood, but we are not talking about those children here. They might blossom with a leader who is interested in directing a play, but not necessarily interested in developing people through the theater experience. I am speaking of the many fearful children and adolescents who come to us, awkward and scared on the first day, knowing that they will have to get up and do something. And when we see the creative spirit come alive in such unlikely candidates as these, we come closest again to that authentic meaning of education: "to bring forth."

The Role of Stories in Our Lives

In addition to helping children and teens feel better about who they are, practitioners leading after school theater workshops can create a moral climate in which individuals become



Maxine, grade 5, Brooklyn

more caring and more connected to one another. And, however lasting or fleeting this connection is, theater workshops and the dramatization of literature play a vital role in the development of empathy in young people. Robert Coles, in *The Moral Intelligence of Children* (1997), speaks passionately about the role of literature in the moral development of children. He says, “So many younger school chil-

The students showed each other how informally trained actors could produce good acting in a short time, and how literature can mean more when a reader can see it acted out.

dren are eager to embrace the imaginary—indeed, their minds are often afire with it. Given a choice, they will leap into one or another scenario, be it historical or contemporary, factual or fictional, and bring to it their own moral or intellectual assumptions” (p. 121) because the elementary school years are “The Age of Conscience” and “the time for growth of the moral imagination, fueled constantly by the willingness, the eagerness of children to put themselves in the shoes of others, to experience that way of life” (p. 99).

As after school theater facilitators, we can encourage participants to step into the shoes of a character in a story about courage in the midst of obstacles, for example. We can involve children and teens in the dramatization of poetry that says something important about the ebb and flow of nature, or of a city neighborhood. In this way, learning is happening at a deeper level, and various aspects of intelligence are being addressed. The individuals involved, whether viewing a dramatization or presenting one, are able to connect more directly with the character who lives with prejudice, with a haiku that expresses the silence of snow falling before dawn, or with the girl who wakes up to find her world has changed forever because of an event in the life of her country.

We don't finally conquer the world's evil and forever after enjoy the moral harvest of that victory. Rather, we struggle, even stumble along, from day to day, needing to take stock yet again, with the help of a story or a movie or experiences that, inevitably and not even that rarely, simply occur in our daily lives (Coles, 1997, p. 20).

My graduate work in Vermont included a study of high school students at Northfield Mount Hermon School in Massachusetts. Through that study, I learned that the vast majority of the members of two American literature classes felt more connected to the characters they portrayed (or viewed) on stage, and to the themes addressed in the story, as a result of the dramatization. Students shared

that they felt less isolated on their own journeys as a result. “When I was on stage,” wrote a seventeen-year-old, “I realized that the character and I are sort of similar; I understood him better.” Another student wrote, “It simply made me understand why the character was feeling the way he was, and why he was having such difficulties and frustrations.” In addition, the study confirmed that most students, who had initially appeared frightened and resentful when approached with the idea of pushing back their desks and interacting on stage with classmates, became more confident about their own creative abilities. Many, in fact, went on to make dramatic presentations a part of their final papers at the end of the term.

John Adams, head of the English department at Northfield Mount Hermon, wrote:

From my perspective, the project was wonderful because the students showed each other how informally trained actors could produce good acting in such a short time, and how literature can mean more when a reader can see it acted out. I have to say that seeing the dramatic production of otherwise familiar scenes offered me a completely new way of looking at these books, especially because I was seeing how my students interpreted the readings. My teaching has

more than likely changed as a result. Despite my lack of formal training in theater, I shall get more classes to stage scenes of these readings because the benefits are simply too great to ignore.

In *The Moral Child* (1988), William Damon discusses the relationship between empathy and prosocial behavior. He states that it is generally recognized among researchers that children who demonstrate strong empathic capabilities are children who are more likely to be involved in sharing with and helping others. They also tend to be less aggressive than children who are not as empathic (p. 17). In some of Robert Coles's research, children were asked to view improvised or scripted scenes with child actors on video tape. In these scenes, actors displayed strong emotions such as fear, anger, pride, shame or sadness, and the emotions of the children viewing these tapes matched closely the emotions seen on the screen (Coles, 1997, p. 17).

This research reinforces the theory that dramatizing stories can help individuals, both actors and audience members, match their own feelings with those of the characters being portrayed on stage. Children and teens, when they step into the shoes of a character from a story (or view a dramatization), *can feel something* of what it is like to demonstrate courage while portraying a character whose friend is about to be evicted from her apartment (*The Sidewalk Story*, by Sharon Mathis), or can *empathize* with a dragon who would rather recite poetry than fight anyone (*The Reluctant Dragon*, by Kenneth Grahame).

If it is true that both children and adolescents are matching feelings with the characters they view, then we can surmise that it is also happening to them in movie theaters and in front of televisions around the world. Once again, it is the after school program that can balance what is happening with and to our

young people by creating a positive moral climate. It is the after school practitioner who can play a key role in this creation by giving children and teens the rich opportunity to match feelings with and model themselves after characters who demonstrate integrity, compassion and courage, and by dramatizing stories and poems that portray both the struggles and the triumphs of the human spirit.

Some of the schools that intend to create a moral climate, says Damon, have used teacher-led discussion, role-taking exercises and curriculum materials that expose students to conflicts in fairness and moral choice (p. 148). Both the study at Northfield Mount Hermon and the research conducted at The Village Theater School have incorporated these three guidelines by involving actors in the dramatization and discussion of works of fiction.

Addressing the Whole Child

In *Creative Dramatics and English Teaching* (1975), Charles Duke says that when children are very young, they demonstrate a genuine spark of interest in creativity and the arts and an excitement about the prospect of participating in them. Our children need to develop their imaginations and patterns of learning that will help steer them through life. And we,



Dragon, Neil, grade 4, Staten Island

Ages 10-12: A Suggested Sequence for a Poetry-Writing Session

Opening Circle

"The Ungame:" a series of statements and questions to be completed by participants in groups of 3 or 4.

Examples:

"The best dessert in the world is. . ."

"My name is Carol, and my favorite time of day is. . ."

Purpose: grounding and connection; opening of communication

Warm-up

"Group Pictures": build human pictures, or tableaux, of a suggested word or image in groups of 3 or 4.

Example: "Build me a picture of a garden in the moonlight."

Purpose: collaboration; preparation of the imagination

Main Body

Writing Poetry: construct a poem based on certain catalysts

Purpose: group cooperation; understanding of poetic structure; performance

Catalyst: Music—Choose an instrumental piece which suggests a mood

Exercise: Ask students to close their eyes and imagine a movie screen as they listen, seeing what images appear on the screen in response to music. A list of words and images might include:

dark, boys, stormy, wind, ocean, gray, sailing, fight, brown

and then become:

gray day boys in the sand the fighting
ocean the dark sailing day

Catalyst: Art Prints—Use 10 to 12 prints of works of art depicting nature, people or animals

Exercise: Ask students to list one-word images in response to Van Gogh's *Sidewalk Cafe* and create a poem; words such as:

yellow, evening, chairs, eating, stars, blue, cobblestones, swirling, above and people

might become, by combining words not normally used together, and by ignoring sentence structure:

Sleepy cobblestones
People walking and eating
They listen to music
Sit on yellow chairs
And high above
the evening stars shining.

Catalyst: Poem—Use a poem to trigger the creation of an original poem.

Exercise: Use a poem by the Japanese poet Issa who wrote, "I am one who eats his breakfast gazing at the morning glories." Ask the group to think of how they would describe themselves:

"I am one who sits in a red chair every year and watches the Super Bowl."

"I am one who spins in a pink ballet dress while the sun is shining."

Dramatize the Poetry: Break up into groups of 3 or 4, each group with several poems, then choose a poem to dramatize, cast it, play music under it and then stage it, recalling the warm-up exercise, "Group Pictures."

Closing Circle

Use this time to talk about the experience of writing and dramatizing the poems and about the various ways in which the students were affected by the poems.

as practitioners, must engage young people in the process of discovery and of original thought, whether or not someone else has had the same thought before. Duke argues that it is the process itself that contributes to an actively creative mind, so when we, as facilitators, involve individuals in this process, “We can jog them out of passive acceptance and mechanical routines; it makes familiar things different and worthy of noticing, provides new devices for thought, and encourages participation.” With little

dramatic experience, practitioners can help integrate drama into “the process of living and learning.” If we believe in the importance of self-expression through drama, we cannot *help* but contribute to new and meaningful experiences in the lives of those participating (p. 13).

Brian Way, in *Development Through Drama* (1967), makes an important distinction between theater and drama. He believes that education must consider drama only as a means of developing individuals (p. 1). He is concerned with the development of *people*, defining drama as an opportunity to address the whole child in ways that are sorely lacking in many schools. If, the author says, we were to ask someone, “What is a blind person?” the response would very likely be, “Someone who cannot see.” But if you close your eyes and walk around the room, you achieve moments of direct knowledge, enriching the imagination, possibly touching the heart and soul as well as the mind.

As after school practitioners, we need to look at drama as an opportunity to give children a missing piece in the development of wholeness, and that missing piece is intuition. We need to find ways to design and implement programs so that the children coming into a theater experience can connect more directly to themselves, to one another and to the stories and poetry they are dramatizing. Now, more than ever, our children and adolescents are escaping

into the world of instant gratification, entertainment and shallow pleasures because of a void that is not being filled by the kind of experiential learning that develops intuition, reflection and discovery.

Howard Gardner’s theory on multiple intelligences (1991) states that there are several kinds

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of intelligences, suggesting that each of us is smart in different ways. The ten-year-old who struggles in math through the school years because logical/mathematical intelligence is not his strong suit finds himself confident and capable during the creation and dramatization of a mime sketch set to music. Suddenly, the same boy who might experience himself as a failure at school demonstrates bodily/kinesthetic intelligence and musical intelligence in an after school program, and goes to school the next day feeling a little more confident, because he is able to see himself in a new way. After school programs can, therefore, provide the flexibility that allows us to address these multiple intelligences in children and teens.

Much of this article has been devoted to the role of the facilitator in approaching theater experiences with children and teenagers and to the theoretical underpinnings of education for the whole child. Although the next section will, I hope, prove valuable by giving practitioners a sense of how to approach certain age groups, it is the warmth, enthusiasm and the genuine interest on the part of each practitioner that cannot be overstated in the fostering of self-esteem in the young people who come to us in after school programs.

On pages 44 and 46 are illustrations of a structure I use at The Village Theater in

Ages 12-15: A Suggested Sequence for an Improvisation Session

Opening Circle

"The Ungame," as described on page 44.

Purpose: The prompts provide a focus for the participants as they become acquainted, helpful at this age because of the need to feel safe in front of peers.

Examples: "My name is Jennifer, and my favorite holiday is. . ."

"My name is Robert, and after school I like to. . ."

Warm-up

Nonverbal improvisations in groups of 4 or 5.

Purpose: Inclusion of dramatic elements in performances without dialogue (note: if successful as nonverbals, repeat using dialogue).

Exercise: After introducing the four elements of good dramatic improv (who/what/where/problem or conflict), ask each group to quickly develop a brief improvisational scene, showing:

Who the character is

Where s/he is

What the action is

Problem or conflict in the scene

Begin by brainstorming with the group some possible Whats, Wheres, Whos and Conflicts and use side-coaching for support and re-direction as needed.

Main Body

"The Dream:" Based upon the warm-up described above, to develop in small groups an improvisation using a dream concept

Example: The young manager of a doughnut shop is nervous because the new employees are about to do the baking during the night shift. Having instructed them in what to do, s/he takes a nap in the back room, and then dreams that everything is going wrong. The other actors then nonverbally improvise what could go wrong: spilling flour, burning doughnuts, making a mess, etc., all in slow motion to create the "dream state."

Hint: After the first performance, ask the actors to rehearse the scenes further, and even develop them into a thematic presentation for an audience of parents and friends.

Closing Circle

Themes for the previous exercise could also include "fitting in," "being different," "losing someone you love," for example, and could provide subject matter for rich discussions. You might introduce the idea of improvising scenes from works of fiction with which the actors are familiar, either from home or school.

Closing circles can always include discussion (not critique) of what occurred in the Main Body of the session.

Brattleboro, Vermont, and which works well with all age groups: Opening Circle, Warm-up, Main Body and Closing Circle. Using this structure, I will share the ways in which I approach different age groups with the same objective for the main body of the workshop: the dramatization and discussion of fiction for the purpose of developing "a sense of wonder" in participants and a deeper connection to each other and to the human experience. The cur-

riculum I use is suitable for children and youth four years of age and older, but for this article I will only offer detailed explanations of what I do with two of the age groups: 10-12 and 12-15.

In *Drama Improvised* (1997), Kenneth Pickering discusses the reasons that drama experiences are so important as children become adolescents, emphasizing the very real need to understand the world and to begin to develop interpersonal skills by successfully relating to

peers in different play situations (p. 12). Pickering believes that “adolescents, whose developing personalities are full of emotional and social complexities, and who frequently feel ill at ease with themselves and their bodies, can find in the drama lesson just the release and guidance they need. Introspective natures can be gently and painlessly nurtured” (p. 12).

The process of leading this age group in the dramatization of scenes from literature is worth further exploration. The technique of combining the experience of a narrator reading passages from a scene *while* the actors are improvising, nonverbally, in *response* to that passage, provides a wonderful entree into the rich world of dramatizing stories, scenes from stories or scripted works.

In one of my classes at The Village Theater, I briefly shared *The Prince and the Pauper* by Mark Twain. A group of actors responded nonverbally to a passage that was being read. Suddenly, I stopped the narrative, and the actors knew that at this point they should begin creating dialogue and the improvisation would become a verbal one.

Stories can also provide a springboard for improvisations that come out of our own experiences and can involve the theme of wanting to trade places with someone for a day. And these kinds of workshops can stand alone or evolve into more polished pieces which can be shared with family and friends, or performed at the nursing home down the street.

Making a Difference

Walt Whitman wrote in *Leaves of Grass*:

There was a child went forth every day,
And the first object he looked upon,
That object he became,
And that object became part of him, for the
day or a certain part of the day,
Or, for many years or stretching cycles of
years.

We can never know exactly how, as practitioners, we affect the lives of the children and

young adults who come to our programs. Both my practice and my research over three decades have shown me quite clearly that theater experiences, and particularly dramatizations of good literature, change lives for the better. And while the verbal feedback might be different according to age, the core experience is the same: theater workshops, led by enthusiastic, empathic facilitators contribute to the creative spirit in each child, and to a growing awareness of one's own abilities. The following written responses by children of various ages will illustrate how the impact of theater experiences becomes increasingly complex as children mature.

- Seven year-old: The reason I like class is because I like to be in front of people.
- Eight year-old: I like to do theater in the after school program because I love to act!
- Nine year-old: I love drama. It makes me happy!!
- Ten year-old: Drama helps the kids put themselves in another person's point of view. This is called empathy, and without it kids don't see how they are hurting each other by their behavior.



Naren, grade 4, Brooklyn

- Eleven year-old: One way I get stronger from drama is I overcome fear. This experience in drama has made it easier for me to conquer fears in my life.
- Twelve year-old: Working in drama has helped me to grow, not only as an actress, but also as a person. I have noticed that my confidence has gone up since I started performing, and now I know how to speak up when I feel it appropriate.
- Seventeen year-old: When I was on the stage playing that character, I realized that he and I are sort of similar. I understood him better.

Professor Andrew Garrod of Dartmouth College told me in an interview that in his experience, "Theater enhances empathy. It enhances sympathy. And it teaches habits of cooperation and working as a team" (May, 1998). Where *better* to develop these essential qualities in individuals than in after school programs throughout our country?

In the introduction of *Drama Improvised* (1997), Kenneth Pickering states:

Human beings pass ever increasing numbers of years of their lives in front of television screens and the use of books as a source of wonderment, imagination and information is now receding with the advance of the CD-ROM. More alarmingly, perhaps, society seems to have absorbed the values of the technocrats and the market place. The only charters we seem to value now are those designed to protect our consumerism. Where, in all this drive for efficiency, productivity and information, is there a place for wisdom, or compassion or imagination? Where, in fact, is there room for our humanity?

Today, more than ever, we need to find resources that will inspire a celebration of our shared humanity. And theater experiences offer a resource, as English teacher John Adams stated, "whose benefits are simply too great to ignore."

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