



Θέατρο & Εκπαίδευση δεσμοί αλληλεγγύης

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Theatre & Education *bonds of solidarity*

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Bonds of solidarity for two and a half millennia

Michael Patterson



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ΔΙΑΒΑΣΤΕ ΤΟ ΑΡΘΡΟ ΠΑΡΑΚΑΤΩ
Read the article below

Το άρθρο αυτό μπορεί να χρησιμοποιηθεί δωρεάν για έρευνα, διδασκαλία και προσωπική μελέτη. Επιτρέπεται η αναδημοσίευση μετά από άδεια του εκδότη.

Bonds of solidarity for two and a half millennia

Michael Patterson

You will no doubt be familiar with Bernard Shaw's famous dictum: "If you can do it, you do it; if you can't, you teach it." I would take this a step further: "If you can teach it, you teach it; if you can't, you teach it to teachers." So my paper begins with a confession. Apart from a few rare occasions when I have taken a drama workshop in a school, I have never had the courage regularly to face a class of pupils. My own drama teaching has been confined to university teaching and to teaching teachers to teach.

So I stand before you admitting to very little expertise in Theatre or Drama in Education in its normally accepted sense. I shall therefore be speaking very much as a layman and am delighted to learn that such plain speaking can be dignified by the term "Atticism", and where better to practise this than in Attica itself? Moreover, perhaps my poverty of experience and my ignorance of the core subject of this conference lend me a certain useful distance. Indeed from my happily uninformed viewpoint it seems to me that the claim of "bonds of solidarity" between Theatre and Education is at best seriously under threat, at worst mere wishful thinking.

Let us be honest: Theatre in Education is all too often regarded as a "fringe" activity. Even well-intentioned educators find it hard to see how they can make room on the timetable to organise the time and the suitable space for drama workshops, to see how Drama or Theatre will fit in the curriculum or indeed how they will find time in their busy schedule to invite in a group of actor/teachers whose contribution will not lead directly to better exam results. While pressure on schools mounts, do we have to accept that this new and "trendy" resource is too great a luxury to indulge in?

This paper wishes to recall that Theatre in Education, far from being new and trendy, has a far-reaching and highly respectable tradition, in fact, over at least two and a half millennia. Nor should it be regarded as a mere fringe activity, for it has been and should remain central to the experience of every educated individual. Above all, I shall argue, our appeal that Drama/Theatre in Education should be afforded a greater presence in schools should not be solely on the basis of the noble and praiseworthy aspirations set out in the "Rationale" of this conference:

Theatre/Drama in education, in its various aspects, as a form of art, as a learning tool and/or as a medium of social intervention looks for the truth, evokes memories and humanity's social struggles and demands, illuminates and examines the present and envisages the future.

No doubt everyone in this room, myself included, would subscribe to this, but would these high-sounding words convince a politician that Theatre in Education is worthy of spending public money on, or even persuade a harassed head teacher to allocate their limited funds to such activities? Are we all perhaps just whistling in the wind? What I hope to argue is that in addition to the unquestioned humanistic and cultural benefits of Theatre in Education, it has been recognised for two and a half millennia how important such a bond is in purely practical terms. Far from whistling in the wind, we should be breathing down the necks of even the most hard-headed politician or the most penny-pinching head teacher that Theatre in Education is not just desirable but actually essential in the schools of today.

When I claim that Theatre in Education has in fact been central to European education for two and a half millennia, I am using the term in an outrageously loose way, which, before you begin to heckle, I immediately concede. But bear with me.

Of course, all that time ago and for succeeding centuries the name was different. It was then known as Rhetoric. Beginning with the Sophists in the fifth century BC, the art of public persuasion was central to the education of every cultivated person at least well into the 19th century. Just like Theatre and Poetry, Rhetoric as practised by an early orator like Gorgias was condemned by that dreary individual Plato for obscuring the truth. It was with the establishment of Aristotle's Lyceum in Athens in 335 BC that Rhetoric became definitively established as a core subject for the educated man. It is significant that Rhetoric gains in importance with the consolidation of democratic thinking in ancient Athens, as witnessed for example in the famous Philippics by Demosthenes beginning in 351 BC, when he encouraged his fellow democratic citizens to resist the tyranny of Philip of Macedon. Rhetoric is only of any use where it is essential to persuade rather than coerce; there is

no room for presenting a good argument when a dictator has already ordered you what to do.

Aristotle is of course also remembered for writing in his usual rather dry fashion the first formulation of the types and methods of Rhetoric in his treatise of the same name. What is noteworthy is that Aristotle regarded Rhetoric as “τέχνη”, a craft or technique not some high-flown philosophical topic. In the classical period Rhetoric, following Aristotle and emulating Demosthenes, flourished wherever public persuasion was an essential element of government, notably with great Roman orators like Cicero and Quintilian.

These were the models of public speaking, which after the Renaissance offered once more the essential tools for an educated individual, for what was the point of learning large amounts of knowledge if one was unable to communicate this understanding to one’s fellows, whether in debate, in the court-room, or more informally to one’s friends?

Some 2000 books on Rhetoric were published between 1400 and 1700, and notable thinkers like St Augustine and Thomas Aquinas wrote about Rhetoric. Shakespeare at his grammar school in Stratford would have taken Rhetoric as one third of the standard syllabus, the so-called “trivium” of Grammar, Logic and Rhetoric, such a self-evident line-up that it eventually led to the adjective “trivial”. This pattern of learning passed down through the centuries until the early twentieth century, and at some of the more old-fashioned schools in the United States one may still find Rhetoric on the syllabus. Elsewhere it has occasionally been swallowed up by a more modern-sounding subject like “Communication Skills.”

Of course, Rhetoric and Theatre are two quite distinct disciplines, since Rhetoric is concerned with expressing one’s own point of view coherently and persuasively, while in Theatre one usually assumes a different persona, even a character with whom one has little sympathy. While learning Rhetoric pupils might well have also engaged in theatrical activity like the boys of St Paul’s School in London who performed major dramas during the Elizabethan period or the Jesuit schoolboys who acted in the major Baroque tragedies. But Rhetoric is clearly not Theatre. Nevertheless, there is considerable overlap, since learning Rhetoric would involve addressing many of the issues familiar to us from theatre practice.

Let us begin with the technical aspects. In order both to deliver a speech successfully and to perform on stage, strong voice projection is necessary. Nowadays even with the amplification of a microphone, good voice control and a varied delivery are essential. Vocal training has always been as essential to the rhetorician as to the actor. As Cicero urged in *De Oratore*:

I would not have the letters drawlingly expressed: I would not have them negligently slubbered over; I would not have words dropped from one in a dry, spiritless manner; I would not have them spoken with puffing and swelling.

This is advice that should be heeded by politicians and actors alike, and indeed one recalls that Hitler had acting lessons and that Margaret Thatcher sought help from a speech coach in order to deepen her voice. The recent film *The King’s Speech* attests to the way in which the demands of public speaking and stage performance coincide.

Similarly, it is important to be able to use gesture effectively both as a speaker and as an actor. As a major handbook (forgive the pun!) of Rhetoric there appeared in 1644 a definitive volume by one John Bulwer, which had the following snappy title: *Chirologia: or the naturall language of the hand. Composed of the speaking motions, and discoursing gestures thereof. Whereunto is added Chironomia: or the art of manuell rhetoricke. Consisting of the naturall expressions, digested by art in the hand, as the chiefest instrument of eloquence.* In this weighty volume Bulwer attempted to catalogue hand gestures, insisting always that they should “flow . . . out of the liquid current of nature.” Especially in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries guides to gestures for actors were also published, and predictably, they followed very closely the lead that had been given by Bulwer. All this now seems very forced and artificial, but one sometimes wishes that television correspondents flapping their hands as they speak might have studied one of these texts.

Another area of convergence between Rhetoric and Theatre is memory. Any of us who have acted have frequently been greeted by a member of the audience, who at a loss to comment on the quality of our performance (or perhaps too polite to do so?) regularly resort to the question: “How do you manage to learn all those lines?” Let us not forget that Memory (Μνημοσύνη) was the mother of the muses, who after several nights of passion with the ever promiscuous Zeus, and after a series of remarkably short pregnancies, gave birth to her nine daughters. For both the public speaker and the actor a good memory is essential; if you can speak entirely without script, notes or teleprompter, you will gain respect, as the otherwise not very charismatic Ed Milliband, the leader of the British Labour Party, showed recently when he achieved this feat while speaking for over an hour at his party conference in October. Of course, for the actor, failure of memory leads to a complete breakdown of the performance and is a source of embarrassment for performer and audience alike.

To support memory, careful rehearsal is vital for both public speaker and for actor, and it is known that both Churchill and Hitler rehearsed their speeches in front of mirrors. The story is told that Churchill's butler overhearing his master speaking loudly in his bath, enquired whether anything was the matter. Churchill snapped back: "I wasn't talking to you. I was addressing the House of Commons."

What is seen here is same need both in Rhetorician and Actor to polish and perfect "performance". Significantly, the same ancient Greek word, used by Aristotle, "*ὑπόκρισις*", can mean both the delivery of a speech and the performance by an actor.

Perhaps more significant than these converging questions of technique are the areas addressed by Rhetoric and Theatre. First, both of these disciplines deal with likelihood rather than certainty. If a public speaker is required merely to share facts and not present an argument, then he or she hardly requires any rhetorical skills. You can put the figures up on your powerpoint presentation and then sit down again. Similarly, if a play is setting out merely to inform the audience of objective fact, it may be a pleasant way to digest this information, but it does not constitute drama, which depends on evaluating choices between varying courses of action. As Arthur Miller wrote in his essay *Tragedy and the Common Man*: "Tragedy, then, is the consequence of a man's total compulsion to evaluate himself justly." It would be hard to find a play, whether tragic or comic, where this observation does not apply, for drama repeatedly invites the audience to debate alternatives and to evaluate the human situation.

Just as Rhetoric can flourish only in a democracy where there is opportunity for debate and for presenting an argument, so too worthwhile theatre that questions the world about us will be encouraged only in a fully democratic society. I doubt very much whether Theatre in Education as we understand it could exist in a dictatorship; only if it were made to reinforce a positive image of the status quo would it be condoned. Significantly, too, it was under Margaret Thatcher that the many admirable and productive Theatre in Education companies in Britain found their funding being withdrawn.

In terms of education, the most important coincidence between Rhetoric and Theatre is that both are primarily concerned with communication. "No man is an island," John Donne reminded us, and as human beings we are committed to sharing our thoughts, feelings and ideas. With the development of social networking there is perhaps a more widespread desire than ever before to communicate with the world at large.

Yet where in our schools do we see the communication skills of pupils being developed? Judging by the drivel on Facebook or the inarticulate grunts of the average teenager, clarity of communication does not appear to be a priority. If education is to equip the young for life, then it is vital that they should be able to express themselves clearly and forcibly and to learn the self-assurance to do so in a public arena.

Politicians are now desperate to cultivate their image; advertisers seek to persuade us to buy their products; people in commerce value the ability to convince others of a course of action. Whether one is seeking to persuade the Troika to extend the time limit on a loan, personally to request a wage rise, or to convince the woman you love that she really should marry you, then it is essential to have learned how to negotiate successfully.

But what is the school experience? Perhaps if you are at a good school, you will have the opportunity to take part in debates or to be given a role in the school play or musical. Perhaps if you have a good teacher, you will be assigned a project and be required to stand in front of the class and deliver a talk to them. But probably most of the time the only time you as a pupil will speak in public is when you put up your hand and answer a question. And if you are very shy or just lazy, you may hardly ever even do that.

Does this mean that Rhetoric should be reintroduced as a core subject, as it had been for centuries? Hardly. The formality of Rhetoric and its close association with the study of the classics has now rendered it unsuitable for re-adoption into the school syllabus. Instead I would urge that it is Drama/Theatre in Education that should pick up the baton of this millennia-old tradition and carry it forward.

Placing Drama/Theatre in Education at the core of the syllabus would again give pupils the training in self-assurance, voice production, use of bodily movement, the exercise of memory, and, above all, practice in public communication, that was once a central part of education. Moreover it would yield three further pedagogic benefits and transferable skills. These were recognised by the so-called British "super-woman" Nicola Horlick, who succeeded both as a top financier and as a mother of six children, when she declared that she preferred to appoint Performing Arts graduates over any others.

The first of these benefits is that Theatre work obliges you to work as a team. Peter Brook in *The Empty Space* pointed out that the work displayed in preparing for a performance by a theatre company, director, actors, back-stage staff alike, was the kind of ideal social co-operation of which political theorists could only dream. There are very few occupations in life where one is not part of a team, required to work alongside oth-

ers with their individual needs, support and annoyances. Once again school and indeed university education fail to address this vital need to learn teamwork, any more incidentally than training in Rhetoric does. Pupils and students may sit together in a class but they are generally given work to complete on their own and are tested in individual examinations. It is normally only in science subjects that co-operation may sometimes be encouraged. Indeed, in the humanities it would probably be regarded as cheating.

Secondly, a drama workshop will frequently encourage invention by using improvisation and the devising of scenes. Once again usually working as a team, a group of pupils will be called upon not to repeat what they have learned from a textbook or from their teacher but to find within their own imaginations material to act out and reflect on. Such a call on personal initiative and self-reliance is yet another skill that is vital for a successful future career.

Thirdly, the pupil who learns theatre practice has a real understanding of deadlines. If you have not quite managed to complete your homework, the teacher may accept your explanation that the dog ate half of it and permit an extension; at worst you will be marked on just half the work, which was interrupted by that important football match on television. However, if you have advertised a theatre performance it has to be ready, even if you do not feel fully prepared. It is simply not possible to step out in front of an audience and announce that they should come back in a couple of days when the show will be ready for them. You go ahead and you do the best you can. In the world of commerce keeping to deadlines is one of the most important lessons that one can learn.

I hope that I have shown that Drama and Theatre in Education, far from being a modern and trendy phenomenon, has in Rhetoric a history almost as long as European civilisation itself. I hope too that I have shown how vital this subject remains if we are to maintain that civilisation, not only because of its essentially humanistic principles but also because it has practical value for the politician and the trade unionist, the manager and the worker, the wife and the husband.

It may seem unwise to emphasise the practical value of any art-form, because art should not have to justify itself in this way. However to argue that Drama/Theatre in Education not only enhances a child's experience at school but is likely to be economically and socially beneficial might just persuade funding institutions that teaching students in and through Theatre is an essential tool of a rounded education.

It may indeed help to reinforce the ancient bonds of solidarity between Theatre and Education.

Michael Patterson is Emeritus Professor MA, DPhil, De Montfort University Leicester, UK. He has taught Theatre at universities in England, Ireland and Wales. Having studied German at Oxford, he began writing about German theatre and has published and contributed to several books on the history of German theatre, on German Expressionism, on Brecht, and on the contemporary theatre scene, including a well received monograph on the director Peter Stein. More recently he has published a work on British political theatre and compiled single-handedly *The Oxford Dictionary of Plays*. In addition to his teaching and research, Patterson has acted in and directed many student productions, including Continental and Irish tours of Shakespeare, intended primarily for schools. He has also conducted workshops, especially for teachers, in the UK, Germany, France, Austria, Italy, Turkey and India.

