

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

THE USE OF GAMES AS A METHODOLOGY OF TEACHING DRAMATIC ARTS
AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL

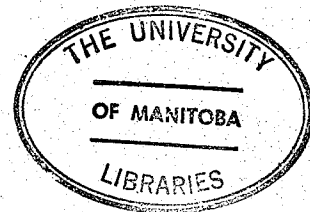
A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION, GRADUATE STUDIES,
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF MASTER OF EDUCATION

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CURRICULUM: HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

MARCH, 1977



"THE USE OF GAMES AS A METHODOLOGY OF TEACHING DRAMATIC ARTS
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by

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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements
of the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge my sincere gratitude to my thesis chairman, Professor D. H. Turner.

In addition, I wish to express my appreciation to Sister Clare O'Neill and Professor Colin Walley, who have given advice and suggestions for the improvement of the original draft.

My thanks are also extended to the students of Westdale Junior-Senior High School who were directly involved in the courses, and to Mr. J. V. Stein, Principal, for their strong support of the program.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to set forth instructional procedures for a game approach to teaching dramatic arts and to examine the approach through classroom application and evaluation. The study reviews literature on the development, scope and values of games in education, and the use of games in the study of dramatic arts. A preliminary analysis of Improvisation for the Theatre, by Viola Spolin, proved useful to the teacher for developing lesson plans and organizing meaningful group activities.

Two heterogeneous classes of grade ten students participated in the program. At the outset of the course, students were instructed in the basic elements of games so that they could apply them in a number of individual and group activities, both real-life and simulated life-experiences.

Evaluation of the course and procedures include a checklist for rating the game and written responses to a questionnaire completed by the students taking the courses. Because of the emphasis on process, the major part of the evaluation was done by the students themselves.

On the whole, students reacted favorably to the game approach. Many felt that the method of instruction gave them a better understanding of themselves and others in both game and real-life situations. Students suggested they would recommend this method for other students because it was interesting and because it provided for different levels of ability among students.

The results of the study suggest that the game approach increases student involvement and motivation to learn, and thus it could be valuable for teachers of drama and English.

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CHAPTER 1

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the use of games as a methodology in the teaching of dramatic arts at the secondary level, and to analyze and synthesize the approach through classroom application and evaluation.

The methodology involved the preparation and presentation of twenty drama lessons, based on the use of games, to thirty representative grade ten students. Lessons were designed to provide opportunities for individual creative expression while students learned to apply the following common elements in games to real-life situations: purpose, procedures, rules, number of players, roles of participants, participant interaction patterns, and results in terms of values assigned to the outcome of action.¹

Evaluation of this approach included an assessment of the procedures and the observable responses of the students involved. Criteria for evaluation will be discussed later in the study.

¹Elliott M. Avedon/Brian Sutton-Smith, The Study of Games (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1971), p. 422.

Definition of Terms

Game

The definition of 'game' is wide and varied. In Viola Spolin's book, Improvisation for the Theatre, the game is defined as a "natural group form providing the involvement and personal freedom necessary for experiencing."²

In examining the use of games in learning, Mary Reilly, in her book, Play as Exploratory Learning, extends the meaning of a game:

A game is an activity between one or more independent decision makers, seeking to achieve their objectives in some limiting context. A more conventional definition would say, a game is a contest with rules among adversaries trying to win objectives. The trouble with this definition is that not all games are contests among adversaries. In some games, players cooperate to achieve a common goal against an obstructing force or natural situation which is itself not really a player because it does not have objectives.³

William Martin and Gordon Vallins, in Exploration Drama, offer a definition of games that assumes much wider implications than the previous ones:

²Viola Spolin, Improvisation for the Theatre, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 4.

³Mary Reilly, editor, Play as Exploratory Learning, (London: Sage Publications, 1974), p. 36.

The games children play are highly developed forms of their creative expression. They have been shaped by time and fulfil a structural role in the growing dramatic needs of children. They grow out of the children's experiences and have the essential toughness and vitality of true ritual... The development of games from primitive ritual seems a natural process. The development from games to drama is also natural, for all games contain the need of conflict and exploration of life which form the essence of drama. Such games are for taking part, not spectators. Children's games are themselves an elemental form of drama, in which the children work out, through established patterns, problems which affect their own lives.⁴

Definition of Game as Applicable to this Study

The definitions of a game presented by Spolin, Reilly, Martin and Vallins, form the basis for the following definition to be used throughout this study.

The game is a natural group form providing involvement and personal freedom for one or more dependent decision-makers, who, with the use of rules and objectives, work out problems which relate to their own lives.

Dramatic Arts

This is the term used to describe the new experimental courses which were set up by the Theatre Arts Committee under the authority of the Manitoba Department of Education in 1975. Guidelines for the definition of dramatic arts are set out by this committee in the program:

⁴William Martin/Gordon Vallins, Exploration Drama, (London: Cox and Wyman, Ltd., 1968), p. 7.

Dramatic art is the art of playing.... It is for this reason that the program outlined here approaches the study of drama and theatre through the playing of dramatic games, at first very simple, then more and more complex. The students begin by playing very simple improvisational games, the game-plan being limited to a simple point of concentration. As his skill and sophistication increases, he is introduced to more complex game-plans. The scripted play itself is seen as a highly complex game, the game-plan of which requires that all of the dramatic skills built up through simpler dramatic games be utilized.⁵

Drama

Drama comes from a Greek word, and means 'to do' or 'to act'. In this study, drama does not apply to what is generally an off-shoot of the language arts program at the high school level, that is, formal play-reading and analysis. Instead, 'drama', as it applies to this study, emphasizes the process of participation rather than the production of the trained actor, direct experience rather than indirect experience. Drama means putting ideas into verbal and physical action which convey significance primarily to the participants.

There is also the problem of defining the term 'drama' as opposed to 'theatre'. This is necessary because students and administrators are often confused with the two activities, which can differ greatly in function. Brian Way states the difference clearly:

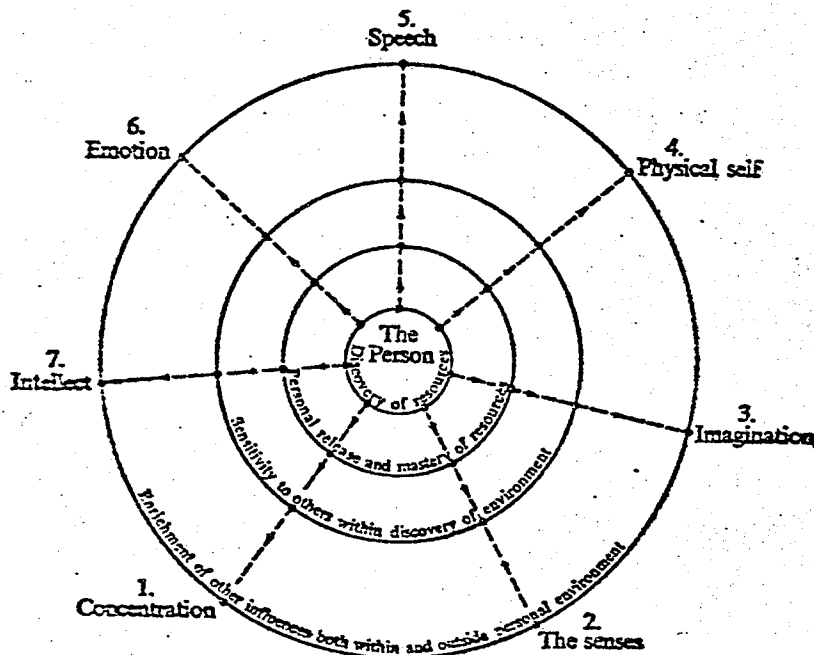
⁵Manitoba Department of Education, Experimental Dramatic Arts Program, Manitoba Levels 1, 11, 111, 1974, p. 1.

'Theatre' is largely concerned with communication between actors and an audience; 'drama' is largely concerned with experience by the participants, irrespective of any function of communication to an audience.⁶

It is essential that the term 'drama' be defined as clearly as possible so that students, parents and administrators will not be misled by a course outline headed by the all-encompassing word, 'drama'. In this study, 'drama' is defined as a means of exploring the development of an individual's thoughts and feelings through direct experience.

Development of the Whole Person

This study is not concerned with producing the school play. It does concern itself with the development of an individual through the use of games. Turning to Brian Way's theory concerning the development of a human being through drama, one should begin by looking at Way's diagram:



⁶Brian Way, Development Through Drama, (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1967), pp. 2-3.

Way explains the diagram in this manner:

All possible points on the circle exist in each person. At this stage, only the inner circle really concerns us, as at the beginnings of drama we are concerned with helping each individual to discover and explore his or her own resources, irrespective of other people. Touching upon all these factors, and to an extent the root upon which they all depend, is the growing ability to concentrate; whenever that concentration is full, then both the quality of attempt and the degree of mastery will likewise be full.⁷

Each resource of which Way speaks is included in the list of objectives outlined in the experimental dramatic arts program.

The concept 'development of the whole person', as it appears in this study, is based on Way's conception of the 'person'.

Improvisation

'Improvisation', according to Hodgson and Richards, refers to the idea of individuals responding in different ways to a stimulus. The authors do not confine improvisation to a single activity relating to acting. In the dramatic arts program, improvisation refers to the freedom and creativity that a person can call upon to solve a problem in a game, once he is aware of the given circumstances.

The word 'improvisational' has become interchangeable with the terms 'creative dramatics' and 'improvised drama'. Improvisation is usually interpreted as, creating extemporaneously.

Acting

'Acting', according to Viola Spolin, means making something happen:

⁷Ibid, p. 12.

Everyone can act. Everyone can improvise.... We learn through experience and experiencing, and no one teaches anyone anything. This is as true for the infant moving from kicking to crawling to walking as it is for the scientist with his equations. If the environment permits it, anyone can learn whatever he chooses to learn; and if the individual permits it, the environment will teach him everything it has to teach. Experience is penetration into the environment, total organic involvement with it. This means involvement on all levels: intellectual, physical, and intuitive.⁸

In the dramatic arts program, it is stated that all acting consists of games, and that a role played by a student is also seen as a game, and not as a complicated acting device.

Mime

'Mime' is a term used to describe a means of non-verbal expression and communication through the use of the body.

Sensory Awareness

'Sensory awareness' is a term applying to the use of the five senses. Both mime and sensory awareness are dependent upon the individual's degree of concentration, as is shown in Way's diagram considering the development of the whole person. Through the use of games and mime, sensory awareness and concentration can be further developed.

Design of the Study

The study was conducted with two classes of grade ten students, with a total enrollment of thirty. Both classes received the same number of hours of instruction. This figure was

⁸Viola Spolin, Improvisation for the Theatre, p. 3.

ninety hours of instruction, with possible reduction due to the split-shift situation at Westdale School. Both classes received the same number of hours of instruction, using activities selected because of their effectiveness in achieving the following aims of the course:

1. To develop awareness of self, of others, of physical environment, of cultural environment, and of cultural heritage;
2. To foster the development of a wide range of skills such as ease and confidence in physical activity, powers of concentration, powers of creative imagination, co-operative skills, ability to reason, and ability to express themselves;
3. To promote self-discipline, emotional maturity, self-evaluation, a positive attitude toward all the arts, a sense of excitement and joy of learning, and objectivity in dealing with the problems of the immediate environment and of society at large.⁹

The game approach attempts to reach each aim or goal. Each goal represents areas which are essential in the development of the whole person.

The course was evaluated on the basis of the following criteria by participating students:

1. Rating of the games to be used in the classes. This entailed a summary of student responses to a checklist devised to help them evaluate a game in terms of its common elements - purpose, procedures, rules, number of players, roles of participants, participant interaction patterns, and results according to values assigned to the outcome of action.

⁹Manitoba Department of Education, p. 2.

This is the rating that was used: 1 = very effective
 2 = good
 3 = fair
 4 = poor

The participant evaluated each element of the game by circling only one number in each section.

The key for the rating was omitted from the student's paper.

2. Written responses to a questionnaire that contained the following questions:

- a) Why did you like/dislike the game?
- b) Why did you like/dislike yourself in the game?
- c) Why was the game fun? Why not?
- d) Why did the game have the right number of/too many rules?
- e) Why would you like/not like to play the game again?
- f) Why did the game represent/not represent a real-life experience?
- g) How can this game be played/not be played more imaginatively?
- h) Why could this game become/not become part of a story?
- i) Why were there enough/not enough players for this game?
- j) Why did you like/not like your role in the game?
- k) Why would you have liked/not liked a different role?
- l) Why was the outcome satisfactory/not satisfactory?
- m) Why did you mind/not mind losing?
- n) Why were you concentrating fully/not concentrating fully on the game?
- o) Why were you co-operating fully/not co-operating fully?

Both the rating scale and the questionnaire were administered periodically throughout the course so that feedback was coming into the investigator on more than one occasion.

3. On the final questionnaire, the following questions appeared:

- a) What is your opinion of the dramatic arts program?
- b) What do you think of the game approach in teaching dramatic arts?
- c) Do you prefer other methods of studying dramatic arts? If so, explain.

- d) What benefits do you think you have gained from the game approach to dramatic arts?
- e) Was the quantity of work that you were required to do satisfactory or unsatisfactory?
- f) What are some of the activities you found beneficial?
- g) Did these activities help to give you a better understanding of yourself and others?
- h) What changes would you suggest if you were going to take a similar course to this one?
- i) What other activities would you include?
- j) Would you recommend this method of teaching dramatic arts for other students? Why? or, Why not?

Other questions to be included in the final questionnaire dealt with specifically structured questions such as:

- k) Check (x) one of the following:

Were you satisfied at the end of the course that you learned

- i) more about yourself and others than you usually do in other courses?
- ii) just as much as usual?
- iii) less than usual?
- iv) not sure?

and,

- l) Check (x) in which of the following ways the game approach can be useful to students:

- i) in providing opportunity for sharing experience?
- ii) in providing for individual expression?
- iii) in providing for varying abilities among students?
- iv) in providing for student interests?
- v) others (specify)

4. A taped, informal interview, with a special segment of the group involved was administered because some students had difficulty in expressing themselves in a written manner and asked if they could use the tape recorder as an alternate means of providing information. The questions in the taped interview were identical to those on the written questionnaire, in order that the responses could be used in the overall evaluation.

5. Since classroom observations and inferences were also used in assessing the effectiveness of this methodology to the teaching of dramatic arts, part of the evaluation had to be carried out by the classroom teacher.

Limitations of the Study

1. The size of the drama classes was restricted to a total enrollment of thirty.
2. The study was limited to one year's investigation.
3. Sources for this study were limited to those already mentioned.
4. The study was limited to a rather narrow sample. The participating group was not homogeneous since classes were made up of students with varying abilities.
5. Because the dramatic arts course was an option course at Westdale School, most of the students were drama-oriented.
6. Because twenty-eight of the students had not been exposed to the method of instruction before, a different treatment by the teacher in the case of the two students resulted.
7. The study, in emphasizing process rather than the end product, was to limit the major portion of evaluation to the students, and a minor portion to the classroom teacher.
8. Because of the subjective nature of dramatic arts, and the difficulty in testing for appreciation and creativity, values claimed for the game methodology were not measured in scientific terms. The study, then, does not ensure a high degree of reliability.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Since a Theatre Arts Committee was appointed to design courses in dramatic arts based on games as a methodology of teaching, and, if possible, to collect information on its strengths or weaknesses, it could be concluded that the Manitoba Department of Education has shown some interest in the use of dramatic games as a method of teaching and learning.

Elliot M. Avedon and Brian Sutton-Smith have raised several hypotheses concerning the value of games in education:

- a) Games engender more student interest than the more conventional activities;
- b) By participating in games, the students will learn more facts and principles than by studying in the conventional manner;
- c) Students will acquire more critical thinking and decision-making skills by participating in games.
- d) Students' attitudes will be significantly altered by taking part in games.¹¹ (This implies a positive correlation between games and attitudes.)

C. H. Cherryholmes, author of some current research in the area of educational games, states that:

The only hypothesis that has been completely accepted so far is the first one - students are more interested in simulation activities than in conventional classroom activities. Therefore, it may be said that what is now known about games and simulations as instructional media is this: they are useful devices for getting and holding student interest and attention.¹²

¹¹Elliot M. Avedon/Brian Sutton Smith, The Study of Games, p. 321.

¹²C. H. Cherryholmes, "Some Current Research on Effectiveness of Educational Simulations," American Behavioral Scientist, 10, October, 1966, pp. 4-7.