1990

The In-process collective as a form of inquiry through performance

Steinberg, Shirley R.

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THE IN-PROCESS COLLECTIVE
AS A FORM OF INQUIRY
THROUGH PERFORMANCE

SHIRLEY R. STEINBERG

B. Ed., University of Lethbridge, 1986

A One-Credit Project
Submitted to the Faculty of Education
of The University of Lethbridge
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF EDUCATION

LETHBRIDGE, ALBERTA

April, 1990
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The concept of a theatre collective originated about twenty years ago in Quebec as a form of social theatre. The medium included a group of actors improvising and then scripting scenes that pertained to certain topics chosen for performance. Noted collectives include ones produced on William Lyon McKenzie King and "The Farm Show", both dealing with social and political issues in Canada. The performances were scripted and the collectives, now published, remain basically the same each time they are produced.

The idea of a collective intrigued me, consequently I decided to apply the concept with students and to create a collection of personally written material with dialogue and improvisation to produce a performance. After several collectives on gender and giftedness, I realized that the medium was not restricted to any topic, and that the collective would be an excellent method of democratic teaching within the regular classroom with regular classroom curricula.

For my one-credit project, I decided to facilitate the production of a collective within a Grade Nine Social Studies class that I was teaching. I wanted to employ the ideas presented within feminist pedagogy, that of allowing empowerment to take place and to become a "midwife" to the students instead of the teacher-director
expected in many productions. Including the concepts that Freire
discusses in his ideas of students being able to name their world
and have a concept of place and understanding of the world
through their own experience, I developed a model of presenting
the drama collective.

The collective began with dialogue within the classroom to
discover what the students were interested in. We viewed a tape
of a collective and discussed the value of the medium. At that
time I proposed the idea for the project and the students voted
unanimously to go ahead with it. We set up a timeline for the
production and decided to do it on "Communism". After a week of
dialogue about our perceptions of communism, the students decided
that the subject was too narrow and that they were intrigued
with the prejudice they were experiencing within themselves about
the "Reds". They voted to change the collective to include prejudice
in general.

The project lasted two months. We spent about two hours a
week talking about prejudice. We brainstormed words that dealt
with prejudice and then categorized the words and discussed each
category. Several times the students wrote down their feelings
about the project and its progress.

After much dialogue, we began to improvise scenes
surrounding our discussions and trying to reinact personal
situations and show how we felt or thought. The project progressed, and at the end of the second month, we presented it to an audience. After the performance, the audience joined in a discussion on the collective and on prejudice, thus becoming an existential part of the entire process. Nothing was scripted, and the dialogue that took place during the performance was spontaneous, consequently, I assert that the entire project was phenomenological as an "is-ness" or what it is like to discuss prejudice, and what prejudice is like. If it was ever presented again, it would change and develop, hence the idea of being ever in-process.

The students were super, I think I learned the most, and several times I was reminded that I was an equal partner and my agenda as teacher was not going to be accepted. The students learned who they were and what they thought and as a group decided that no matter what their own prejudices may remain, that they were responsible for these thoughts and owned the feelings.
During the project, students often discussed their feelings about what they were learning. With their permission, I have included two entries about the project and prejudice. The first entry was done at the beginning of the project and students were asked what they felt was at the root of their prejudices. The second inclusion was done at the end of the project and students were asked to write about how they felt about the entire collective.
Most of the stuff we said are true but some of it was kind of rude. I really feel bad about all of that. I'm not always as open as I was today. I didn't mean everything I said. I don't care too much for them, but I would never put them down. Well, maybe would. I feel that we were trying to fill up the record, not discriminating them.
I truly hate prejudice against people cuz I would not hate it when I hear prejudice against me. I feel they're judging all Indians by just a few or some Indians. I think some Indians are cleaner, dressed better, etc. than some white people. Some white people are dirty in hockey playground Indians. I just think Indians are probably caught more than whites because referees what them cuz they expect them to be dirty. Some with police, they figure an Indian is more likely to steal than a white. Sometimes I feel nervous or scared around Indians because I hear people say that I should be afraid of them. I feel we should be able to judge them ourselves but prejudices don't really and completely allow us to do so. I don't really like to talk about people Indians like how we were in class. I thought some of the things said about Indians were rude. I don't know how people who have had prejudices against themselves and hate it can turn around and talk about other people the same way as people have talked about them.
I think a lot of this is stereotyping. Many of these events I have noticed with Indians, but I know not everyone of them is like this.

I think a lot of the troubles with Indians is because of the government. The government has given them way too much money and rights and has let most of the natives go to war they want to.

The Indians were here first. I deserve some extra rights because we took their land away but they have proven that overall they were not able to be responsible and should get a lot of the rights taken away. They should get stricter and try to make them into responsible people. Indians are not the only bad people. Whites also do things a man can.

I think the Indians need to be better people because if you think back on their traditions, the white learned much from them, but when the white came they gave up many rights and the Indians got worse.
I feel real bad for poor Indians. I don't think they're safe. I used to think if the Indians were just as smart as whites. I like the Indians, I don't like them all but the ones I know and all the Indians. And that's one of us. but we have different backgrounds. I hate the Indian jokes, they are funny. How would you like it if people made up disgusting jokes about you? Some Indians are very bad when we are whites, so what's going on?
I think that this has been a very interesting subject to talk about. But I still really don't think that there was bad. I think just because there were so many bad that there were people who some of them are not all that bad. Once last summer we went to Fairmount for summer and we went horseback riding and it was Indians that ran the place. I didn't think that there all that bad as people say they are. Some Indians are nice others can be mean.

Maybe people think there bad cause they are poor and get everything they want and Indians aren't all that rich cause they usually have large families cause you hardly see a small family Indian people might think there rough because they always getting picked up by the whites so they get rough and take no stuff that no decent.

Most of the Indians get drunk on illegal cans because they need alcohol and they sit in bars and get drunk. Well what else are they suppose to do if there not working. Some of them come in the store and ask if anyone looking for a hired hand.
Chris R

Today we have transformed many words that come to our minds when the term "Indians" comes up. I think that these are true about a lot of Indians. But I met an Indian boy many years ago. At first when I met him I thought of no, that all we need in our neighborhood, another "Indian". Living in Lethbridge I often see a lot of Indians around the city that can be put under many of these records. But that Indian kid was one of the nicest kids I ever met. He was very honest, clean, and had a good family. I think sometimes that what causes a lot of problems for Indians in their families. Most families don't set a good example. But when I see how this one boy's family was, and how nice they were, that does say something about how the kids will turn out. Sometimes bad feelings about Indians extend to all of them, even the good ones.
My parents tell me that [text cut off]

Eventually are going to take over new

whole community like they are doing

in other communities. They say they are making

that as much as I don't last some of

the families. They are nice but they go to
Community doesn't like Huttites
Most people hate Indians
Black people are athletic most people say because they ran and everyone seen many good athletes
Huttites do all our hard work here every thing
Indians are cheap in most Always and the few else met steel
Dutch usually are hired men because must drive not are hired men Dutch are crazy slavers
The influences in my life that had directly influenced my opinions of prejudice because I met some Heidenriters and when I talked to them, I really got to like them and realized they were more like me than I thought. I don't have any reason for hating Indians, and they haven't done anything to me. My dad is prejudice against them, but I don't agree with him.
Influence

Mostly my family's friends and also the community.

My hutters lived right beside us.

They always came by our house.

They did it down without paying.
Some influences that I have had in my life that
are prejudice against people like Hitlerites are
due, I think, to my uncle who had ordered
chickens for us so that we could buy them but he
never ordered any.

Another time mom was working in the field
when someHitlerites came to the field and asked
mom to buy some chickens but she said she had
no time but they persuaded her so she went home
First so she could pay. They asked her for some coffee
but she said she had no time. They said "Sure you
do it won't take long."
"No I don't have time" replied mom.
"Oh yes you do" they said.

Finally mom gave in.

They gave people chow.
- My feelings about it were that it was a good way of teaching, I also felt that it would help me learn more, faster. I really felt the project would work.

- Some of the things that I have questions about is how well a person in the audience react or feel if we do a skirt or talk about something that relates to their particular ethnic background.

- During the project I felt that it was coming along extremely well, and I felt that I was learning more about prejudice and what causes it.

- I was really impressed with the project and how it turned out. I really feel we have come a long way.
At first I was sort of excited about the whole thing, but it started to become a drag. That's all we would do is practice and practice, the most important thing that I learned was how to work as a whole class. I figure it would be difficult to perform this with a much larger class.

Questions:

Who is this benefiting, me or the teacher?

Are you doing this for a project work or is the use?

What happens if there is ethnic people in the audience?
My first feeling about it was I really wasn't interested in it. But then when I got into it I was really enjoying it. Some things I really didn't think were prejudice but when we did a skit of mine. Questions: What happens if they don't like, what if there were people in audience that were doing a lot on, what if they think it was cruel. During it I was thinking it was getting a bit too much. But it was dealing a lot of things about prejudice. Some things I really can't why people are prejudice. Now it getting to be boring cause of practicing. It for Strauss a day.
My first feelings of this new way of teaching was excited, I thought it would be a lot more interesting than reading some boring story that you don't really read and do some boring questions or if later. You don't even remember what you've read a few weeks later. I can't wait till we get to the University and start to perform.

Questions:
- What if there is an Indian there?
- Are we going to learn anything?
- How many people are going to be there?
My first feeling is about this new way of teaching was weird. I didn't think you would learn very much from it. I thought it would be boring and uninteresting. When we started this new way of teaching it was interesting. I enjoyed learning this way. It's easier for me to learn this way than just taking notes and getting lectures. This way you get to know all the student's feelings.

Who is this benefiting more the teacher?

What happens if there's an Indian or another ethnic group there?
I'd like the idea of teaching some things like this
but as long as it doesn't draw out too long.
Because note we've been doing it for a month
and it's starting to get boring.

Some things that we learned through this
prejudice collection is that we were alot of
prejudice and we don't know about such as
fines, gyp, shoot etc.

Some questions I have are

- Will this offend anybody in the crowd?
- Do people (fears) take this prejudice seriously?
My first feelings about it were: it was exciting about it and thought it would really be interesting what happens if there's a person who's in the audience that one of our prejudices that goes against? Will I lose speed? Will I embarrass myself? Do we get marked on it? Do we have to do it? Getting kind of boring but that because we keep doing it over and over.
Overhead Brainstorm Chart on Natives

This chart is a sample of charts we brainstormed during the project. We would record all words that came to mind about the subject. This chart was done from words that were called out about Natives.
HOCKEY SCENE: This scene was developed when we discussed prejudices about natives. The boys were very verbal about the fact that they believed Natives were unfair in hockey. During our discussions it was revealed that white students were equally unfair a great deal of the time.

TEACHER SCENE: As we developed scenes, I had an agenda to keep to the topic of religious or ethnic prejudice. However, the boys felt that they were victims of prejudice by female teachers. On a day that I was absent, the students composed this scene. It was an excellent reminder of the democratic process!

DUTCH SCENE: Elaine expressed her own experiences as a newcomer to the area, a child of parents born in Holland. This scene was constructed as she related her story.

PLAYGROUND SCENE: Students were used to buying "Nigger Babies" from the store; it wasn't until we started our dialogues that it came apparent that the name was not appropriate. This scene stemmed a lot of talking about what exactly is in a title or name.

HUTTERITE SCENE: As farmers, the students in the area are acutely aware of the new Hutterite colony that has just been built. Their discussions of Hutterites were heated and defensive many times and the result was a knowledge that they, indeed were prejudiced, but that they felt it was justified.

STORE SCENE: This scene was a result of the discussion that crime and stealing from stores was led by Natives. The perceptions of the students were from hearsay and news reports, never from first-hand experience.
A collective of what we know and believe and think about prejudice.
Dear Grade Nine Parent,

Our Social Studies Class is studying the topic: The U.S.S.R. this year as a requirement within the Alberta Curriculum for Grade Nine Social Studies. As part of our unit, we are doing a dramatic presentation entitled: "Communism". The students are writing and researching this topic themselves, and our production will be co-authored by each student, in other words, they are writing the entire play themselves.

The play will be finished in January, and we are hoping to present it to any interested parents and friends. In addition, we are planning to present the play at the University of Lethbridge to several teachers.

During the process of creating the play, I would like to record some of our classes on video tape, as well as on a tape recorder. In addition, I will be keeping a journal of the progress we are making. I would like permission from you to keep these records of our play, and invite you to visit us at any time to view the records or watch our rehearsals.

Along with working within the curriculum, I feel that this method of drama works well in allowing the students to research and develop their own ideas and to become critical thinkers. I am using work within this framework towards the completion of my Master's Degree at the University of Lethbridge. What we generate during this Grade Nine class will assist other teachers in developing new ways to teach Social Studies, and it is exciting that our Enchant Grade Nines will be able to take part in this.

I would appreciate any comments or questions that you have in regard to this manner, and request that you indicate your permission on this paper and return it to the school.

Thank you,

Shirley Steinberg, Enchant Social Studies

___________________________ has my permission to participate in the dramatic presentation for Grade Nine Social Studies. I also give my permission for my child to be video-taped.

_________________________ (parent or guardian)

_________________________ date
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Shirley Steinberg, Enchant Social Studies

[Signature]

Date

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Thank you,

Shirley Steinberg, Enchant Social Studies

[Signature]

[Parent's Signature]

Nov. 21/89 date

_Ivan Vrestik_ has my permission to participate in the dramatic presentation for Grade Nine Social Studies. I also give my permission for my child to be video-taped.

_Mrs. Two F. Vrestik_ (parent or guardian)
Dear Grade Nine Parent,

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Shirley Steinberg, Enchant Social Studies

________________________
(name)

________________________
has my permission to participate in
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________________________
(parent or guardian)

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date
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Thank you,

Shirley Steinberg, Enchant Social Studies

________________________
Codie

has my permission to participate in the dramatic presentation for Grade Nine Social Studies. I also give my permission for my child to be video-taped.

________________________
Le Ennenga

(parent or guardian)

________________________
Jun 20/99 date
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Thank you,

Shirley Steinberg, Enchant Social Studies

[Signature]

Jennifer __________________ has my permission to participate in the dramatic presentation for Grade Nine Social Studies. I also give my permission for my child to be video-taped.

[Signature]

Brenda Steinberg (parent or guardian)

Nov. 21/89 date
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Thank you,

Shirley Steinberg, Enchant Social Studies

[Signature]

Chris has my permission to participate in the dramatic presentation for Grade Nine Social Studies. I also give my permission for my child to be video-taped.

B. Ruthledge (parent or guardian)

NOV 20/89 date

What'll I do when she goes to Hollywood??
Sources


