

BOOK REVIEW

Assessment in the Drama Classroom: A Culturally Responsive and Student-Centered Approach

Dr Jonathan Jones

New York: Routledge (2024) 138pp.

ISBN: 978-1-003-42833-6 (ebk)

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In an ever-changing educational world, a book on assessment in the drama classroom is timely. The book provides an interesting, and useful, consideration about the role of assessment with explicit links to a culturally responsive approach to curriculum design, pedagogy, and the potential for fluidity in the assessment of drama learning. The inclusion of specific assessment tasks for the reader moves the purpose of the book from one of information and guidance toward a more agentic stance for the reader and this is a commendable attempt by the author to demonstrate the constructivist approach outlined in the book!

Clearly this book is situated predominantly from a US perspective and provides clear thinking about some of the challenges faced in that context. However, there are also some considerations made in relation to the UK context, which are useful. Given the inclusive position of the author, these considerations can easily be linked to global contexts beyond the US and UK.

The theoretical considerations made in chapters one and two provide an interesting stimulus for thinking about assessment in drama, with the inclusion of key theorists, such as Vygotsky, Bruner, Bolton and Heathcote, providing the reader with an accessible understanding of some of the historical developments and theoretical foundations of what drama teachers might teach, how they might teach, and how they might evidence that as part of their practice. Supporting this, the author shares additional links and organisations that would support the early-career drama teacher and more established teacher with their understanding of assessment in a culturally responsive way.

These considerations lay the foundation for thoughts about 'identifying content for the drama classroom'. The exploration of culturally responsive pedagogy alongside the thoughts about more global perspectives on theatre genres, such as Kabuki and Sanskrit Theatre, enable the reader to reconsider the purpose of their curriculum as one that places the diverse nature of their pupils as the centre of their practice. Linking this to 'Theatre Standards and Benchmarks' and demonstrating practical

examples and appropriately challenging questions, enables the reader to re-cognise how a culturally responsive approach to curriculum design and assessment can work in practice.

The chapters exploring diagnostic assessment, formative assessment, and summative assessment provides the reader with a space to not only consider the purpose of these forms of assessment but also to see how these might work in practice. The author makes clear that the relationship between these types of assessment is fundamental for the drama teacher, new or old, particularly in creating learning opportunities for their learners. For example, the section on 'backward planning' serves as both a useful reminder and potentially a practical way to think about assessment for pre-service and early career drama teachers.

The final chapter, premised on the question 'what have we travelled?', cleverly asks the reader to reflect on their own learning from the book and serves as a way for the reader to self-assess their own progress in terms of understanding assessment itself. Interestingly, the author provides a sense of 'harmony' by asking the reader to re-consider how their own assessment can inform teaching and learning in their classroom.

Overall, a useful contribution to the challenging and complex context of assessment in the arts, particularly drama and theatre. The considerations of culturally responsive pedagogy and curriculum also underpin the theme of this book with practical examples, and key questions, giving the book 'practical muscle'!