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Welcome to **ATTACK!** a two-page occasional publication. Most of **ATTACK!** will be concerned with the holistic curriculum which, if acted on, is a fundamental way to undermine the present undemocratic education system. Don't be discouraged if opportunities to teach holistically are limited, do your best, be a guardian, and act as a witness to this culturally significant and inspiring way of teaching and learning. **ATTACK!** is a partner to <https://networkkonnet.wordpress.com>

### Drama as part of everyday classroom life

It was 1968-69, I was deputy-principal at Brentwood School and my overwhelming memory is the joy afforded by the adventures in drama I experienced with the children. Having drama (often unplanned and at the prompting of the children) within curriculum areas and at odd moments – as well as being refreshing, can have a remarkable effect on children: provide insight, change perspective and, as the situation following proves – be repairing. I'm thinking of Chris – a boy who was passed on to me as a child who was shy, unsure, and having deep-seated learning difficulties. Chris, after considerable hesitation, was finally inveigled into taking part in some drama, started to warm to it, became involved then, in responding to the stimulus, curled up under his desk in a huge green jumper and stayed there for two school days. Whenever Chris felt moved to answer, which was a development in itself, out came some muffled sounds. Because I didn't mind him being down there, the children didn't mind – so it all seemed the most natural thing in the world. There was one interesting moment though: as Chris rolled to the door to go to the toilet (as had become his practice), the principal lit upon the classroom (a piece of offending playground waste paper, I think I can recall). Taken aback by the rolling green jumper, and finding he was the only one to be so, he fled to his office to recover. On the third day, Chris rose again, so to speak, and there he was, as cheeky as a sparrow sitting at his desk in a Hawaiian shirt. (I was to discover he was a boy in the gifted range, outstanding at maths and in that huge spidery writing fantastically imaginative at writing.)



So our drama days hummed along happily: a prop box was available if the children wanted to put on a drape or hat; glove puppets were in another box; drama task-cards were developed (sometimes selected by the children for use, other times lucky-dipped); charades were played; re-enactment of favourite stories was undertaken (Tom Sawyer whitewashing the fence an all-time favourite though it can slip into over-acting if not controlled); drama was combined with art and writing; an advance organiser was provided (listen carefully and think of something to act) before reading a story to them; the children tried to work out the story-line of something the children had made up then acted; problem-solving occurred with pauses in the acting to discuss the story-line development; plays from the school journal were acted, then the children asked to work out alternative endings; something from school life or the news was acted with the children trying to work out what was happening.

Increasingly, the children were in charge with the drama starting spontaneously. At the beginning, me joining in was a stimulus to children, but before long it was seen as 'using up their turn' and, chastened, I took a back-seat in proceedings. But not in demanding sincerity: 'Why are you cleaning your teeth without first putting toothpaste on your brush?'

I find it difficult to remember drama being much referred to at teachers college (in the mid '50s), nor can I remember much of it being used when I went on sections (practicums). Which rather raises the question: Did drama ever have a heyday? In practice, probably no – but as an ideal it had a valued place as part of

the enthusiasm for integrated learning that abounded in the '50s and '60s. Those were the days when Elwyn Richardson and Sylvia Ashton-Warner were going for it and anything seemed possible, especially in the arts and language. In 1978 Dorothy Heathcote came to New Zealand and stimulated a lot of interest in drama but it still only occurred patchily. *Classroom Drama for Forms 1-4* was published by the Department of Education in the early '70s. The title is something of a misnomer because it can just as comfortably be used by teachers of younger children. In the introduction, *Classroom Drama* sets out exactly the main purpose of this writing: 'The book is intended for the use of classroom teachers who have no special qualifications or training in teaching drama. It is hoped that the approaches suggested will interest them in the work and enable them to make a start. Once underway, they will find many other ideas and approaches will be developed by them and the children together.' My situation exactly and my experience; I only wish the book had been available when I started my drama journey. Any discussion of drama in New Zealand should pay tribute to Sunny Amey who, in various capacities, but particularly as a departmental curriculum drama officer, battled with unfailing good humour to get drama firmly established in classrooms. However, for all her efforts it wasn't and today still isn't, indeed, it is largely absent, with just the odd spot of entrenchment.

But my drama journey didn't start at Brentwood, it started at Maromaku, not too far from Oruaiti as it happens, at a time when Elwyn was at the tail-end of his northern years.

It started when a charade somehow manifested itself before us. The word used was: *blackberry*. A child acted stumbling around in the dark, then burying something.

**The effect on the children was magical. I can still remember the intensity of the children's concentration. I learnt then, strongly reinforced by subsequent experience, that nothing in the classroom transfixes children's attention the way drama does. I knew at that moment that drama was going to be the cornerstone of my teaching. To try and explain why it transfixed their attention is to diminish its transcendence. I didn't need or want any theoretical or education justifications, something magical was going on in their heads, something deeply integrating, something I couldn't match no matter how I performed (is there a touch of envy there?) or anything else in the curriculum. Something very important was happening: end of story.**

I can remember the last time I used drama at Maromaku. I had been taking a social studies topic based on the *School Journal*: 'Jamaica Boy'. Anyone who read the story might anticipate that the culmination of my drama teaching experience at Maromaku would be a complex social interaction, for instance when Henry, the black Jamaican boy was called a 'quashie'. But I had become drama-canny by then. Such an incident could have been dramatised but, on the whole, is not the sort of situation I found worked best – that was found to be everyday ones. And in being everyday very likely possessing considerable learning significance as situations the children could use for comparison. Remember, the drama was occurring within social studies – my 'feeling for' social studies – in which the main aim is establishing a feeling for the people being studied. When Henry came home from school he went to collect the water, chop the wood, stack the wood-burning stove, peel the potatoes, put them in the pot, put some salt in, light the stove, put the pot on the stove, and from time-to-time check the stove and the progress of the cooking.

After reading the story to the children, I said to them, 'What happened?' and listed their responses. 'Let's act going down to collect the water.' 'Well done, some of you remembered to take the pot off the hook.' Then the other parts of the story were acted in the same way. 'Now, who would like to act the whole story in sequence?' A child was selected. 'Hold on, you didn't do anything with the damper.' Sometimes, early on, I provided a voice-over. As usual, the children were absorbed in observing the enactment. 'Now let's do it individually as class.' The children knew the drama rules for such enactments, rules that had been evolved rather than set. One of them being the children could speak if they wanted to, if it seemed natural. With the children not being under any obligation to speak, I found the rule encouraged the children, whether acting or viewing, to concentrate on the sincerity of the emotion implicit in the actions.

I urge you to have drama as an everyday part of your classroom, my main suggestions: Get going; keep your initial intentions uncomplicated; mainly rely on the children for ways to develop drama further; look for opportunities to use drama in the curriculum and throughout the day; insist on children acting with sincerity; but above all – get going.

