

Philomena Rorke

USE OF DANCE IN THE CLASSROOM TO RAISE SELF-ESTEEM

(Taped/Edited by Don Pugh)

My project, creative dance to raise self-esteem has been operating five months. My role is as a consultant visiting four primary schools and two high schools each week. I teach students but as a demonstrator for their teachers, with classes running from half an hour to an hour.

Some visits are occur only once when I arrive on invitation. I haven't followed up on them because I haven't had time. What I usually do is a demonstration to the children of my dance method.

The teachers would watch as I showed them how dance works with children. It does work with children in improving their self-concept.

It's another story training teachers because the modelling process seems to threaten them. The problem is not at the high schools where I am viewed as a dance specialist. There I work as a dance specialist as we do straight dance and we are working towards technique.

A very difficult dance class at one high school was chosen deliberately in year 9. It happens to be a Phy Ed class where all the behaviour problems are together. Most of the time three or four of the students are in the contract room or being suspended.

I've tried many things and I don't seem to be getting very far. Then I look back to the week before and we are getting somewhere. There's only four out of 34 now that are consistently misbehaving and they are not the leaders in the group. The leaders are on side completely. These are just four immature little boys who do monkey noises in the background but they will eventually conform because of the power and dynamics of the group.

Teachers are generally unmotivated in learning how to use dance. I did some personal development with teachers but it was discontinued because they couldn't make the after school commitments. They were there for about four weeks and then gradually the phone calls would come in that they couldn't make it.

My object in training teachers is to make them aware that I use a demonstration mode with dance, drama and movement, as a vehicle for building other social skills in children including health education and mental health awareness.

I use dance drama as a vehicle but it's dance as a way to develop self-concept that I'm really interested in. The real interest that I have is to change locus of control of students from being an external one to being an internal one. I want students to be independent and responsible.

When I am working with the teachers it depends on them and their experience whether they perceive me to be working as a dance

instructor or a person who is facilitating self esteem. Unfortunately there seems to be no connection between their perception of what I do and what they have assimilated from Lou Thompson in his school talks on self-esteem.

The teachers see me in two roles. Most see me as a specialist, like an adviser going in and giving kids dance skills. Only a few see me as an instructor for them in skills which they could use to build their children's self-esteem.

The programme only works if teachers buy the self esteem approach and learn to use the methodology, like dance, drama, music, meditation, and creative visualisation. I also encourage teachers to use the concepts of changing locus of control and strategies to discover self and become aware.

In two schools the teachers are taking my skills into the classroom. They model what I am saying, so student learning takes place all week. A school approach to self-esteem helps. Too often teachers see me as a specialist coming in to do their drama for them.

In dissatisfaction I actively sought the support of the P.S.P. people to run me through a process. I looked at what was good about what I did and what was bad, to revise what I am going to do.

I realise that the programme is less successful because I'm doing all of the work with the children and teachers are not able to participate. I think if I had done a better job in presenting what I was doing on paper and making sure that teachers knew what they had to do then there would be more teacher involvement. I say that because I think it is a bit threatening for teachers to teach this way in front of children.

Teachers have stated that they won't do anything in front of me. So with the teachers I feel I am not succeeding at all in communicating, and in giving them the power to be able to take over.

I am succeeding in the fact that kids love dance and teachers want it but they want me to do it for them. They don't see that they have the power to instruct dance for themselves.

I need some support and some clues about how to do that. I need to change my method of operation. I have two half days a week when I am not actually in schools and I am feeling really frustrated, not with the kids but with the teachers.

I see action research as being a process which can systematically implement the change. I want the teachers to participate actively so they can take over. They must not see me as having exclusive access to the skills. They must recognise that they have to get the skills from me and that we work together.

In speaking to my peers I found a shared concern. We as consultants sometimes mask how we relate to teachers because we're really afraid of threatening them and their teaching practices. My personal reaction with a teacher that does nothing, just sits there week in and week out, would be to level and express my feelings to her. I'm not because I can see their fear. But non-participating teachers may know exactly what I think.

A consultant needs to be a catalyst, but I am not feeling myself to be a catalyst, and I need to take a look at that. I don't want to operate "pussy footing" around peoples feelings. It's about time I learned to be honest.

They say that they do try my skills when I am not there. Then I find out that they do it in the classroom seated behind the desk. They lack confidence to go out into an open area and to expose themselves. They don't have the knowledge.

Some teachers won't dress appropriately either, so they won't get dirty. They won't share even though I talk about sharing. They say "Yes I think it's a good idea" but they don't know how to implement the concepts.

Question: But they're aware that what you are doing is helping kids self esteem and self concept?

Well, they think I teach self esteem. They don't realize that it doesn't matter what I do. It's what they do and it will only really have a dramatic impact if we do it together. They see me as doing it for them.

They won't actually come away from the pen and paper or discourse, and involve themselves physically.

I think also that I don't have the same role and that causes discomfort. I don't have the same language, and I have access to different knowledge than they have.

I'd sooner drop drama and dance altogether out of their terminology. Then teachers would no longer feel that they were employing advanced drama specialists. They'd no longer feel that they'd have to produce an advanced drama programme. My lessons are really about behaviour modification and awareness.

"Part of the objective is to encourage the teachers to pick up on developing self concept?"

We'd like them to find out that they can use their own strengths to do it. Self concept develops with dance and drama, and you can see why that's a good vehicle. However, any teacher strength is valid such as teaching netball or athletics or footy or something else. Whatever is your strength, whatever activity you like to enjoy may be the basis for self concept development.