

REFLECTIONS OF DRAMA TEACHER

Flamenco Dance Classes at Gordon Road Girls' School 2009

Background

As a Drama Teacher from a school that provides excellent support of the Arts - Music, Art and Drama -I find that Dance is an area that needs to be addressed. More and more children are becoming less able to involve themselves physically in "playing out" or Role Play. Even in a warm-up routine in Drama Class it is very difficult to get them to activate the trunk of the body. Because of lack of lesson time allotted to the Arts, I earmarked Grade 5 as a year in which, for two Terms (8 - 9 lessons) we would experience Dance Drama. But it became more Drama and less Dance as the lessons progressed.

Aim

I approached Linda Vargas and asked her if she would devise a series of lessons that would teach the girls how to experience and express Feeling and Meaning through Movement. I know Linda to be totally involved and passionate about dance and have witnessed her inspired and inspiring performances and teaching.

Linda agreed to teach eight lessons to 3 groups of Grade 5s (Approx. 75 children) Lessons were held fortnightly and conducted initially in the Hall and then in the Drama Room.

On Reflection

Age and Location: While every age group would benefit from the experience, I feel that Grade 7 would probably be the most rewarding class to teach. But my Grade 5 syllabus structure provides the best opportunity. It would also be preferable for children to attend classes once a week rather than once a fortnight. Location is important as adjacent classes need to be forewarned about the noise level.

Classes and Instruction:

Unfortunately I missed a number of lessons in the Second Term when I was off school, but I witnessed enough to know that I would love to include Lynda Vargas' Flamenco Dance Workshop as an integral part of the Grade 5 Drama year.

The children were both fascinated and enthralled by her lessons.

What They Learned

Skills: The growth in confidence and self-esteem was a joy to watch. Listening and memory skills, control, focus, accuracy, rhythm, beat, pace, co-ordination and expression were just part of the skills they managed to acquire.

Teamwork: Learners were able to experience the bonding power of teamwork as they joined in the stamping and clapping to the rhythm. They could see and hear if they were out of sync. The *loudness* of being *right* reinforced the measure of unity and the joy of achievement - the reward was immediate!

Role Play and Involvement: The more the child was swept along by the beat, the more the beat became the *heartbeat* of the role she began to assume. I saw her slip into another skin as her posture and attitude took on a different shape. All this even before she began to play out the story in a range of expression. Here was the achievement of physical involvement that I had been longing to see.

The adding on of steps into longer sequences challenged their concentration, yet as they kept building on top of what they already knew, it served as a continual affirmation of what they had and could achieve.

Individual expression and Culture: After the basics had been assimilated I watched each little person start, naturally and without prompting, to colour their dance with their own style. I began to understand and appreciate the universality of this dance form. It allows for a freedom of expression that unites yet enables each culture to feel at home.

Communication and Empathy: Where this art form probably surpasses Drama and Music is in its two way conversation between audience and performer. The Flamenco Dancer dictates the pace and the emotive value of the piece. The audience not only clap along in time, but become so totally involved in *matching* the pace and the mood that they too become part of the performance. What a solution to the dangers of passive communication that television and technology has engendered.

Teaching:

Classes were conducted with professional ease, passion and great warmth. I never once heard Linda raise her voice and yet the children followed instructions respectfully and with great joy. It was a very special place - and time.

To start with Linda greeted and got to know each child. She used questions and answers to stimulate and inform. I particularly enjoyed the caring pace at which she taught, somehow managing to scoop up all levels to a point where everyone could understand. Steps and sequences were regularly revised and work consolidated with great care so that no one felt out of their depth. Enthusiasm was rife with children bubbling over with excitement as I led them into each class. A further highlight was the Warm Up. During this period it never failed to amaze me that as soon as the music started and the exercises began, an infectious smile spread over the face of each child. Like a welcoming embrace, the warm-up bonded, focused and settled the class.

I loved learning about the history of Flamenco, the style and technique. I loved seeing the joy and sense of achievement in each learner. I loved the way that they responded - the vast majority did indeed involve themselves physically socially and emotionally in the activity. I know that they thoroughly enjoyed this deeply enriching learning experience because when Linda asked for volunteers to rehearse and perform at her end of year concert - giving up their lunch breaks - 44 of them signed up (This when approx 18 children were away from school- so there may be more)!!

I think a life lesson that I have learnt was when Linda said to the children that they should count the beats for themselves - that she was not going to think for them! (paradigm shift for me !) It made me realize that I do far too much thinking (setting up) on behalf of the learners - not allowing them to think for themselves.

On a personal note: I cannot thank Lynn enough for giving so very generously to us of her talents and her time.

Drama Specialist

Gordon Road Girls School