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Version: Published Version

Article:
Elliott, Victoria, Fukazawa, Hiro, Ikeno, Norio et al. (2015) Drama and citizenship education in England and Japan. Teaching Citizenship. pp. 50-51.

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International feature

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Drama and citizenship education in England and Japan

In this article the authors discuss their initial thoughts about a collaboration between Citizenship and Drama educators. They illustrate the range of ways in which these subjects could be connected, and in doing so highlight some important dimensions of citizenship education.

Citizenship education emphasises participation. The essence of drama in schools is experience and engagement. As such there should be a good deal of common ground between teachers and students of citizenship and drama. Intrigued by the potential overlaps between these areas a group of people in Japan and England have started to work together on a project. We want to be able to clarify the nature of any connections that might exist between citizenship and drama, we want to see what people do as they teach and learn and, crucially, we want to make an impact on future practice by developing educational resources that help students and teachers. In this article we raise a few of the issues that we are beginning to explore. This article is one of the ways we are using to begin to lay the foundations for future work.

In some ways our project will take place in fairly well trodden ground. Others have explored the relationship between drama and developing citizenship, and some of our own work in citizenship (e.g. Ikeno, 2011) and drama (Watanabe and Neelands, 2009) shows some indications of the areas that need to be further investigated. However, we should recognise that, perhaps curiously for citizenship educators, the idea that there may be a connection between these fields is resisted by some. David Mamet (1994) has explicitly stated that drama cannot be used to change the world. Jonathan Levy (1987, p.8) has written eloquently of the danger of trying to use theatre as a lever to change the world: 'when art is used to teach, either the teaching or the art must suffer'. And, perhaps curiously for drama educators, there seems to be some resistance by citizenship educators about making connections with drama specialists. A review of the articles contained in citizenship education journals reveals a lack of interest in drama, whereas a review of journals such as Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance shows strong interests in citizenship themes (including a recent special issue on human rights education). If the link is loosely developed – perhaps if citizenship educators simply 'steal' the motivational teaching methods of the drama teacher or if drama specialists use for their own purposes the stimulating content of current affairs then an opportunity will be missed. The increasingly low status of both citizenship and drama (and, in Japan - despite the rich tradition of Noh, Kabuki, Bunraku, Shingeki and Sho-Gekijo - the absence of discrete drama lessons) may also prove to be a challenge.

> **When art is used to teach, either the teaching or the art must suffer. (Jonathan Levy)**

What then could bring these fields together? What have citizenship educators and drama educators got to say to each other? We suggest below that there are three main areas of connection: Firstly, one of the principal ways that Crick used to clarify the particular nature of citizenship education was to declare that it was concerned with public issues. Theatres, of course, are public spaces and to attend a play is to take part in a community event. And, some have developed an argument about the value of such participation. Theatre going for secondary school students is said to increase tolerance and understanding of others' emotions (Greene, Hitt, Kraybill & Bogulski, 2014). Perhaps, developing ideas from such things as contact theory, simply to be in public with others is to allow for the potential to grow as a citizen.

Secondly, a member of a theatre audience or a participant in a drama activity must watch an event that is about something. The experience or the process of theatre-going is perhaps not the only thing that matters; rather, content is important. We are struck by how many plays focus on what we might broadly call social and political issues. Shakespeare's Julius Caesar and The Merchant of Venice (and many others), modern classics such as those of Arthur Miller and J. B. Priestley as well as the work of contemporary playwrights such as David Hare and Tom Stoppard (and many others) are full of citizenship themes. This, of course, stands alongside those drama activities written and performed by young people that allow them to explore key moments of past and present in society (e.g. see a drama activity on dementia by the young people of The Joseph Rowntree School, York supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation www.jrf.org.uk/film/breaking-thoughts).

Thirdly, the processes of drama may be ideal for helping young people to think, to express their points of view and generally to develop the skills of informed and responsible participation. The standard practices of drama specialists such as warm-ups, role play, hot seating, conscience alley, forum theatre allow not only for thinking and action but also feeling. For example, Winston and Strand (2013) referring to drama work with young people in the specially written Tapestry declare that theatre in education has a 'special contribution to democratic dialogue in its ability to create and sustain a spirit of lively and enjoyable exchange over sensitive and difficult issues and to leave the great majority of participants with a spirit of goodwill' (p. 77). Drama has the potential to allow young people the space to experience emotion and to do so in a way that allows for mature responses to challenging issues. Drama and citizenship education allow for expression but are not designed to promote an unhelpful, de-stabilising form of feeling. 'To work and play collaboratively within group settings, a level of emotional regulation is needed' (Fleer & Hammer, 2013, p. 241). It may be possible that this positive exploration of self and society is valuable for helping people engage critically in mature and responsible ways.

We need, of course, as we continue to develop our project to ask some searching questions about the connection between drama and citizenship education. Perhaps the key question is whether citizenship and/or, theatre/drama are to be seen as 'space', technique (motivational content or process) or something more fundamental? If we allow for too much flexibility in how we characterise citizenship and drama we are perhaps opening ourselves to the possibility of an unhelpful 'anything goes' approach. And we are aware of the ways in which education interacts with other forces in society allowing or debarring certain sorts of work. The liberal approach to education in the Taisho-era (1920s and 1930s) in Japan and the 1960s radical education movements of the west gave rise to forms of education which were not seen when other pressures dominated. Certain types of work are possible only when other societal conditions exist. But we enter this project in a very positive mind-set determined to explore the public space, the social and political content of plays, the processes of interaction that help learners progress in relation to empathy, tolerance and other citizenship-related matters, and to use the rich, engaging techniques that are available to us as teachers in order to help promote understanding of society and participation in it.

> **The processes of drama may be ideal for helping young people to think, to express their points of view and generally to develop the skills of informed and responsible participation.**

Citizenship and/or drama teachers wanting to know more and / or who wish to become involved in future project activities should contact the authors of this article by writing to Ian Davies (ian.davies@york.ac.uk)

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