



VOL. 2

JOURNAL OF THEATRE DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

2017

ISSN:2616-1028



TEACHING EDUCATIONAL DRAMA IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS WITH COSTUME AND PROPS AS VISUAL AIDS

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Abstract

Costume and props are vital aspects of educational drama. In Nigeria, the concept and possibilities of educational drama has not been utilized beyond the theoretical postulations of its possibilities. Whereas through educational drama new theories and frontiers have been propounded to enhance learning, as well as advance both the sociological and psychological development of children. While the trend in most academic spaces where Educational drama is thought still views and utilises drama as a simplistic entertainment medium. In this paper, Costumes and props are discussed as possible enhancement in the teaching of educational drama across curriculum. The paper finds that it is not just enough to deploy drama in both teaching and interrogating subjects in primary and secondary schools, but that, in using costume and props as visual aids, teachers and pupils are better engaged both intellectually and visually to the extent of enhancing interpersonal relationships amongst them.

Keywords: Educational Drama, Costume and Props, Visual Aids

Introduction

Educational Drama is an aspect of school curriculum that focuses on a

child's development and enhancement using drama as its basic tool. According to Sunday Ododo, educational drama is a child centered educational method that "focuses on how the child rapidly fruits up in knowledge acquisition and utilitarian values that are derived therefrom" (142). In other to get a useful insight on the benefit of educational drama to teaching, and learning, there is need to ask, what is **drama**? Is it anything put together by a select group to make us laugh? We may take our definition of drama a bit wider to say that drama is a performance on stage before an audience that discusses societal issues. Drama can also be seen as any performance on stage or television, on the street, market, or even in the classroom. To put it in a more concise and parlance and to further a broader scope, in this discourse, we can infer that drama is an imitation of life "in which the participant pretends that he or she is someone else, or something else, through role playing in an imaginary environment" (Gökçen Özbek, 47). By pretending, a participant is able to learn through the experience of make believe, and for make belief to be effective in suspending disbelief, the application of technical visual aids comes very useful in ensuring a concrete finality in the act of presenting fiction as reality. Expressing it broadly, Freedman et al cites Burton who defines drama as "a total activity, concerned with the inner self surroundings, the physical and mental self, the individual and the community, and the human situation and potential. In general drama is concerned with the whole person. (131). Invariably, drama is an art that "contributes to the development of the individual and the society at large" (Okeke 101). Hence the whole person must be presented in its original visual embodiment to include costume and props in order to situate a story more correctly. Sunday Ododo indicated that the use of technical aids such as property, costume make-up etc. during a "theatrical presentation usually gives depth and meaning to the artistic fare" (154).

Drama, Society and Education

The first and basic function of drama is to entertain. Dramatic entertainment is achieved through the imitation of life, and with it is

embedded every other educational value. Shakespeare's "Mirror up to Nature" in *Hamlet* precedes the statement that drama is a mirror to the society because it is a tangible tool deployed in exposing the fallibility and strength of man through imitation. Drama helps to inform, educate, instruct, and mold character as the case maybe. As teachers or educators of young minds we have no greater joy than to see our children learn adequately and transpose whatever they have learnt to useful visible gains. Therefore, through drama, children are educated to understand the ways of man and to better prepare for a more challenging world ahead of them.

In teaching curricula subjects, dramatic activities have become a valuable tool in making sure that teaching goes beyond the abstractness of what the normal school curriculum prescribes. Children, and humans in general, remember more what they see, and even more what they participate in than what is verbally thrown at them. This is true in both real life situations as well as in learning spaces. The space of learning is not complete if visual enhancing curricular materials are not used to improve teaching. It becomes very easy to see the excitement and self-worth children gains when they are made the center of attention through dramatic works enhanced by the use of props and costumes. In the developed countries, teaching through art to children has evolved in a lot of ways that children are given hands on props to see, feel and even handle. This is to ensure that what they see sticks better with the young children, than what is verbally dished out. Heathcote, and Wagner, is quoted by Mustafa, Yasar as advancing that:

there is an increasing body of research investigating the role of drama in teaching and learning. The existing drama literature suggests that drama offers several opportunities for educators to promote learning and development. For example, drama allows participants to be engaged, motivated, empowered and activates agents of learning. (371)

The use of drama as teaching method works in every aspect of learning, since it harnesses the total experience of man in explaining issues that are unexplainable with the use of traditional and conventional teaching methods. Esen, Ersoy and Pinar Guner (2014) identify drama in education as “one of the methods of learning-teaching and practice that starts from the unity of human and that aims simultaneously to improve the needs to know (wisdom), to hear (conscience and aesthetics) and to act (motion), which are common abilities of human (45). Mustafa also cites Isenburg and Jacob (1983) as avowing that “when drama is interwoven into education it promotes literacy, multiple interpretations, problem solving and collaboration amongst students” (372). This is because drama owing to its universality is life itself that represents the character of existence that is near to an equality of actual life (Howard vii).

Areas of Child Development through Drama

The benefits of educational drama in schools cannot be over emphasized. The process allows both the teacher in role and the pupil to play symbiotic roles of teacher-pupil, and pupil-teacher relationship both simultaneously and separately as the case maybe. The interchangeability of roles that educational drama encourages give both parties the possibilities of learning from each other's point of view as such, educational drama can enhance and contribute to the development of a sharp and vivid imagination in Children. This is possible because apart from dramatic work in teaching expression, properties and costumes become visual aids that help stimulate and retain high level of imagination and vivid thinking. Through educational drama process, the powers of creativity and self-expression can be attained especially in children that are naturally shy and backbenchers. As stated in the *Integrated Resource Package* of the British Columbia Curriculum on drama in education, “Drama is an interactive process that engages students in relationships with others and with the environment.

Through educational drama, Children develop the ability to make sound decisions and solve emergency problems without depending on adults in cases of emergency. Educational drama can expose children to a greater understanding of themselves and the world in general. By the deployment of role-play, which enables children play different characters they gain access to characters and situations as objectively as they can. In other words, pupils are able to understand life actions and events from other people's perspectives. The process can also help a child build self-confidence, a sense of self worth, respect and an ability to understand others in distress. A constant experience in an educational drama process can build team spirit and a two-way work environment with positive energy. As well as improve eloquence and public speaking among shy and timid children.

Educational Drama or Drama in Education (DIE)

Although "Educational Drama" is generalised to comprise Children's Theatre, Theatre for Children, Theatre with Children and Theatre for Young adults, it is a very professional and systematic technique that emphasises the experience a child gathers during the process of making a dramatic work, rather than a focus on professional work meant for the audience. Nellie McCaslin cites Wilfred Ward a pioneer theorist of DIE, as arguing that there is a marked distinction between Children's Theatre and Educational Drama. To Ward, Children's Theatre is "focused on a product that began with an audience in mind" while Educational Drama "focus on the player and process" (13). Educational drama is an interesting skill and learning process that is employed to teach across subjects and curriculum. With this method, children learn by means of improvisational exercise that is lived and experienced extemporally by students and their teacher. During the process, the children and teacher who is also referred to as "**Teacher in Role**" or "**Facilitator**" discuss and review life issues in an attempt to collectively proffer solutions to such issues using the dramatic forms. The process of educational drama is a platform that helps stimulate the imagination of children to release their creativity and also enhance their capacity to resolve problems

independently. The ability to achieve an independent imaginative and creative spirit in children is achieved by guiding them through the various aspects of the performing arts. This is because, "the arts, are by their very nature, creative in the sense that they involve activities of actual creation - of paintings, music, dances, dramas and art-works of various sorts" (Sharon, Bailin, 209). Engaging a child in the holistic process of the arts and its various methods to deal with simple subject matters enhances the students and teachers' ability to learn through observation and interaction with each other. Therefore, instead of taking in everything a teacher teaches, especially since they are always traditionally doctored and imposed on the imagination of children, educational drama empowers the children through dramatic experience that tasks the imagination of a child to create actual scenarios and answer questions to topical issues hitherto taught in the abstract.

In educational drama, the student's imagination is stretched beyond the classroom to accommodate the practical use of real life experiences. Events and practical life issues become tools in the hands of children in solving difficult classroom problems through critical brainstorming as supervised by the teacher-in-role or facilitator. The students are exposed to what they really feel and are able to experience some form of challenges and lark and sometimes as experienced by other people. Thus, a child is equipped to become better prepared in handling emergencies should the case arise in future. Most often than not, a line of dramatic discussion in an educational drama session would require an intensive investigation and research that would further broaden the understanding of such issue. When this happens, the students can take such project further through thorough and investigative research.

Props and Costume in Educational Drama

What is Costume?

Tortora Eubank et al describe costume in drama as "the fabrication of

apparel for the overall appearance of a character or performer. Costume is specific in the style of dress particular to a nation, a class, or a period” (1). To Chukwuma Okoye, costume “is all the materials, by way of dress or clothing, which a theatre performer has on his/her body in the course of a performance” (46). He explains further that, “even if the performer is in the nude, so long as this nudity is presented within the context of a theatrical performance, he/she is on costume... not limited to items of clothing alone (46)

It should be noted that in the theatre anything that is put on by the actor bears meaning to the overall interpretation of that dramatic performance. Describing the inevitable function or use of costume to drama Uwadinma-Idemudia posits that:

Costume has come to represent in most performances all the scenographic expectation employed to put a story forward to the audience owing to its multifaceted function that spans from character delineation, the location of time and place, the enhancement of mood and the summing up of the total spectacular expressions of a performance. (47)

Like the conventional dramatic practice, costume is deployed to accentuate and project visually the total personality of a character from head to toe, and from the physical to the unseen emotional disposition of a character. This is also true when used as demonstrative embellishment in the teaching of school's curricula subjects. Costume becomes a tool used for the following:

- Introduction of the actor. (Delineates the actor in terms of age, occupation, physical strength, social strata)
- Tells a story or narrates the plot of a play. (Creates mood, time, period, style class emotion/feeling in drama)
- A spectacular embellishment. (It enhance sensational and striking interpretation to drama: The grand entrance of a beauty

queen or the beggarly entrance of a pauper crook)

As listed above, even though artistic professionalism is not the goal in educational drama, the use of costume is implicitly deployed to achieve realness and enhance believability in teaching in classroom spaces.

What is Props?

Property on the other hand, is popularly shortened in dramatic parlance and referred to as props. Thematically, props is all objects carried or handled by the actor on stage during a performance. Margaret Harris describes props as “anything, which appears on the stage but which cannot be classified as scenery, costume, or electrical equipment” (7). Props are categorized into different basic but broad categories to signify its size and functions. These categories or groupings are listed as follows:

- *Stage or Set Props*
- *Hand Props*
- *Personal Props*
- *Costume props*
- *Dressing or Trim Props*

Stage or Set Props:

These are heavy props like furniture, carpets, curtains and their fittings. Others are door and window furniture. These kinds of props are because of their size and ease of movement, firstly arranged on stage before the beginning of any dramatic performance.

Hand Props:

Hand props are small properties held by actors on stage to emphasize actions on stage. They may be carried in and out by the actors or they may even be position on state for the actors to pick and use. The actor must interact with these props once the audiences in one way or the other have seen them. Hand props include, Spoons, Plates, cups, combs, a little transistor radio a basket of fruits, phones etc.

Personal Props:

These are personal props handled by actors to complement their personality and indicate their status. The actors personal identifies with them and use them to make serious statement about their psychological make-up. Examples of personal props are, Handkerchief, Pen/Pencils, walking stick, money, juju Bible etc.

Costume props:

These are props that complements or completes actor's costume. They are usually worn alongside the costume to complete an actor's physical make-up. Examples of costume props are, Crown, jewelry, spectacles, masks, swords, fan, medals etc. These props must not be worn by actors who are seen with them, but can be carried in by actors for other actors already on stage to emphasis a point or make a theatrical statement.

Dressing or Trim Props:

These are decorative props like ornaments not particularly handled by anyone but placed on stage to enhance local, locate the time/ period a play is set. Examples include pictures, drawings, sculptures, hourglass and books hanging on the bookshelf etc.

Costume and Props in Educational Drama

From the foregoing, we have enumerated by way of definition and exposition what we can term costume in drama as opposed to what props (properties) are. But the generalisations above are typical for any form of theatrical and dramatic performance.

In terms of educational drama as viewed from the angle of functionality and purpose, costume and props may not be as effectively used to communicate meaning as much as can be achieved in mainstream theatre practice. This is because, with educational drama, incidences and actions are improvised and spontaneously related to themes and debate a particular session may have. In other words, the flexibility of preempting the particularity of costume or props to be used during the process of educational drama is slim but very possible since symbols; signs and

semiotic elements are key factors in knowledge acquisition and retention. Be that as it may, the positive side of the coin is that a school or organisation with experience in the arts of educational drama can pre-stock the classroom with vital costumes and props. This acquisition is to suit different curricular requirements for all forms of dramatic interaction in different activities. Costumes and props in the possession of schools can always come handy after a subject has been fruited into a focused theme, a goal or after an objective is established with defined characters in a dramatic presentation. Therefore, students/teachers “**not in role**” guided by “**Teacher in role**” can then be saddled with the responsibilities of sorting out relevant materials suitable for such dramatic experience. Materials that would normally fall into the different categories of costume and props listed above should during acquisition reflect the exact intention of different subject areas. This is to discourage waste of funds in the purchase of unnecessary work items for demonstration. For instance, if a social studies teacher intends to teach Oba Ovonramwen Nogbaisi and British invasion of Benin in 1897, or Queen Amina of Zauza and then decides to use the process of educational drama, he would have made pre- historical research into the costume and props used by the Benin people as at the time of the insurgence. He would also do a trans-cultural research on the appropriate kind of costume and props worn by the British colonialist at that time and try to acquire significant numbers of them ready for the class. For later, he will also carry out the same research in the Northern part of the country to ascertain historical and cultural relevance in props and costume selection. During the class session, the students would not just discuss in abstraction, but through the use of costume and props provided by their teacher, they would feel a part of the whole experience as if it was re-occurring again at that very time in history. The visual nature of costume and props would then enhance the believability of the event not just within the classroom, but beyond the discussion generated in the class to enhance the creation and internalisation of the characters brought to life both by them and the visual images created by their costume and props.

Costumes and Props as Visual Aids in Educational Drama

Generally speaking, the sense of sight has a more lasting effect in any experience. While a facilitator in an educational drama setting may rely more on the inner resources of the animator to interpret codes and meanings in the process of creating a dramatic work, costume and props become important signifiers in engaging the minds of the actors more vividly and readily for critical thinking. A costume or props signifier may trigger an endearing subject that can instigate series of questions and answers during role-play. Invariably, cognitive thinking is enhanced while actors are in-role, and an animator engages a property that embodies a specific subject matter to enhance an objective, creative and illuminating mental and critical thinking. A piece of costume can be pivotal in revealing a perspective or insight during role-play in the process of educational drama. While, costume is used to enhance the physiological presence of a character, it can also indicate the psychological stance of an actor when used correctly to illuminate a trait that differentiates one character from another. In other words every form of costume and props deployed for use in an educational drama setting must be able to elucidate the subject matter encased in the superior argument of the performance. To eradicate the issue of stereotypes in articulating various subject matters in educational drama process, consumes and props becomes a differentiating tool in distinguishing between variables and enhancing their topicality. As the process of educational theatre facilitate creative learning, problem solving and interpersonal relationship, properties especially hand props can help increase the confidence level of an animator in articulating issues during discussions and problem analysis sessions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that teachers in schools both primary and secondary should be trained in the art of educational drama first and foremost. As reechoed by John O'Toole, the skill will help them in "managing and shaping dramatic play, understanding the relationships of drama to all arts and play, and to learning (14). This will

imbue in them the skills of using drama as a tool in teaching across curriculum. Secondly, whether mainstream theatre practice, educational drama, children's theatre and all dramatic variants for students, children and adults, costume and props play symbiotic roles which is complementing each other or else the omission of an important costume or props can distort the image and meaning an actor is suppose to generate in a dramatic performance.

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