THEATRE IN EDUCATION PROJECT: AN APPROACH TO INSTRUCTIONAL INNOVATION

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ABSTRACT

The theater possesses dynamic space for education to exercise its power to direct human sensibilities and consciousness on the existing social realities, and political and cultural problems of a community, locality, or a nation. With highly integrative potentials and approaches of the CREYARD Theater in Education Project, the creative space that it affords for testing, exploration, and reiteration of life and of the world at large, accommodates variety of artistic medium and literary genres as long as they could facilitate underscore the cultural and moral values, and advance the religious positions, catechisms and apostolic visions of the learning and religious institutions. The critical problems are woven on the tapestry of events on stage, allowing the learner-spectators to see and drive their sensitivities towards the hidden and the unspoken areas of realities projected on the performance. Theater takes its role as an active and psychologically-stimulating instructional devices to further the interest of the learning institutions to introduce its moral positions and inculcate the educational values that they hope to promote with their students. This paper presents the instructional framework and models in the theater workshops of the Theater in Education Project produced by CREYARD Communication and Arts Center whose theatrical works deal with variety of subjects such as environmental preservation, social justice, apostolic spirit, service, and social responsibilities.

Field of research: Education, Theater Arts, instructional approaches, instructional model, performance, drama

1. INTRODUCTION

The theater processes involve dynamic and multifaceted instructional orientations. Adapting Joyce and Weil’s Families of Instructional Models (Joyce & Weil, 1996), the instructional methods, ranging from behavioral, social, information-processing, to personal and integrative orientations complement to the creative approach of the theater acting workshops. Each of these orientations consists of instructional models that serve as the binding principles of the theater approach.

Theater in Education Project initiated by CREYARD is composed of nonprofessional actors such as students, teachers, and office workers. The instructional approaches point toward relevant education and that is by leaving valuable learning experiences not just for the actors but for the audiences as well.
1. Behavioral Framework

Shambaugh and Magliaro (1997) exemplifies the behavioral instructional framework defined by Joyce and Weil (1996). Models in this family take broad range of application but share similar attributes: learners have the ability to change their behavior based on changes in the environment. Learners in the context of this paper are the actors themselves. “Models include direction, which includes interacts between students and teachers, such as modeling, reinforcement, feedback, and guided performance; simulations where behavior is changed based on ongoing reactions to a simplified version of a real-world situation; and contingency management, where behavior is influenced by the consequences that follow”. (Shambaugh and Magliaro, p. 153)

1.1 Direct Instruction

This model focuses on learners’ formation of body awareness, how their body be vehicle of meaning of the text, be the language, and perspective. The instructional approach under this model entails exploration of possibilities and elicitation of responses by activating learners’ schema on cited dramatic situations, emotions, and experiences. The objective is to bring the students to creative space for interpretations and analysis where they can tap their kinesthetic and verbal expressions. As the actors or learners engage among themselves, they establish their understanding on particular problems or issues by consolidating their ideas and introspection and validating them altogether at the end of the learning session to gauge its plausibility in a dramatic performance.

To reinforce the desired behavior for a dramatic performance, the teacher-director has fashioned a series of experiential devices before putting them to actual scenes. Since the theater project does not limit on its direction to skill development of the actors such as acting or theater performance, but primarily takes its focal point on the social problems that the performing group is expected to teach or deliver to the public. The direct method in the theater is the prerequisite of the entire theater experience of both actors and audience. The three examples of the myriad theater workshop activities are the prominent instructional events in the theater process.

a. Body and Sensory Awareness Exercise

The actors are directed to imagined world or reality tapping their imaginations while keeping their body at rest or in movement. This approach is allowing them to explore the human emotions and their possible reactions given the mental and visual stimulations. The mirror-games has also been the prominent device in this exercise where it develops the learners’ awareness of different body demeanor, physical attributes, and body attitude making others as the mirror of their own actions. The behavior of the learning participants is influenced by the presence of the others, experience or sensory-memory recall, and other form of stimulations.

Considering the dramatic elements or the posed narratives of certain issues, the acquired skills in the mentioned exercise are be applied in the process of understanding the dramatic texts. The interpretive skills encapsulate the whole acting skills. The process of re-enactment and of reiteration of realities depend largely on the abilities of the actors to paint the dramatic pictures on stage and reach the sensibilities of the audience towards the dramatic content.
b. **Tension is Fun: Theater Improvisation**

The immediacy of the theater improvisation exercise proves how critical thinking goes hand in hand with creative thinking. The spontaneous mounting of creative outputs demand their perceptual associations of the given subject and idea, and drive their abilities to put them in context for a dramatic performance. Such a time-bound activity, the spontaneous expressions can serve as exercises for them to activate their sensibilities towards the subject or idea, or the problem they wish to surface in their production. The teacher-director may use them in drawing out the narratives and shaping the aesthetics of the production. The sensibilities can be the manifestations of the actors or learners’ cultural values, orientations, and even experiences that can be potent resources for shaping the narratives and the aesthetic visions.

Exploratory group dynamics, and ensemble-building activity taken sometimes as games by structure, were designed to allow the learners-actors to explore and be oriented with different facets of social interaction. They were basically prompted to come up with an output that challenged their resourcefulness and creativity. Examples of which are tableaux, charades, pantomime and the like. The actors are trained to organize themselves in order to come up with unique body expressions and group compositions.

c. **Movement beyond boundaries**

The instructional process of the theater goes along with living-out the dramatic intentions that the text and the narrative requires. This involves defining the form from the structure-free expressions which the physical movement of the actors is the embodiment of their present disposition, memories and imaginations which are the immediate resources of the improvisation. Striving for the form, exhausting the creative resources prepares them to the interpretation of the given text – whether a poetry or dramatic narratives. The critical inquiries involving in the process consolidate different variables of interpretations. The body can be the text, the text can be the artistic vision. The artistic vision then directs the perspectives of the ensembles, thus the articulation among actors is encouraged and drives them to be even more critical about the issues or realities that may not be true to one but true to some. The articulation develops the sensitivity of the participants to the raised problem regarding the society or the humanity itself.

The three cited instructional models in turn, help the learner actors discover and develop their self-concept. In that, the self-awareness has been extensively exercised. With the articulations among the actors and the mounting of expressions help them examine their individual strengths and acknowledge their deficiencies or weaknesses and resolve themselves to transform perspectives to more affirming internal convictions. Empowering the self-concept of an actor is necessary for them to be more committed to their dramatic roles. Otherwise, they cannot deliver the heart or the core of the performance which is their illuminating presence as an actor.

2. **Social framework and collaborative learning**

Obviously, theater approach takes the social framework in the instruction. The social framework asserts the social interactions and inclusive of the relational transactions are
the values, self-esteem, social policy, and social development of learners. Hence, cooperative learning takes the primacy in the processes. (Johnson & Johnson, 1975; Slavin, 1983, Sharran, 1990). The theater process involves everyone of the performing ensemble in learning together the necessary theater skills, and gain wider understanding of the social problems that the production would like to deal with. Everyone therefore contributes to the products of creativity.

Since theater possesses the powerful role to communicate, the ensemble nevertheless, uses communication as a tool to negotiate intentions, and meanings of their expressions. The relationship established by dynamic interactions among actors has been developed through collaboration or cooperative groups. This instructional model shows that the teacher-director sets series of group activities to work on certain goals. She defines the artistic requirements, whether a performance or constructing stage properties. The collaborative process of the groups usually entails discussion, planning, consensus, and task assignments. They support among themselves, and share their resources and exchange feedback for others to improve their outputs and their skills. Exercising leadership is practiced among themselves and so is the value of subordination and cooperation. Subsequently, the coaching process of the director, on the other hand gives rise to competitions between or among groups.

This instructional approach facilitates them for scene studies where this time the social dynamics they practiced in the group will be applied in the dramatic scenes. Considering the stage blockings are influenced by relationship between characters, the student-actors drive their sensitivities on social distance between characters or between actors. The social model speaks of the nature of a theater – reliving the world of human in action and interaction.

The theater production now paints the social, political, and cultural realities that actors bring them to live and immediate experience to the public. They communicate the humanistic intentions to the audience and the latent may either see, evaluate, embrace, discount, accept, or deny, the propositions. The social problems are fleshed out through their keen sensitivities on the issues that are validated in the course of their performance. The imagined world on stage would appear significant when relationship between characters and dynamics are carefully illustrated and with that, the issues are seriously and justifiably examined and interpreted.

**a. Inductive learning in the Theater**

Delving human experiences or history according to time and space naturally opens room for the actors to discover the breadth of human struggles and aspirations. Along the process, they learn to be keen on the nuances of issues from the individual existence, man in relation to his society, and local society in relation to the world. Their understanding and gained knowledge refine their empathy with individuals of varying human conditions – the privileged, the marginalized, and the oppressed. If the theater projects deal with particular apostolic principles of a certain religious or educational institutions, the comprehensions, empathy, sensibility of the actors on the problems would be contextualized in the course of the performance. The actors would even get into the process of research to have a thorough investigation of the matter associated to the subjects, intentions, or directions of the project. With this investigation, the actors share their inmost thoughts and reflections based on the gathered information, then, the
entire process has brought them to evaluation – and that includes the evaluation of the text, narratives, and the creative interpretations of the performance. From the personal perspectives to the investigation of the social realities, learning takes place beyond physical and concrete demonstration. The motivation to engage in the process goes in intrinsic form that the actors as individuals would commit to something bigger than himself - that the entire performance he is involved in, may deliver a call for participation, for transformation, and for individual development, thus requiring his sincerity to the project.

3. Metacognition

Adapting Joyce and Weil's Model of Teaching (1996), Shambaugh and Magliaro (1997) reducing bare bones of metacognition into “thinking about one's own thinking and making decisions about one's learning”. Metacognition is an instructional strategy to win students’ involvement in the process of learning. In here, students are taught to handle how to process information. They are challenged to do critical inquiry and to probe their existing knowledge on things and situations, and develop concept understandings (Taba, 1971).

In the theater, the actors are always challenged to be essentially critical to the topic, subjects, ideas underlying the text and narratives. In the same manner, their understanding of the matters, their thoughts, their ideas are always challenged in the performing events particularly in the theater improvisations, group dynamics, body and sensory awareness exercise. They are usually engaged to the process of thinking and rethinking their own thinking about the matter and this proves necessary in the development of their acting performance especially if they are aiming for establishing truth and believability.

The learner-actors negotiated the language with careful validations of truth, and of information that strongly influence their responses. Language outputs may appear contrived on one hand. However, the manner by which the learners engaged in communicative tasks showed realistic attempts of approaching communication. The exchanges of lines and responses involved thinking, mutual respect and trust encouraged spontaneity.

4. Synectics: Problems

Synectics is a problem solving strategy that brings out creative solutions to problems. Synectics taps the creative sum of a group to arrive at metaphorical solutions to tough problems. This strategy uses the power of analogies and the emotional qualities of groups to creative examine a problem (Shambaugh and Magliaro, 1997, p.165)

The theater performance is also shaped based on how the actors engage to the creative directions of the teacher-director. The instructional process usually begins in the problem solving activities which constitutes the improvisation, creative ensemble exercises, and theater games. The engagement of the actors on these activities influenced largely the creation of the performance. Combining their critical and creative thinking process, the actors work on representations of the dramatic ideas – translating thoughts to objects, and objects used as analogies to particular perspectives. In the same manner, the theater uses representations to establish certain register of propositions, conjectures, and introspection to the audiences.
3. THEATER IN EDUCATION PROJECT: FORM AND ELEMENTS

The experimental performances have appealed to mass audiences considering that the accessibility of the language and that the context of the materials could easily be understood because the scenes show the realistic portrayal of everyday life. Every dramatic act is potpourri of body movements, dramatic monologues, percussive sounds, graphics and animation.

**MOVEMENT.** Actors exhaust their body for rigorous expressions. They have undergone series of workshops and experiments in exploring their body as vehicles of meaning. They state the aesthetics of their performance by redefining the modern expressions – combining the indigenous or organic expressions and the popular dance form – jazz, hiphop, ballet. The students could differentiate how the rudiments of dance become defiant to the popular dance culture. The “pangalay”, a southern dance form, is the predominating influence in the lyrical dance.

**LANGUAGE.** Showing the facets of different human affairs, the scenes furnished with series of dramatic monologues, ensemble, and musical numbers. Dialogues between characters paint interesting pictures of everyday situations that may appear trivial at sometime but could be subject to personal and spiritual reflection.

**VIDEOWALL.** Graphics and animation reeling on the wall would serve as the tool for extensive demonstration of the topic so that audience could readily see the context of the illustrated scenes – bringing the smaller scale to large scales of both human and world affairs. The graphic tools could expand the perceptual associations of the audience about the subject of the particular scene.

**INDIGENOUS BEAT.** The music and sound scoring is performed live. The percussions (dabakan), strings and winds are all indigenous instruments (of the South) that the actors are at the same time players they could see how the raw and organic (ethnic)
instruments became a strong devise to deliver the narratives brought in the dramatic scenes. The musical numbers take in forms of ballad, acoustics, indigenous chants, and ethnic rhythm.

4. CONCLUSION

The theater in education project creates rich relevant and pragmatic opportunities for learning. Learning which goes beyond theories from the book but allowing learning-participants to relive, and rethink realities that develop valuable introspections and insights on human life, society and the world. Theater Arts and Education can be great partners in providing vehicles for promoting social reforms, advocacy, and other humanistic endeavors. The immediacy of theatrical performance, aside from its intention to entertain, it broadens their understanding and appreciations of human vicarious experiences. It also opens space to empower cultural values and identity through theatrical elements such as indigenous beat and music, dance, costumes, and visuals on walls that call for strong register of impressions. The instructional strategies of the theater approach justify the emergent potentials of the expressive arts in promoting effective education.

5. An Example of Theater Initiative: Theater for Catechism

In endorsing our project to gain audiences from various institutions, the following is an example of promotional statements of the projects. The objectives are laid down, so are the rationale and educational value. Theater for Catechism deals with the Christian Catholic teachings.
Theater for Catechism: Staging the 7 Capital Sins

Objectives:
1. To bring catechism to the public through a theatrical performance
2. To interpret and illustrate how human tendencies are operating in our lives and affect our world today
3. To promote evangelization and spiritual recollection through theatrical entertainment

PROJECT RATIONALE

The fuming traffic of globalization where the world is enslaved by materialism constricts the people and rips off their spirituality. The production illustrates how such reality generates a spectrum of desolation and malady that deaden the conscience of man. The interests of this project in seven capital sins actually spring from the intentions of presenting problems on the existence of realities of heaven, purgatory, and hell. This project aims to re-examine the human tendencies of sinning, or of committing these seven capital sins by presenting the illustrations how tremendously they affect the lives of others and of the world - situating the meaning of freedom and responsibility in the context of faith and man’s relationship with God.

Every dramatic act features the complexity of human action and motives that bring the known societal issues to the fore particularly those that involve corruption, deception, lies and extortion; so to domestic issues faced by dysfunctional family like violence, abuse and promiscuity. Sins at personal level may seem so small to think about however they give rise to more complicated ordeals that block man to live in holiness, or to respond to the call of conversion.

Catholic teachings, we contend, should not merely rest on the pulpit of the church, and so to the apostolic work such as bringing man to God, or bringing them the light is not only the sole responsibility of religious people but of every Christian. Words of God like seeds may grow in different grounds, but it is the working of man to cultivate the ground not only for him but for others too, so that the fertility of divine grace will grow in every heart.

CREYARD wants to take its humble share in bringing catechism to the public through the form of entertainment and creative approach of education. Making theatre as the vehicle, we exhaust different visual and intellectual stimulations to encourage spiritual reflections on the subjects: seven capital sins. The philosophical foregrounding of the literary text is based on the book, Seven Obstacles to Life and Love, authored by the late Jesuit priest (archbishop) Gerard Weber.

CLASSROOM IN THE THEATER: EXPERIMENTING SINS IN SEVEN ACTS

The theatre for catechism project deals with muted, yet salient teachings of the Catholic Church and these teachings are accommodated in an elevated and fanciful plane of interpretations. Furthermore, the production also hopes to succeed in delivering the propositions on the realities of purgatory, hell, and heaven so that the audience or the Catholics in particular would understand that
the dogmas of the church regarding “life after death” or “the age to come” should have never been claimed as mere representations but should be taken as real that exist both in material and spiritual realm.

Using the accounts from the written and church-recognized materials from the saints, St. Theresa of Avila, St. Catherine of Genoa, St. Faustina, St. Frances de Sales, St. Pio, etc., the performance is directed to paint a picture of souls suffering for being both “purged” and “damned”. So, it therefore hopes to leave to the audience the concept of sanctity, mortification, reparation, and justification on why the church has been very emphatic on the call for conversion. The production also aims to underscore the immensity of God’s mercy, the paradoxical context of love and suffering, and Christ’s gift of redemption to man.

EDUCATIONAL VALUE

Here are some examples of how the theatre experience could be integrated in the classroom instruction.

**Literature Classes** – The play could offer wide and varied discussions on the dramatic elements, and dramatic forms of the performance. It also brings up discussions on symbolism, how colors become an effective device in understanding the predominating moods and emotional texture of the scenes. Students may articulate the paradoxical elements employ in the scenes like the dialogues and the text and graphics reeled on screen. They may cite how the themes of each dramatic act treated in terms of sets, lighting design, and portrayal of characters.

**Social Science** – The scenes or moral degradation spelled as corruption, deception, lies and extortion may encourage students to re-examine the values they personally practice in school or at home. They may be encouraged to be more aware and responsive to the pressing issues confronted by the Philippine society, and how economic conditions that bring up equity, inequality, exploitations, consumerism, commercialism, and the like.

**Religion** – The biblical references of the performance offers wide introspection on man and his relationship with God. The seven capital sins are approached in various levels that allow the students to examine the meaning of temptations, human weaknesses, reparation and mortification. The prologue scene, where the beatific visions of St. Frances of Rome on the suffering souls in purgatory are interpreted, could hold them to investigate the reality of life after death: purgatory, heaven, and hell. The serpent temptation with the first woman, Eva, explains that PRIDE is the start of all things, the father of all sins. Citing the ten commandment on particular scene (on sins), could make sense on the propositions of charitable virtues that Christian or Catholics are expected to live by.
REFERENCES


