

George's marvellous medicine at Stella Maris College

What do drama and science have in common? What do a group of third year B.Ed. (Hons) students following a course at university have in common with a group of eight- and nine-year-old boys? Nothing much in the everyday life of the science classroom. But...

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What do drama and science have in common? What do a group of third year B.Ed. (Hons) students following a course at university have in common with a group of eight- and nine-year-old boys?

Nothing much in the everyday life of the science classroom. But this year drama and science were linked through the presentation of an adaptation of George's Marvellous Medicine, a story by Roald Dahl. The magical world of George who makes his Grandma grow big through his marvellous medicine is linked with the world of science and observation and finding an explanation for why things happen. The play was developed and created by a group of third year B.Ed. (Hons) science students and produced in collaboration with Masquerade Theatre Arts School. The play was the end result of a drama course led by Anthony Bezzina.

This drama course was developed in order to allow the student-teachers to experience first hand the ability to communicate and relate with each other and with pupils. Mr Bezzina led a number of workshop activities where the student-teachers learnt how to project their

voice, achieve poise and presence and carry themselves with ease, the skill of communicating with others which is essential for any teacher, and most of all how to cut loose from all boundaries and touch the limits of their creativity.

The drama sessions allowed the student-teachers to explore their inner abilities and enabled them to develop the skills needed for them to become competent and professional teachers. At the same time they learnt how to use drama as a teaching and learning medium which when used in their science classrooms would make the science they were teaching much more fun for pupils.

As pointed out by a student-teacher, "We learnt how to project our voice, look at the persons we were talking to and even use related gestures to simplify our communication. All this is important for us in the classroom. It also helped to improve our self-esteem".

The drama sessions also helped the student-teachers work as a group. Very often life at university is very competitive instilling in students the need to work on their own to achieve more than their colleagues and to strive for better grades. The drama unit helped the student-teachers work as a group. They were still striving for excellence, but the achievement of the whole group was more important in this case.

As stated by another student-teacher, "Making the props and the set with my best friends was real fun. It is something that I will look back at and miss very much. This also served for the whole group to get together and work really hard because all of us wanted this to

go well".

But how could a play written by Roald Dahl be used to teach science to young children? The idea of using drama in science teaching as explained by well know educator Dorothy Heathcote (1989) is not just to produce a play and have actors in it. Drama when used appropriately can help to expand the awareness of children, enable them to understand reality and science concepts through fantasy, and allow them to see below the surface of actions to their meaning. Drama does not convey information about science to pupils, it helps them to use and see what they already know. Instead of throwing science concepts at students and expecting them to understand straight away, drama enables them to focus on a particular incident, observe a particular experiment, laugh at a particular joke and through the reality of the situation understand the meaning behind the science. It enables pupils to experience events in a physical way helping them to conceptualise and increase their learning.

In George's Marvellous Medicine, the student-teachers used the Roald Dahl idea but adapted it into their own text, to be able to introduce some basic science concepts. For example George mixed vinegar and baking soda to make his medicine, and the mixture erupted with many bubbles flowing out of his flask. He then attempted to solidify his solution by adding corn flour to make goop. His imaginary friends created in the text to give explanations for what was happening, constantly explain the science behind the text. They

explain the food pyramid and what food is good for us to eat, how we can make a paper fly across the room, and why a parachute falls to the ground.

All of this intermingled with chorus songs and dances composed and choreographed by the students themselves under the direction of Mr Bezzina. The colourful set, the narration and humour of the student-teachers all helped to make an enjoyable production for all concerned. This was staged by individuals who were not trained actors but were simply teachers trying their best to find a method which would motivate their pupils to have fun learning science.

The performance itself was held at Stella Maris College Junior School. Two shows were held for the Grade 4 and Grade 5 pupils. The boys packed the hall and with their enthusiasm really energised the student-teachers and enabled them to give a good show.

One student-teacher said: "Today when I was on stage and I saw the students engaged in what was happening I felt really happy and satisfied. I felt that we had achieved our aims".

The aims were certainly achieved and this was visible in the interaction which went on between the student-teachers and the boys at the end of the show. The boys wanted the recipes for making George's medicine. They wanted to know what a solution was and how they could make one. They wanted to know more about Nasa. They wanted to know how to perform all the experiments performed on stage. The excitement and energy was visible all throughout the play.

As one boy pointed out: "The play was so much fun and it helped me learn a lot about science in a fun way. It was also very funny and I liked the bits when grandma grows and George makes his medicine. Now I will go home and try these experiments out".

The most successful aspect was the communication which developed between the student-teachers and the boys. The boys were only seeing these student-teachers for the first time, yet at the end of the show they were stopping them and asking them questions about the play, thanking them for a fun session and a great show and most of all being open and friendly in a positive manner.

This is the essence of good teaching and the first lesson that every beginning teacher must learn. And these student-teachers learnt the lesson in a fun way and at the same time managed to teach something to the boys at Stella Maris too.

Hopefully these student-teachers will carry with them the memory of George's Marvellous Medicine into their classroom practice and enable them to make the teaching of science fun for all their prospective students.

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