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Author(s)	Bastion, Arlene
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# Drama In Moral Education

ARLENE BASTION

Few people have any passion for morality, not even those I suspect, who write about it. It may fascinate, bewilder, confuse, even repel, but it is not I think, enjoyed, or liked. It is possible, then, that moral education, as a vehicle of morality, will also never be involved in any flaming love affair. In short, we have to call a spade a spade, or rather moral education a spade – useful, but dull, necessary, but boring.

A popular obstacle oft cited is moral education's non-examination status. But logically, however, can and do we only enjoy subjects we are tested in? Even with rose-coloured glasses on, I know too that grades count, but I shudder if only grades count. No, I think the problem with moral education, or rather how we got stuck in this cycle of difficult-to-teach-hard-to-study-cycle is the content of morality. We fuss, fret, and frown over its meaning, who, how to, when and why to act morally. Discussion of these issues can be found under LC268 in the library. My article looks into a possible panacea to the moral educator's predicament of how to convey the morass of morality in a palatable manner.

"It's not *what* you say, it's *how* you say it." This jingle might be all right if we are only selling soap, but moral development is too vital to ignore content, or the "what". Thus, what we say also counts, very much so, but moral education programs, and there are many good ones, cannot succeed, if we continue to plod through them with heavy, downtrodden tread of old run-of-the-mill routines. In moral education, our subject and object is serious, but to use sonorous delivery is to produce somnabulistic stupor, something easily enough obtained with a subject like morality. Moral education is important, but taking it seriously does not mean we cannot have fun and enjoy it. An analogy I've often used is the innocuous towfoo. Uncooked, it's white, or worse, off-white, soggy, tasteless, bland, squelchy, unattractive, unedible. But look at it after we've had it peppered, chillied, curried, stuffed, or fried.

In moral education, how we "cook" it is even more important because we're already battling with obstacles of content and

competition from exam subjects. We also face negative attitudes or prejudice carried over from the generations who have suffered through moral education (but still lived to tell everyone else how awful it was). Teachers dread the subject probably because they remember their own classes. Of course there are the lucky ones who just love teaching moral education, and whose students just love them teaching moral education – write and tell me how you do it.

My panacea for the unlucky ones is to try drama. Perhaps most of us will think of drama either as associated with acting, and actors who possess some special skill and talent. These correct conceptions are also useful for moral education, but in moral education, we can highlight other aspects. I think, for example, that in moral education, dramatic techniques and components are extremely useful, and not just drama as the putting up of a play involving actors, etc. Way (1967, p.2) distinguishes between “theatre” referring to “communication between actors and an audience” and “drama” focussing on “experience by the participants”. My use of drama incorporates both aspects – using dramatic strategies and elements to involve students in learning through their interest and enjoyment in a class.

Drama in moral education is thus not another addendum to an overcrowded curriculum. It is not possessing any special skill or aptitude. It is no added pressure, no one more subject we have to learn. It is an approach which simply asks us to use our imagination, a method of teaching and learning, an emphasis on how to enhance and highlight certain elements which teachers already possess (or ought to), and which are already present in class (or ought to be). Drama is when a teacher can transform a towfoo word like “today” into a world of magic and promise. Drama is transporting students from dullsville moral education into exciting venues of enthusiastic interaction and self development. Drama is using our face, voice, body to appeal to students, to arouse and keep their interest.

Dramatic techniques engender interaction (which morality is actually all about if I could interject a personal notion here), and moral education classes in particular exist and succeed on interaction. A main reason for the dread we all face at moral education is the strain of eliciting and maintaining this interaction.

Your face and voice could be your biggest asset in this task. If you sound as exciting as a dial tone, your students will respond to you accordingly. Your face might also be your fortune, but if you register as much emotion as a stone slab, your students will act as such. Be conscious then of the immense range and variety of pitch, tone, emphasis, pace, rhythm, your voice can extend to, and in the same way, the multitude of expressions and emotions your face and eyes can show – and should show. Think of all the ways we can say that other towfoo word – “class.” We can say it sternly, questioningly, threateningly, tiredly, enthusiastically, excitedly. But how often do we? Take a common opening to most lessons: “Today, we are going to ....” delivered with as much enthusiasm as for a bowl of wet noodles. Yet if we took care to emphasize the word “Today”, inject some hidden excitement and wonder in our tone, increasing the pitch on “we”, how much more effective we would be in captivating our pupils. We can do all this in other lessons, but I feel in moral education we have to try harder.

We need this kind of dramatisation because the material we are working with can be pretty heavy going. We don't want to lose our students, however. We want them to be genuinely interested and involved in what's going on, because surely this subject will stand them in best stead in their lives, yet it's probably the subject they think least about. They come to us with preconceived notions that morality and moral education is boring – and so it can be, unless we take some care to perking things up.

Even our bodies can move and be a vehicle of expression and information. Loosen up! Just think, we have ten fingers to use and play with to make a point, emphasize, draw attention to, admonish with, show excitement, etc. So why keep them glued to your sides? If you're angry, physically hunch up your body and glower at them, stand with arms akimbo and legs apart. Act angry. This tells them you are. But it will lessen hostility because they will see the point you are making, which is more effective than your directly scolding or admonishing them with a constant cacophony of shrieking of “Keep Quiet” or “I told you so many times, hiss, hiss . . .”

Pupils cannot interact and respond to stone slabs. Drama helps us go out of ourselves to losing self-consciousness and becoming

ourselves. And this must be the best source and stimulus of any interaction – a person who is herself. If we take this point into pedagogy, the teacher is the focus of attention, and in herself, her own best visual aid, and resource material. She can make or break a lesson by just what she is. She thus has to use everything she has to stimulate, interest, liven, compel, appeal, attract. Try saying “please” in as many different ways as you can think of. Try “hello” in the same way. Try to think of the many kinds of people and the situations which occur in which we will use these words, and how we would change our voices to indicate the change in people and situation. With our face and eyes, try wrinkling your nose, puckering up your lips, frown, lift your eyebrows up and down, bare your teeth, grimace, look as though you just won a million dollars, look as though you just lost it. We seldom think of using our faces and eyes which can and should communicate as much as our voices.

In a moral education class, we want our pupils to be relaxed, open, and communicative. We want them to feel comfortable with us. Dramatic activities and techniques provide us with the “ice-breaker” start we need. By dramatising our speech and actions, we also make students more interested in us, and more interested in the lesson. Doing dramas in itself in the classrooms, such as through prepared scenarios or improvised role-playing increases sensitivity and awareness of the students towards others, provides them with opportunities for reflection upon human behaviour. They can think about the characters and situations they’ve watched, or roles and situations they personally played out. Presentation of a drama is an excellent vehicle for fostering values of cooperation, and consideration of others. It is even better when the teacher can join in.

Discussions, for example, are the basis of a lot of moral education lessons. We want pupils to express themselves and share with us their thoughts and opinions. Many moral education lessons die, however, because discussion dies. Teacher ends up a wreck trying to squeeze out students’ responses. The teacher could, however, prepare a couple of scenarios which illustrate her teaching point. She could either get students to prepare it ahead, or she could get students to devise the scenarios themselves. She could also have improvisations. On this last point, improvisations sometimes work best because of the element of surprise, but they can also bomb if

students are too surprised. Try out and use both ways, just as you ought to try thinking of drama – don't be afraid of or anxious of failure, or underestimate your students abilities – or worse, yourself. This is where acting comes in – act confident and purposeful even if you are nervous. If trying drama for the very first time, for example, be calm, clear, and forceful in your instructions as to what you wish them to do (ACT!). Your students take their cue from you, they mirror you. If you act as though drama and acting out was the most natural thing in the world, they will not feel you are asking them to do something bizarre, and will not feel self-conscious. Perhaps you could start by acting things out for them, then move to acting things out together.

Drama helps develop self confidence, personality, imagination, creativity, communicative abilities, empathy. In teaching respect for persons, I might suggest my students research on some real life events, collect facts and information about them. Students can then use this data to write their own playlets evolving around data, and present it. This kind of activity breaks up monotonous structures and routines. Or with junior classes, make puppets out of toilet rolls, and dramatize lessons using these puppets to either introduce topics, ask questions, prescribe homework, etc. With senior classes, students can manipulate the puppets themselves to act out scenarios. This is a good technique for shy students. Somehow, they feel less self-conscious, because they feel the puppet is a buffer, it's as though the puppet is acting, not them.

Organize a trip with your students to watch a play together (there are many matinee shows). Probe the characters for reasons for their actions, probe the plot for situations which show up the workings of values, or where values might have helped. Question the values of the play. Ask students whether characters had justification for their actions. Even juniors can be led through this kind of questioning, using simple language, and references to their own life as analogies and examples. Naturally with juniors, the play must be comprehensible, but the recent Singapore Youth People's Drama Festival was rich reaping ground for moral education. The fact of organizing a trip for your students is itself an activity for moral education. Of course it is more trouble than saying "Open your textbook," but moral education, or learning how to be moral, is not found between the covers of a textbook. I sometimes wonder if moral

education is not actually an inspirational task – the teacher inspiring students to hold certain values, or be a certain way. Drama fosters good interaction, which is one of the bases for inspiration.

Brain Way (1967) connects education with drama at the point at which both concern themselves with human development. Moral education is a subject and process which focusses specifically on human development. Drama helps persons develop themselves as well as their interaction with others. It helps the teacher by providing activities to stimulate discussion, as well as helping her be more stimulating to pupils. It is also a plausible view that every lesson is a drama in itself. The classroom is the stage, pupils are both actors and audience, pupils are active participants, and teacher is director, generating attention and interest, and involvement. Sometimes, the roles change, but whatever, with drama, there's seldom a dull moment.

This article could only outline the idea of drama as a technique for moral education. Moral education cannot really be imposed upon persons. They have to learn by doing. Drama, also like moral education, is doing, and doing cannot be done on paper.

## Reference

Way, Brian. (1967). *Development Through Drama*. London: Longman