Why use creative drama in an elementary school classroom?

“Of all the arts, drama involves the participant the most fully: intellectually, emotionally, physically, verbally, and socially. As players, children assume the roles of others, and they learn about becoming more sensitive to the problems and values of persons different from themselves. At the same time, they are learning to work cooperatively, for drama is a communal art; each person is necessary to the whole.”

Creative Drama in the Classroom and Beyond
Nellie McCaslin

Creative drama offers an opportunity for children to:

- Expand self-awareness
- Develop imagination
- Think independently
- Work cooperatively
- Improve communication skills
- Express a healthy release of emotions
- Build social awareness

In essence, creative drama is dramatic activities which have the experience of the participants as the goal. This differs from theatre classes in which preparation for a performance is the objective. Creative drama is usually reserved for children four to nine years old - ages or stages of development when participants can benefit from dramatic experience if there is no pressure to perform. Creative drama can include dramatic play, story enactment, imagination journeys, theatre games, music, and dance. "Let's pretend" is the norm in creative drama class, not just a child's game. Because the emphasis in creative drama is process rather than product, teachers have the freedom to take as much time as needed with their classes. When a student in a creative drama class prefers to watch instead of participate, because of shyness or fear, a teacher can allow it. The teacher can become a participant and let the children lead the activities rather than being guided through them. Creative drama can help children learn about emotions, problem solving, and relating to other people. Through their experiences with drama, students develop their imaginations and their confidence. One of the most special things about creative drama is that there are no "wrong" answers - through pretending, animals can talk, kids can travel to outer space or the jungle, and the sky can be green while the grass is blue.
“The brain is innately social and collaborative. Although the processing takes place in our students’ independent brains, their learning is enhanced when the environment provides them with the opportunity to discuss their thinking out loud, to bounce their ideas off their peers, and to produce collaborative work.”

“What Do We Know from Brain Research?”
by Pat Wolfe and Ron Brandt
Nov. 1998 Educational Leadership - How the Brain Works

Differentiated Instruction
Identifying Components/Features

Several key elements guide differentiation in the education environment. Tomlinson (2001) identifies three elements of the curriculum that can be differentiated: **Content**, **Process**, and **Products**. Additionally, several guidelines are noted to help educators form an understanding and develop ideas around differentiating instruction.

**Content**
Several elements and materials are used to support instructional content. These include acts, concepts, generalizations or principles, attitudes, and skills. The variation seen in a differentiated classroom is most frequently the manner in which students gain access to important learning. **Align tasks and objectives to learning goals.** Designers of differentiated instruction determine as essential the alignment of tasks with instructional goals and objectives. Goals are most frequently assessed by many high-stakes tests at the state level and frequently administered standardized measures. Objectives are frequently written in incremental steps resulting in a continuum of skills-building tasks. An objectives-driven menu makes it easier to find the next instructional step for learners entering at varying levels. **Instruction is concept-focused and principle-driven.** The instructional concepts should be broad based and not focused on minute details or unlimited facts. Teachers must focus on the concepts, principles and skills that students should learn. The content of instruction should address the same concepts with all students but be adjusted by degree of complexity for the diversity of learners in the classroom.

**Process**
Flexible grouping is consistently used. Strategies for flexible grouping are essential. Learners are expected to interact and work together as they develop knowledge of new content. Teachers may conduct whole-class introductory discussions of content big ideas followed by small group or pair work. Student groups may be coached from within or by the teacher to complete assigned tasks. Grouping of students is not fixed. Based on the content, project, and on-going evaluations, grouping and regrouping must be a dynamic process as one of the foundations of differentiated instruction. **Classroom management benefits students and teachers.** Teachers must consider organization and instructional delivery strategies to effectively operate a classroom using differentiated instruction. Carol Tomlinson (2001) identifies 17 key strategies for teachers to successfully meet the challenge of designing and managing differentiated instruction in her text *How to Differentiate Instruction in Mixed-Ability Classrooms.*
**Products**

*Initial and on-going assessment of student readiness and growth are essential.* Meaningful pre-assessment naturally leads to functional and successful differentiation. Assessments may be formal or informal, including interviews, surveys, performance assessments, and more formal evaluation procedures. Incorporating pre and on-going assessment informs teachers to better provide a menu of approaches, choices, and scaffolds for the varying needs, interests and abilities that exist in classrooms of diverse students.

*Students are active and responsible explorers.* Teacher’s respect that each task put before the learner will be interesting, engaging, and accessible to essential understanding and skills. Each child should feel challenged most of the time.

*Vary expectations and requirements for student responses.* Items to which students respond may be differentiated for students to demonstrate or express their knowledge and understanding. A well-designed student product allows varied means of expression, alternative procedures, and provides varying degrees of difficulty, types of evaluation, and scoring.

—From *Differentiated Instruction*

by Tracey Hall, Ph.D., Senior Research Scientist, NCAC

Using drama and theatre as a way to support learning in the classroom incorporates multiple intelligences in a number of ways:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drama/Theatre</th>
<th>Intelligence Addressed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improvisation, Script reading, Playwriting, Performing</td>
<td>Linguistic intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvisation, Performing, Character development, Scene development</td>
<td>Logical (reasoning) intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvisation, Directing, Props, Costumes, Sets, Performing</td>
<td>Spatial intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvisation, Movement and Pantomime, Performing</td>
<td>Bodily-Kinesthetic intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvisation, Character development, Drama games, Playwriting, Performing</td>
<td>Interpersonal intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvisation, Monologues, Character development, Performing</td>
<td>Intrapersonal intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvisation, Character development (other than human), Performing</td>
<td>Naturalist intelligence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Creative drama provides a progression from what children naturally do to a more structured framework for learning. As we grow older and suppress our instinct to “play”, we become more inhibited and less likely to connect spontaneously with others. Creative drama can “bring us back” to being naturally engaged with others.

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**Drama Continuum**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dramatic Play of Children</th>
<th>Creative Drama</th>
<th>Formal Theatre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is spontaneous, improvised and controlled by participants.</td>
<td>Is organized by a leader, with spontaneity encouraged, improvisational.</td>
<td>Is rehearsed and scripted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is no audience.</td>
<td>The audience is classmates or invited family or friends, NOT a formalized production.</td>
<td>Is for a paying audience and is performed on a stage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The form is constantly changing.</td>
<td>The form is structured by the leader.</td>
<td>The form is set by the script and the director.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is done by choice and for the participants.</td>
<td>The goals are educational and developmental. Growth is primarily for the participants.</td>
<td>Is for the satisfaction of the pleasure of the audience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from the *Wrinkle Writing Teacher Handbook*

Susan M. Pearson, UNM Children’s Theatre Professor
Building Confidence and Community
Steps to a Strong Foundation With Performers

Building Confidence within the Individual

1) Individual but parallel work—everyone doing the same thing at the same time. No audience.

2) Partners but parallel work—partners working together at the same time. No audience.

3) Groups but parallel work—groups working together at the same time. No audience.

Building Community within the Group

4) Groups performing for an audience—audience is the other groups.

5) Partners performing for an audience—audience is the other partners.

6) Individual performing for an audience—audience is the other individuals.

Created by Erin K. Hulse, APS ARTS Center/Fine Arts Department
Adapted from Paul Ford, UNM Department of Theatre and Dance