



METHODS TEACHING THE HISTORY TO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS THROUGH THE ARTS

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ABSTRACT :

This article explores the purposes, processes, and products of encountering drama in History classrooms. The authors define drama as scripted, interpretive, and original experiences. The scripted experiences communicate to an audience or a group a common purpose, meaning, or idea. The students take the narrative and actions previously constructed and pretend they are their own while providing a public performance of a previously constructed work. The interpretative drama experience provides a situation for the individual to react within it. It helps the student to determine point of view of establishing character and place, but the product must relate to the framework given. The original drama experience must allow the students to be proactive to construct a new situation. It must allow students to synthesize content knowledge aesthetics in a new form, and students must create a new product.

KEYWORDS : purposes, processes, and products of

encountering drama.

1.INTRODUCTION

Individuals and societies reflect their humanity through culture transmitted in the course of a multitude of artistic endeavors that often inspire and inflame emotion. Connecting students to the History through the arts may bring similar inspiration and emotion into the classroom. These artistic endeavors include visual and performing arts, music, dance, and drama. Connecting students to the History through the arts bring similar inspiration and emotion the classroom. In this way the arts become the History curriculum. Dance, drama, painting, and music stand as model of the study of social phenomena in passionate and exciting ways. An examination of historic and contemporary problems through the lens of art requires a synthesis of concepts that encourage critical thinking. The authors describe three ways of examining the History and art nexus through student involvement in scripted, interpretive, and original experiences.

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ARTS TO HISTORY :

By means of the arts in History students connect to the topic under study in an emotion filled genre. The development of empathy for the experiences of those removed in time and distance from our students is an admirable, and often difficult goal for History teachers. In addition, a key principal of History is effective decision-making and problem solving. Engle and Ochoa (1988) speak of the role of drama in encouraging the development of the citizen in a democracy. A period of practice and experimentation in a safe environment such as a classroom allows students to develop the dispositions and skills conducive to a democratic society. Students act out social problems in a sheltered and experimental arena. A variety of art works represent social issues and human conditions, and require social study. The information and interpretations represented in the arts are also important to a comprehensive study of the History.

3. THE ROLE OF THE ARTS IN HISTORY :

The arts communicate information to the students and help the students display or demonstrate information. Arts that reflect society communicate universal themes, provide student access to the ideas in the art, and allow students to connect with these universal themes. The power of the artist's narrative helps the students to organize information, tell a story, and share information with others that will be equally memorable for the students and their audience. Students approach the art, construct new knowledge as they access that information, and disseminate that new knowledge to an audience for interpretation, enjoyment, or discussion. History can bring the arts into play as a way to discover content and to help students interpret the past, compare it to the present, and gather implications for the future. This article suggests three methods for teaching History through the arts. These methods differ from one another by how they draw on the arts; to convey a message, to interpret, or to create.

4. ARTISTIC INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS:

Students have the opportunity to construct new knowledge in most educational mediums. These three methods provide opportunities for student construction of knowledge in differing degrees. The three artistic methods include scripted, interpretive, and original. In each of these methods, students encounter the arts and use them as a vehicle for achieving History understanding. When used in combination, teachers present students with opportunities to offer the works of others, react to situations, and create their own work.

Students construct knowledge as they interpret the written work of scripted experiences, whether they exist in story or song. Limitations exist on students' ability to interpret in vastly different ways because of the scripted nature of the experience. In singing folk songs representative of sailors and their life on the water, students repeat the work, following conventions of musical notation. In this example, students not only become aware of specialized vocabulary, but also the perils, hardships, failures, and accomplishments of these people doing their work. Limitations exist because students may not find it necessary to employ previous knowledge in order to perform the script. In the folk song example, it is possible that students may sing without thinking about the ideas and vocabulary in the lyrics.

In the interpretive method, student knowledge construction is more substantial. Students often work with a more abstract piece of art or through a more interpretive situation that requires students to bring previous knowledge and experiences to the setting to inform them as they construct something new. If they do not bring in this additional knowledge, it is likely that their understanding of the art will be superficial and confined to the art criticism found in art gallery labels, rather than understanding the historical and cultural frame of reference of the art. For example, the art mural *Guernica* by Picasso requires students to interpret this abstract work of art, combine it with knowledge of the Spanish Civil War and the artist, and construct new knowledge of the war through an artist's eyes. Students determine the artist's point of view from a particular place or from the perspective of the artist's subject.

The third way student interact with the arts in History is what the authors call the original method. This origination provides the best opportunity for students to construct new knowledge. Secondary school students work from a variety of primary sources and community cultural resources such as a dance or drama to produce a completely new piece of art rather than performing or interpreting existing art. Students create skits to perform before an elementary student audience stressing the hazards of illegal drug use. In this example, students work together in groups to illustrate particular dangers about specific drugs and drug use. Their work is both new and original. The primary sources consulted for the creation of this art include their own experiences and backgrounds, available literature, and community social service agencies. Also important to this example is the prompting, examples, encouragement, and criticism from peers as the students create.

a) Scripted:

In scripted artistic experiences, the students do something prescribed for them. Each scripted experience presents a perspective of a culture or the past through an artistic medium. When students explore scripted events they come to know more about the culture or time period as created and interpreted in the eye

of the artist. When students present a script to an audience, they convey a common purpose, meaning, or idea. Students become the voice of a previously created piece of art.

A scripted play, a choreographed ballet, and a Verdi opera all tell about the historic content of a particular time. The authors of each of these works produced a work that serves as an artifact making a statement about their time and place in history and society. For example, the musical *1776*, written prior to the American bicentennial, reflects the writing of the Declaration of Independence; the *Nutcracker* tells about a Christmas celebration as viewed by a Russian who had an eye on western Victorian audiences; and, the opera *Nabucco* tells how a repressed Italian population in 1842 saw the plight of the exiled children of Israel. Still enjoyed by modern audiences, the works of these authors provides a cultural picture for study by contemporary thinkers in a search for clues that illustrate the author's society. Modern audiences still resonate to the works because those themes and ideas raised by the authors are still important to the members of the audience, and still connect to current events. Students in most classrooms will not perform these works of art; instead they will perform pieces created specifically for the classroom.

Educators write most scripted experiences (e.g., classroom plays) produced specifically for the classroom (Leming 1991; Welch and Morris 2001). They do this to focus on particular experiences that they want their students to have. Classroom authors must also look to elements of good drama production when they produce scripts for classroom use. Some essential elements of these scripted experiences are:

- the importance of telling a good story with vivid characters, as the play must show a tangled situation and make the audience want to know how it will end (Cassler 1990),
- answering the question, "Why is history relevant?"
- the examination of the human element of the individual and his or her story.

Teachers will also need instructional materials that may not be commercially available. Plays can change the focus of History classes to illustrate more connections to current events, social problems, and relationships. History experiences that traditionally focused on political and militaristic events can be refocused to include the voices of common people and their world, such as in the two plays that follow. While this makes the understanding of History more complex, the inclusion of the arts is even more appropriate because it is more representative of society.

Welch and Morris (2001) wrote the *Jaguar Princess*, a scripted play that informs students about the culture, conditions, social classes, and achievements of the Mayan of Meso America. They wrote the play to illustrate class and gender equity issues that the reader explores through the travel of the teenage main characters. The play has one to four questions on each page that ask students to discuss elements of the play. The questions include comprehension, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation levels. Students read the play, stopping the action at appropriate places to discuss the questions. Before sharing with the whole class, small groups discuss the questions and potential answers. At the end of the class session, the students write essays that describe what the problems of the Mayans were, how the students would solve those problems, and what connections exist between the problems of that time and today.

b) Interpretive:

Interpretive methods also explore the arts and History . In an interpretive situation, the students enter into a situation that provides a place to begin, but the students must supply the dialogue and make meaning of the experiences. A beginning place might include viewing a piece of visual art, tombstone, or a historical situation. In the interpretation, students get closer to inference, assume the feelings of a figure, and acknowledge the thoughts of a character, express empathy, and show understanding of the role of events in that time whether represented in inanimate works or art or drama. In the interpretive mode, the students must take the given situation, developing and embellishing it. They can only do this by having a significant amount of information or significant guidance that they can apply to the subject. This is particularly true during early experiences when students are unfamiliar with studying History in a non-traditional way. The motivations for developing these areas are desires to provide students with a safe and creative environment for the testing of hypotheses and historical understanding, empathy for past people and events, and an appreciation for artistic

expression.

Art:

Art can serve as an example of interpretation. Students use art museums to explore the visual arts and the people who created art as an alternative method of communication (Epstein 1994). Through artistic accomplishments, students connect the past to the present by an interpretation of the art. They can even suggest future implications and interpretations of these works of art. The students extract the importance of the time period or culture as they synthesize information gained from the art, artifact, or other resources. The individuals who live in a specific time period and specific culture produce artifacts of literature, art, music, drama, and dance. Students develop links with the past to understand the artist, time period, and society that produced the work of art. For example, art of the French Colonial period includes the works of Voltaire, furniture such as enclosed beds, the folk song "Aleute," the works of Molière, and folk dance reels. All of these artifacts inform students about the people and society of the time.

The History enable students to work in the community, and local experiences encourage students to examine and research the thought and creativity of other community members across time. Through History , students develop an increased knowledge of their community and its resources with a heightened awareness and sensitivity for the visual arts and museums (Addona and Ebersole 1989). With the purpose of connecting students to communities, local museums function to create a forum for the discussion of ideas. The arts promote thinking through engagement within the classroom community. In addition, sometimes students see art every day and it just blends into the background. By examining the past and present of the community, a student takes part in the active exchange of ideas necessary for healthy community life, and the students enter that exchange of ideas as a result of the everyday art in their community. Heightening their awareness to the art in their lives leads to heightened awareness of the place student's place in the community.

Improvisation:

In a given situation the individual or group of individuals must react to a dramatic situation in an extemporaneous fashion. The students apply a determined point of view to establish character and place. This predetermined point of view may come through some type of prompt, such as a phrase, a quotation, or a visual representation like a photograph or a painting. Through interpretation, students create a representation of the point of view. Students create both dramatic and visual interpretation of a phrase, or if given a painting, they may create a representation of the next action sequence, as if the painting were in a sequence. The parlor game "Charades" offers such a model. Students get a slip of paper giving them a geographic prompt. They must communicate the place or concept to their audience through non-traditional communication. In a similar vein, with economic "Pictionary"™, students communicate economic themes, concepts, or content through a visual representation.

This interpretation and improvisation requires students to construct History knowledge in an artistic and kinesthetic display. The display must relate to and be representative of the prompt provided. A specific example of this improvisational strategy is Selwyn's (1995) statue lesson. A statue lesson allows people to discuss a situation by freezing the action. The tableau format allows students to examine the feelings and motivations of each individual in a situation. The added advantage to the student is that instead of moving images or fluid action, the action freezes, as in a statue.

Some dramatic activities lend themselves to collaboration and group decisions. The statue lesson works well in a group setting because as students discuss appropriate interpretations, they are constructing new knowledge. This interpretation revisits prior knowledge and assists in gaining new knowledge.

c) Original:

The third way to explore the arts in History is through the method the authors call original. Through this process the students utilize application, synthesis, and evaluation of History information and display it through an art form. At the end of this process, students have a unique and new product that they can share before an

audience of their peers. Examples of this creation and origination are insightful photography, cinematography that makes a new statement, drama, creative dance, or poetry that sets the values or mood of a time period.

Success in the original method requires active student participation, as students do not create new knowledge through passivity. The students must apply History information to the arts; they must evaluate how they can best communicate the information; they must create a new art form to display their knowledge, and then they must evaluate it again to see if it has merit.

Dance:

Personal thinking and social convention forms the bases for dance (Akenson 1991). The dancer communicates social relationships based on the two former ideas. The movements have personal and societal meaning as the dancer embellishes culturally determined patterns and forms. The student translates movement from society and societal institution into a movement that expresses feeling and meaning. This may be at the local nightclub in a line dance or as a form of Shaker worship. A Hawaiian hula holds great meaning socially, culturally, historically, and artistically. The dances of the Native peoples of the Americas convey a multitude of knowledge and emotions both to the participants and observers. When rehearsed, the audience shares meaning through bodily kinesthetic rather than linguistic communication.

Drama:

In the History, the arts help students through encountering drama. Students entering drama have the opportunity to freely question, pretend, and imagine within the context of historical and/or cultural knowledge. Any character developed for first person historical narrative presentation circumscribes the historical or cultural knowledge of the time and place. This preparation requires student examination of primary sources (Drake and Corbin 1993). Students explore themes, time periods, and identify objectives, looking for turning points in the story. Before the performance, they may also seed the audience with pertinent questions.

When first person historical narrative characters are convincing, they assist the audience in entrusting themselves to the story. First person historical narrative seems particularly well suited in helping student develop questioning skills. Drama allows students the opportunity of talking with personalities from the past. The student explains how the context of the time, place, and cultural environment shape the thinking of the character. These factors explore thinking from the point of view of a historical figure. In addition to primary sources, students may use biographies to recreate historical figures in the classroom (Weatherly 1989). The students' individual research leads to the students' performance. Using the medium of drama, students examine how the historical figures solve problems in a democracy.

When individuals and their characters come together for a historical conversation, new skills and knowledge are brought to bear. The interactions of the stories in conversation exhibit relational characteristics and show social interaction. Characters from a similar time frame come together to discuss an issue of the time, or characters with similar interests from across time and space come together to show change in issues or differing views on issues. Inhabiting history (Selwyn 1995) draws characters out of their original situation and places them into a type of fish bowl encounter that allows them to converse face to face in a small group as historical personalities, whether they be famous or ordinary. Public dialogue personifies issues as students support their character's views as one of four people speaking face to face with the rest of the class asking periodic questions and moving their own characters in and out of conversation.

5. CONCLUSION:

As presented in this article, arts instruction within the History includes three methods: scripted, interpretive, and original. Each method has the potential for students to construct new knowledge, taking them from passive recipients of information to active participants in learning. The arts enrich the teaching and learning of History in these ways, promoting opportunities for student growth in academic and social thinking. Teachers using these methods of History instruction help students see the connections between artistic endeavors and History. Students will also see that the arts have always been in the History.

Teacher educators are always on the lookout for new and challenging methods to introduce into their classes and field experiences. Those who provide student experiences in methods classes developing History materials that include the arts enrich and strengthen the preparation of History teachers. In addition, teacher educators provide crucial experiences in which pre-service teachers can practice these skills in the schools with cooperating teachers who value and encourage integrating the History with the arts. Teacher educators provide needed support for the arts while their students get to practice and experiment with new methods of History instruction. The content of this article provides another method for teachers and teacher educators to encourage learning about History - through the arts.

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