

Launching into Drama as a Pedagogy of Hope

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Abstract

The presentation draws on Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of hope* (1992) and his belief that we need hope in the way "a fish needs water". In this book Freire charges us with the task to "unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles may be". Living through the first part of the 21st century has included us in many experiences that we may consider challenges to hopefulness. Madonna proposes drama as a pedagogy of hope and suggests our role, today and tomorrow, is to work in drama alongside our students to imagine, to hope, to empathise, and attempt to understand ourselves and others.

Keywords: Hope, pedagogy, Freire, drama education, future, imagine

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Presenting a Keynote

Thank you for inviting me to present this keynote today. I can't tell you how honoured I am to be asked to contribute a keynote to my own community, to people who know me well, and with whom I have worked, celebrated and struggled to make sense of what we do, and why we do it.

So on to the speech. One of the challenges of taking on the task of presenting a keynote is that such a task is full of contradictions –

- on one hand I am confident that I have something to say;
- on the other I am nervous that I am speaking to my own “mob” and have to live with you afterwards;
- I stand here a little bit smug that you are forced to indulge me and listen to whatever I want to get off my chest;
- trying not to show that I am terrified that you will think I am a fraud and perhaps don't know what I am talking about.

I always have particular expectations of a keynote address. It should elevate the discussion of the conference in some ways, or at least generate some discussions. What *I* want from a keynote is something that stirs me, which makes me angry or excited, or passionate, or challenged, or nurtured and reinforced that I am on the right track.

So..... no pressure..... and here we go.

Remaining Hope-ful in Chaotic Times

In March of 1973, E. B. White, who you may know as the author of *Stuart Little* and *Charlotte's Web*, received a letter from a Mr. Nadeau, who was concerned about what he considered an inevitably bleak future for humankind. White responded with this letter:

Dear Mr. Nadeau:

As long as there is one upright man, as long as there is one compassionate woman, the contagion may spread and the scene is not desolate. Hope is the thing that is left to us, in a bad time. I shall get up Sunday morning and wind the clock, as a contribution to order and steadfastness.

Sailors have an expression about the weather: they say, the weather is a great bluffer. I guess the same is true of our human society – things can look dark, then a break shows in the clouds, and all is changed, sometimes rather suddenly. It is quite obvious that the human race has made a queer mess of life on this planet. But as a people we probably harbor seeds of goodness that have lain for a long time waiting to sprout when the conditions are right. Man's curiosity, his relentlessness, his inventiveness, his ingenuity have led him into deep trouble. We can only hope that these same traits will enable him to claw his way out.

Hang on to your hat. Hang on to your hope. And wind the clock, for tomorrow is another day.

Sincerely,
(Signed, "E. B. White")

Chaotic Times

It is possible that many of us might agree with E. B. White that, "man has made a mess of the planet". Certainly we live in chaotic times where change seems to be the only constant. Our everyday lives rub up against complexity, chaos and change and we see daily evidence of the contradictions in the world we inhabit: the environment is out of kilter with reports of floods and droughts more frequent; in an age of great prosperity there are millions living (and dying) in dire poverty; in a knowledge society we seem to display

a good deal of knowledge but often little understanding. Our daily lives are made up of clusters of contradictions.

These contradictions and the rapid rate of change have led to Ziauddin Sadr's claim that we are now living in "post-normal" times. By this he means that we have moved beyond any certainties of normality and that old orthodoxies are vanishing. In such times we cannot expect the future, or in fact the present, to adhere to our expectations, or to what is familiar. A post-normal society is one where the familiar certainties have disappeared: the world of the present and the future is one of environmental upheaval, of economic uncertainty and of multi-layered, diverse and hybrid societies. Sadr states, "much of what we have taken as normal, conventional, and orthodox just does not work any more" (Sadr, 2010). The previous "scripts" by which we think we can live our lives are disrupted and changed in new times and, thus, we must move beyond those familiar scripts to create new ones. We, drama educators, can find a good deal of food for thought in Sadr's propositions.

The human capacity to innovate and create new ways of thinking, being and doing may also be under threat. According to American academic Kyung Hee Kim's (2011), recently published research there is a "crisis in creativity". Kim analysed results from over 272,000 Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking, from 1966 to the present. Her analysis of this very large data set leads her to the conclusion that "we are becoming less verbally or emotionally expressive or sensitive and less empathetic, less responsive in kinaesthetic and auditory ways, less humorous, less imaginative, less able to visualise ideas, less able to see things from different angles, less unconventional, less able to connect seemingly irrelevant things together, less able to synthesize information and less able to fantasize or be future oriented" (Kyung Hee Kim, 2012). That is quite a list and it is hard to remain hopeful when confronted by claims like that! Especially when, as Helen Cahill (2010) pointed out in her article about drama for hope in *NJ* 33, there has been a decline in optimism about the future, by 50%, between Australian young people surveyed in 1995 and 2005. That means, compared with those interviewed in 1995, only half of the young

people surveyed at the end of that ten-year period were hopeful that the future would be better.

Freire and Critical Hope

So let's get back to Freire and his notion of "critical hope". Freire says, I am hopeful, not out of mere stubbornness, but out of an existential, concrete imperative. I do not mean that, because I am hopeful, I attribute to this hope of mine the power to transform reality all by itself, so that I set out for the fray without taking account of concrete, material data, declaring, "My hope is enough!" No, my hope is necessary, but it is not enough. Alone, it does not win. But without it, my struggle will be weak and wobbly. We need critical hope the way a fish needs unpolluted water. (Freire, 1992, p. 2)

When Freire uses the term critical hope, he means an optimism and a sense that the future can be made; that the present can be changed by action, by human action. He considers it necessary to harness humankind's curiosity, relentlessness, inventiveness, and ingenuity. Freire contends that it is by harnessing these human qualities that the future can be improved, and part of the process of engaging in critical hope is the imperative to participate deeply and richly in the *present*, in "unravelling the fabric in which the facts are given, discovering their 'why'" (Freire, 1992, p. 22). It is through processes by which we unravel the fabric of circumstances, of power, of relationships, of authority and control and thus recognise the complex interplay of cause and effect that we develop a critical understanding of the present; and this critical understanding allows us glimpses of possibility for change, for hope, for the belief that things can be different, other than those contexts and circumstances we are living through at this moment.

Why Drama Can Be a Pedagogy of Hope

Working in drama and accepting the premise of drama presupposes an

act of imagination that, by the very nature of that imaginative turn, allows us to work within the realm of possibilities. Drama embraces “as if” worlds, where we agree to think, act and react as if we, and our surroundings, are different to the lived and experienced realities we inhabit. Always based in the human context, drama allows us to explore identity and agency as we investigate how roles and relationships interplay. These roles and relationships can be between a single self and multiple other selves, between self and others, and between ourselves and the environment. We recognise that perspectives shift, change and alter as the roles, relationships and meanings are differently framed by closeness or distance to the dramatic action. As Freire suggests we should do, much of our work involves exploring in and through those roles and relationships, issues of power and control. Thus we offer to our students and ourselves the opportunity to work in role with agency and, when we take on the mantle of the expert, with expertise.

Maxine Greene reminds us of the significance of working with imagination:

Without imagination – the ability to enter alternative realities, to bring an “as if” into being, to look at things as if they could be otherwise – we would be sentenced to perpetual literalness, to be confined in “square rooms”. (Greene, 1999, p. 2)

What a terrible thought: to be condemned to “perpetual literalness”; consider for a moment the consequences of only experiencing square rooms. Instead, Greene proposes that working as teachers and artists can involve a process of “futuring” (Greene, 1977, p. 287) involving critical consciousness, attentiveness and, quoting Merleau-Ponty, “the will to seize the meaning of the world”. Of course, considering and working with possibilities involves risk and challenge, and a prominent challenge for us, as drama teachers, is to find the pedagogical stance that will hold our students safe as we work with ideas and situations that may challenge some of their most deeply held beliefs. Our challenge, is to find the balance between making it too hard, and too easy.

Avoid the Magic of Making It Easy

Some years ago a colleague shared a story with me that made me rethink the way that I planned and worked. An ex-student who had finished school some years earlier had visited my colleague. The young woman had been a dedicated and passionate drama student, who was sure that drama could change the world. She came back to school to see her drama teacher and tell her off, to scold her for making it seem too easy: “You made us believe we could change things, but we can’t – it is much harder in the real world than it was in class”. That story was a moment of discovery for me, too, as I realised that I very often made the answers easy, the solutions much more simple and uncomplicated than my students deserved.

Some years ago, in *Dramawise* (Haseman & O’Toole, 1987) John O’Toole and Brad Haseman told us that we should avoid easy solutions when teaching tension. Remember Tension of the Task and the adjuration to:

- Make the task hard;
- Make the task important.

So we learned to put constraints around tasks – constraints of time, of conflicting purposes, of complexity, of effort. When I heard how that young woman felt so angry, betrayed and let down by her drama teacher, it made me rethink how often in process drama, in forum theatre, in text interpretation and in the devising process, I worked too hard at scaffolding the learning for my students and, thus, made things too easy. I became a facilitator (my least favourite term for what I hope to do as a drama educator). In fact our task as drama teachers is to make the work hard, make it important, and make it meaningful. I don’t mean that we make learning impossible, but that we engender learning where risk and failure are seen as positives and important components of the learning process, rather than things to be avoided.

Drama and Pedagogy

So, how do we manage this as drama pedagogues? One of the

interesting things about being a drama teacher is that we often align most comfortably with a particular way of working e.g. process drama, or forum theatre, or Spolin or Johnstone's improvisation and game-based approach, or text-to-performance, or devising works, and so on. Less often do we articulate what we do and why we do it. This is one of the roles of the public intellectual (Giroux, 2006) and largely absent from discussion amongst drama educators. If we are to be advocates for our work and the power of drama to transform, then we have some work to do in terms of articulating what, how and why we choose to work in this field. We need first to understand how and why we work in the ways that we do, and we owe it to our students and to the community more broadly, to be able to articulate and communicate so that we build a shared understanding of our field of endeavour.

I know I am jumping around from point to point today but there is little time and so much to say. A couple of thoughts now on pedagogical stance.

Some of you will remember the wonderful keynote given a few years ago by Erica McWilliam, who you may not know, started her career as a drama teacher. McWilliam has proposed three pedagogical stances that will be familiar to all drama teacher (McWilliam, 2008):

1. the "sage on the stage" (as I am doing now) where the "expert" speaker shares knowledge, usually in an oral presentation, and is relatively distant from the learner;
2. the "guide on the side" where the pedagogue walks alongside the students and acts as a coach or director of learning;
3. and the meddler in the middle where the teacher participates in the learning with their students, helping them to ask questions, and complicating the task when things seem too easy.

I am sure you can guess which one I favour. Indeed there is a role, a time and a purpose for each of these pedagogical stances but the most productive and fruitful stance for drama education, to my mind, is the meddler in the middle allowing, as it does opportunities to mess things up, to complicate issues and ideas, and to challenge the easy solutions that fit nicely into a 40-

minute lesson.

What We Would Expect to See in a Pedagogy of Hope Drama Classroom

In conclusion I would like to share a list of attributes, that I suggest we would expect to see evident in a classroom where the teacher engaged with a pedagogy of hope. Work in such a drama classroom would be characterised by (in no particular order):

- work that is slow, thoughtful, and mindful; allowing time for deep and thorough exploration;
- experimentation with differing and alternate points of view;
- work that affords exploration of critical perspectives, perspectives which “unravel the fabric” of the moment to consider interplays of power, authority and control;
- active, embodied learning which allows students to “feel thinkingly and think feelingly” (Bundy, 2003, p. 171);
- success and enjoyment together with a sense of accomplishment because the work has been “hard” and worthwhile;
- work that matters and is connected to the lives of the students;
- presentness and wide-awakeness to the moment, the detail of the present;
- experiences based in “I wonder”, that entice exploration;
- democratic and respectful ways of working where, sometimes, the teacher admits she doesn’t know the answer and participates, alongside the students, in the exploration;
- passionate and challenging dialogue and encounters in and out of role;
- students and teachers working as co-artists – creating alternatives, “futuring” as Maxine Greene would have it.

This is the drama classroom I know so many of you are creating with your students, and I am very proud to be part of such a community of educators.

Hang on to your hat. Hang on to your hope.
And wind the clock, for tomorrow is another day.

Dedication: to John O'Toole, mentor, friend and colleague.

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此為上文摘要中譯

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摘要

此演講參考自保羅·弗雷勒的《希望教育學》（1992）及其信念——我們需要希望，猶如「一條魚需要水」。在此書中，弗雷勒委託我們一項任務：「無論有怎樣的障礙，都要為希望找到生機」。21世紀初，我們經歷了很多或令人質疑希望的生活經驗。本文作者提出以戲劇為希望的教育學，建議無論今天或明日，我們的角色都是與學生一起在戲劇中想像、希望、同情，並嘗試理解自己及他人。

關鍵詞：希望、教育學、弗雷勒、戲劇教育、未來、想像

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