

The Drama Teacher and Co-operative Learning Methods

Simon Davey

I have been teaching drama in secondary and tertiary contexts for over thirty six years and have been a co-operative workshop leader/facilitator for the last four. I am interested in the way that the methodology that drives approaches in both areas of my work overlap and complement each other.

The layout of a typical drama classroom looks very much like that of co-operative workshops I have lead or have experienced. Participants sit on a group of chairs in a circle. The situation is democratic - no one has a position of pre-eminence and everybody's word is valued. Work comes out of sharing an experience. This does not mean the teacher has no control over the situation - rather he/she leads as a member of the group not as a pedagogue standing at the front of the class.

Often the drama group splits into smaller groups to explore an idea towards an improvisation, devised or scripted piece. These students are expected to work with a certain amount of independence, collaborate as members of small groups and come to collective decisions. The teacher often adopts a role, asking the group a range of questions that leads them to explore ideas, embark on a specialist study and take up the challenge to make group decisions. There is a safe environment from which to venture forward and students once more are expected to work both independently and in groups.

The above are all features of co-operative learning methods and are processes that I have recognised and/or enabled in co-operative workshops.

In the sixth form drama classroom I have adopted active co-operative learning methods such as Post-it Storms, Paper Carousels and Hot-air Balloon Planning (Shephard, 2002). I have used similar methods when running teacher training courses from *Running the Successful Drama Department to Managing Behaviour in the Performing Arts Space*.

I also recognise overlaps in the methods that I have used for many years, espoused by Dorothy Heathcote, the great drama educator. Using her *teacher in role* and *the mantle of the expert* (Heathcote, 1984), I appreciate the versatility that these methods and other drama methods have, as a means of exploring a wide range of topic and theme areas with groups of learners.

My recent experience as a co-operative workshop leader and facilitator has enhanced the range of methods I now use as a drama teacher. Identifying co-operative teaching methods and trying to separate them out from drama teaching methods seems a fruitless exercise to me. In many ways I believe that they are one and the same. Where they are different they complement each other and equip the teacher with a wider toolbox to draw from in providing a dynamic approach to group learning.

The Author

Simon Davey has been a teacher of drama for over thirty years, working in secondary and tertiary education. In 1991 he gained a MEd in Education and the Mass Media, which developed his teaching into the field of media studies at both GCSE and 'A' level. Simon left full-time teaching in 2007 and continues to develop and deliver learning programmes exploring themes through drama as a cross curricular learning medium. Simon became an associate of Co-operative Development and Learning Associates (CLADA) in 2009 and in this context co-ordinated the national Interact Co-operative Learning Conference in 2010.

References

- Heathcote, D (1984) *Collected Writings on Education and Drama*. L Johnson & C O'Neill (eds) UK: DP Media Limited
- Shephard, C (2002) *Participation - Spice It Up! Practical Tools for Engaging Children and Young People in Planning and Consultations*. Cardiff: Dynamix and Save the Children Fund