

Jonathan Neelands. *Beginning Drama 11 - 14*. London: David Fulton. (2nd Edition.) 2004. pp. xiv + 114.

This book informs the teachers who intend to conduct drama lessons on many related issues. The teachers are introduced to the polarity between the literary and private aesthetic tradition and the oral and communal tradition of performance in the *Preface* (p. xii-xiii). The latter is a useful concept of performance that allows the students to understand the making and knowing of drama that transcends beyond stagecraft and provides an opening of communal interaction for audience by means of becoming co-participants.

Issues pertaining to the objectives of a drama curriculum, the planning of drama lessons, the assessment of drama lessons, and the challenges of logistics and interactions, as well as certain policy constraints regarding a drama curriculum are discussed. The crafting of a pedagogical contract between the teacher and the students for drama lessons, for example, is carefully enlisted in the book to ensure the quality of learning is attained from the drama curriculum. The effort provides a balance between playfulness and mindfulness as the pedagogic contract *will guide the selection of specific teaching approaches...and identify the appropriate teaching and learning strategies for the objectives in the curriculum plan* (p. 16).

Drama is regarded as an approach to encourage the practice of good citizenry, as the pupils often take on citizen roles and act collectively to solve problems and conflicts (p. 40). This is an added advantage that is not often accentuated in the curriculum objectives for drama. Such benefit will definitely arrest the worry of policy makers, who are yet to recognise drama as a useful learning mechanism.

An important philosophical issue is mentioned in this book. Based on the oral and communal aesthetic tradition in drama, the quality of social experience is the emphasis, and the willingness to take part, regardless of individual ability, should be the given priority in the lesson, rather than individual showmanship (p. 25). This is particularly relevant for a class

with unequal interest for dramatisation. The effort of introverted pupils in attempting to perform in the communal ensemble is a sign that confidence is being attained.

There is plenty of information for teachers to better equip themselves for drama lessons. Knowing the class profile in terms of the social role of each pupil, for example, is definitely critical to ensure the formation of a dynamic drama group. Various social roles of the students are carefully identified, with their positive and negative behaviours, for the teachers to organise the cohort. The roles that may be found among the pupils include leaders, followers, jokers, helpers, doers, negative spectators, sister and brothers, and loners (p. 45-47).

The term *laboratory theatre* is introduced to refer to extensive exploratory rehearsal, used to research, test, and develop the understanding of human nature and culture (p. 52). The selection of W-questions (what, who, where, when, why) are useful to assist in clarifying, inferring, probing, challenging, and checking the reality during drama rehearsal (p. 53). In the process of securing classroom support for drama lessons, teachers are regarded as contract makers. The ultimate challenge for the teachers is to persist in creating a learning community that regulate their behaviour for the constructive learning climate to crystallise (p. 56).

The information on drama planning is comprehensive for practising drama teachers as well as amateur, a term that refers to teachers who use drama optionally in an existing curriculum, or practise drama as co-curricular activities (p. 43). The explanation of many terms referring to various drama conventions at the end of the book is very useful. The dramatic terms include *alter-ego*, *choral speak*, *circular drama*, *collective character conscience alley*, *forum theatre*, *mantle of the expert*, among others (p. 100-105).

While the reference list is quite comprehensive, citing pioneering works of drama and theatre makers such as Artaud, Boal, Brook, Grotowski and many more (p. 106-110), perhaps systemic grammar propounded by Michael Halliday should be mentioned, as the concepts of

discourse, tenor, and mode are invoked in the book (p. 32). Nonetheless, the discussions offered in the book are helpful to clarify issues that otherwise might remain as blind spots to teachers who are new to dramatics.

In short, this is a book that drama teachers would find relevant in enhancing their duties. The resources assembled in the book are practical and beneficial. With this book, teachers may be more discerning in drama lessons that are communal, fun yet striking a good balance of efficacy of mindfulness in learning. The book makes an important introduction to amateurs who intend to secure and deepen their grasps of dramatics; and better organise the pupils in the class for drama lessons.

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