

Learning Through Drama

A REVIEW OF *EXPLORING CURRICULUM: PERFORMATIVE INQUIRY, ROLE DRAMA, AND LEARNING*

BY LYN FELS AND GEORGE BELIVEAU. PACIFIC EDUCATION PRESS, 2008. ISBN 978-1-895766-84-4

In their new book, *Exploring Curriculum: Performative Inquiry, Role Drama, and Learning*, Lyn Fels and George Beliveau have coined a new phrase – performative inquiry – that they use as an umbrella term for a variety of drama processes including role drama, forum theatre, playwriting, improvisation, process drama and a range of other performance and visual arts activities practiced by theatre and drama educators. It is a term that works on many levels and is connected to action sites of learning where children and adults discover new understandings, new recognitions and new possibilities through their interaction in drama.

The authors cleverly engage us in thinking about performative inquiry through a lively conversation in which they support, challenge, question and celebrate each other's ideas and their individual drama work with students. This informal dialogue allows them to play with their new concept and think through the resistance that some teachers have to this kind of active, engaging work in the classroom. They answer the questions that many teachers ask: Why do drama? How can I find the time for it given the curricular demands that are already upon me? How can I seamlessly connect drama to the curriculum and thread it carefully in and out of content that needs to be taught? And finally, how should I consider evaluating the learning that happens in and through drama?

Exploring Curriculum: Performative Inquiry, Role Drama, and Learning is both a theoretical and a practical book that will help both the novice teacher who is interested in implementing drama into the curriculum and the experienced drama practitioner who is always on the look-out for excellent drama ideas. Its thoughtful arguments will help all of us to advocate for the use of drama in the curriculum.

The authors have certainly done their work, giving us a theoretical framework for using drama in the classroom and then presenting six thought-provoking role dramas for us to read about and perhaps use. They are intent upon engaging students in thoughtful encounters that are neither combative nor threatening, but allow them to negotiate with each other, perform roles that give them new perspectives, highlight new understandings, and engage in reflection that encourages them to think about and articulate how they can begin to live in the world in new ways. The six lessons are very detailed and give teachers a sense of what drama is as well as careful instructions about how to scaffold the activities so that learning occurs. They use many different examples to illustrate how to deepen and extend learning. The strategies they use will not be new to drama practitioners, but they will be a welcome addition to teachers' repertoires if they are new to the field.

What I particularly liked about the book was the 'Turning Point' section at the end of every lesson in which the authors reflect in a conversation about what worked in the drama and then underline the deepening effect that happened or could have happened. The conversation is lively and humorous and helps the reader understand the theory and ideas in an informal way. At the end of the book there are two-page outlines for each lesson and helpful handouts that can be reproduced if the reader wants to do drama. Other appendices include how to engage your students in role drama, a drama playlist that defines the different strategies discussed in the book, and a variety of forms and overheads.

A chapter on assessment helps teachers who are worried about how to evaluate drama. The authors explain that evaluation is "not about marks and rating students against each other." Rather it is a "stopping place in our journey together." They state that we should think about evaluation as "a valuable component in the pedagogical relationships we are building with our students, as a support for students as they work towards their own goals."

The authors care deeply about collegial collaboration with each other and with their students and have indeed demonstrated that two heads are very often better than one. Their professional dialogue has created a very helpful book for teachers who want to learn how to introduce interesting and compelling work in performative inquiry into their classrooms. |

KATHLEEN GOULD LUNDY is Co-ordinator of **Destination Arts at York University**, a joint venture of the Faculty of Education and Faculty of Fine Arts that undertakes to foster partnerships amongst artists, educators and the community. She also teaches a fourth-year undergraduate course in drama in education in the Department of Theatre at York. Previously she was District-wide Co-ordinator of Dramatic Arts and Dance in the Toronto District School Board.

