School Performances:
A Quest for the Poetics of an Internal Cultural Life at School

Shifra Schonmann¹

Abstract
A school’s cultural life is shaped through a delicate balance between the demands of school theatre as an art form and the educational needs of students as young people. This article examines school plays not from the perspective of “how to”. Rather, it focuses on the conceptual level: exploring the role of the play in the school environment where culture is created. The issues of the culture of the school and the problem of change are central to this study. They are analyzed through a metaphoric view and personal experiences. This approach enables us to critically explore the theatrical work at schools in order to enhance its quality and find ways towards transforming the school play to a form of school art.

Author Affiliation
¹ Professor Emerita, University of Haifa, Israel (shifras@edu.haifa.ac.il).

Biography
Shifra Schonmann is Professor Emerita, holder of Bar-Netzer Chair of Education, Society and Theatre for Young People at the University of Haifa, Israel. The continuing areas of her research are: aesthetics, theatre-drama education, theatre for young people, curriculum, and teacher education. She has published numerous articles as well as books, among them: Theatre as a medium for children and young people: Images and observations (Springer).

She has been a visiting professor at a number of universities, acts as a member of editorial board of several leading journals. She is also a member of INRAE's steering committee.
Opening

In his foreword to Courtney's book, The School Play (1966), Wilson Knight claimed that with the revival of the theatre in the late nineteenth century the tradition of the school play was reborn and has continued to the present day. Although the phrase "the present day" referred to the 1960s, we can claim without any doubt that the phenomenon of the school play has grown, comprised a large scope of different performances and continued to remain relevant. Walking the fine line between the demands of the theatre as an art form in school and the educational needs of the pupils as young people is the main issue according to which the cultural life at school is examined in this article.

Setting the Stage

Significant research and influential discussions took place in the twentieth century and the issue of the cultural life of schools and the possibilities for change are still on the public agenda of any progressive educational system.

In this work, based on my previous one (Schonmann, 2006), I deal with the cultural life at schools in order to explain the foundation upon which the concept of the school play was developed. Furthermore it is tidily connected with main themes, such as conventions and catharsis, criticism, pleasure that emerges from being involved in art and theatre for young people as a school event.

My intention is to point out and elaborate upon the principles that connect education with theatre. The hope is that the young people's experience in drama class and on the school stage may well lead to a deep and lasting source of enjoyment and to ensure that this experience will not endanger the wellbeing of the pupils and their teachers. The cultivation of the emotions, the demand for more self-control, the ability to give and to accept criticism, the ability to develop norms of behaviors as conventions all are only some of the key elements that tie theatre to education and they are all eminent factors in working on school's performances.

I chose this subject because, I believe that the manner in which teachers work with their pupils on a school play has a crucial influence on their pupils' appreciation of professional plays and affects their expectations and behavior as an audience. This article examines school plays not from the perspective of "how to". Rather it focuses on the conceptual level and the significance of the play in the school environment where culture is created.

The Culture of School and the Problem of Change

Culture has been a subject of debate for many years. There is debate concerning negotiation of meaning and significant of symbols (Turner, 1974; 1983). There are plentiful definitions cited in the literature. I chose to mention here Geertz understanding who is still considered as one of the most influential cultural anthropologist. According to Geertz (1973), culture is, in essence, patterns of meaning passed on from generation to generation. The manner of expressing these patterns of meaning may be explicit (by use of symbols), or implicit (by use of beliefs that are accepted without question). Thus culture, if we understand his point, is a collection of suppositions and shared behavior within a particular group. There is a general understanding that culture is expressed through rituals, ceremonies, symbols, and imagery, all of which serve to reinforce and maintain each other.

The culture of schools is also conceptualized in various ways; climate, ethos, or/and oral tradition are some examples of these. Since the 1960s, we can find many works that succeed in explaining the cultural dimension of life in schools (such as: Eisner, 1998; Jackson, 1968; Lieberman & Miller, 1984; McLaren, 1984; Perkins, 1992; Sarason, 1971). Deal and Peterson (1990) presented school culture as comprising a deep sense of principles, faith and tradition, formed throughout the school’s history. Heckman (1993) claimed that the origins of such a culture stem from the shared beliefs of teachers, students, and principals. Taking the perspective of culture as collective life, Terrence (1995) claimed that schools operate more successfully when myths, faith and basic assumptions can freely express themselves in the form of ceremonies and artifacts. Later on, towards the 2000's up to the present day it is still hot debated subject and very elusive one (Finnan, 2000;
Fullan, 1997; Sarason, 1996). We can identify clear inclination towards definitions that are taking in account the big changes in society, the culture of screens and the new innovations of all kinds that have been constantly pressed on schools (Schonmann, 2011; 2015).

The new interpretations reflect the urge to establish a more creative learning environment and focus on ‘core principles’ required in order to accomplish ‘achievements’ with young people.

However, along with Sarason (1971) and many others, I would like to claim that the more schools change the more they stay the same. Life in school is organized according to an established pattern, or units of time, on a daily as well as a yearly basis. The school system is defined by means of specific tasks implemented on a general level of organization, on the level of organizing the classrooms, and organizing groups of learners. Hierarchical relationships between teachers and pupils along with a discipline and learning structure help characterize the school culture.

Let us imagine that researchers from Mars sent a delegation to survey various phenomena on Earth. They land next to a school building and report seeing hundreds of small cloned creatures scurrying everywhere. They also note the presence of a fewer number of larger creatures. At times signals and sounds are heard. In response to these the creatures enter into cubicles, duplicate identical structures, until once again a signal is heard and there is an eruption from the smaller cubicles into larger open areas. The continuous crowding, inside, outside, is ongoing, an unexplained ritual. This is a paraphrase of the description in Sarason’s (1971) book, The Culture of School and the Problem of Change, in which he claims that the "stranger" observing the school perceives an extremely unflattering picture. Many other educational researchers and scholars who study twentieth century schools endorse Sarason’s view. Jackson (1968) argued in his classic book, Life in Classrooms that in most schools crowd, power, and assessment are the dominant feature of life in classrooms. He was right then as unfortunately his observation is accurate for our contemporary days. If we build on this understanding, adding the dimension of permanence, we will have an experience that can be described as follows: A massive number of children enter permanently assigned classrooms with permanent teachers, permanent friends, and permanent curricula operated by these permanent teachers. Although numerous attempts have been made to search for innovations and changes within the educational systems, the culture of schools remained almost the same.

Why is it so? Why is it as Sarason claimed that the more schools change the more they stay the same? This fundamental question is echoed throughout the educational literature without any good reply so far.

To sum up this glimpse into an enormous and complex discussion about school culture and the problem of change, I would like to quote from Sergiovanni (1995):

School culture includes values, symbols, beliefs, and shared meanings of parents, students, teachers, and others conceived as a group or community. Culture governs what is of worth for this group and how members should think, feel, and behave. The "stuff" of culture includes a school’s customs and tradition; historical accounts, stated and unstated understandings, habits, norms, and expectations; common meanings; and shared assumptions. The more understood, accepted, and cohesive the culture of a school, the better able it is to move in concert toward ideals it holds and objectives it wishes to pursue (p. 89).

This is a broad characterization that includes a vast range of ideas relating to what school culture comprises. It is possible to trace the culture of school via cultural indicators (as in stories or heroic characters). At times stories change, but the organized events (such as conventions, assemblies, the opening and closing of the school year, award ceremonies) are unchanging symbols. These traditional events are given more consideration in elementary school than in high school. Traditions such as these provide stability for the pupil.

The internal rhythm of school life is partly determined by the tension created between the school year and school holidays. Events are usually celebrated in school prior to the start of the holiday. A part of the holiday experience relates to preparation for these related events. Ceremonies,
school-plays and various events in school are the artistic and historical realization of the potential for a school's cultural life.

My point is that school performances are a quest for the poetics of an internal cultural life and can serve as a catalyst for meaning in pupils' lives. Along with Courtney I argue that under the right conditions the school play is a powerful device to empower school's culture, but under the wrong conditions it can cause friction more quickly and more powerfully than almost any other activity (Courtney, 1966, p.5). The relationship between the cultures of schools and the school performances pertains to the quality of life at schools and it is a complex and multifaceted relationship as will be examined below.

A Metaphoric View

It seems to me that it would help us to appreciate modern day school reality and the formation of culture if we considered it as a metaphor. Metaphors are created consciously or sub-consciously, and thus present new aspects of life. Our conceptual world is largely metaphorical (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and the use of metaphor is one way to reduce the complex to a more comprehensible state. The essence of metaphor, according to Lakoff and Johnson, is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another (1980, p. 5). Furthermore, they claim that metaphors partially structure our everyday concepts and that this structure is reflected in our literal language (ibid., p. 46).

Research done by Foshay in the 1980s took the approach that structural metaphors are grounded in systematic correlations within our experience. I choose to respond, herewith, to three of Foshay’s metaphors, those who seem inconceivable at first glance and yet after a second thought they help to clear the understanding of the internal cultural life at school.

Foshay (1980) claims that those who perceive a child as a "tabula rasa", as a blank page upon which the teacher may write what he wishes, are those who position the child as slave. It seems abrasive, violent and inappropriate metaphor. However, odd as it may sound, ponder for a moment the array of reinforcements a teacher gives a child. For example: "Wonderful, Dana, your writing is lovely", "Very nice, Oliver, good answer", "No, Valerie, you cannot continue", and other positive or negative reactions such as these in effect create a pupil who is dependent on the teacher. A pupil needs to receive legitimacy for everything s/he does, thinks, or says: a pupil is conditioned via praise, or lack of praise as delegated by the teacher. From this perspective, a pupil metaphorically can be considered as a "slave". Children tolerate this type of violence as part of "the education game" and, because they do acquiesce, they are thus "enslaved".

The second metaphor that deserves attention is the child as enemy. According to this metaphor the child is perceived as an enemy to be controlled. At first glance, this notion may seem far-fetched. Nowadays with the abundance of new and innovative methods of cooperation and teamwork, the needs of the children are at the center of the stage.

The response could be that it is not far-fetched by any means. The most common expressions uttered by teachers in the teachers' lounge include, "Today I controlled the class" or "Today I could not control them" or "I conquered their spirit/mood", or "That is the goal", "That is the purpose", "The strategy of lesson planning", "My tactics in the lesson." In many teaching seminars "innovative teaching strategies" and "tactics" are taught. With this particular conceptual vocabulary (control, conquer, tactics, and strategies) it seems as if there is almost no other reading but to understand the subliminal message: 'we are in war'. Thus, a culture of struggle is developing in which the way we speak affects our deeds as we have learnt from Lakoff and Johnson.

The child as chameleon is the third metaphor I would like to mention in this context, in which Foshay explains that like a chameleon that receives its color from its immediate environment, a child also has the ability to adapt himself and accept the controlling circumstances. In the 1980s, when I first read Foshay’s article, I thought to myself that this must be a highly unrealistic and imaginative metaphor. After a second thought I believe that it is an accurate one. Consider a pupil who every forty five minutes needs to replace his/her "tape", and shift from mathematics to language, or from
geography to Bible and also to replace "the teacher’s tape." A pupil is forced to get into the habit of
switching quickly and repeatedly from math, to physics, to literature, to recess, until he reaches a state
of utter exhaustion. The point to be grasped is that the child is sensitive to the many fluctuations
within the learning environment and because s/he is unable to cope with the pressure and speed of
these endless fluctuations s/he simply learns to protect him/herself and develops camouflage-type
methods, like the chameleon does in its struggle to survive.

Reliance on metaphor takes into account the limits of metaphor. The way it focuses the
attention on specific elements while ignoring important others may distort the topic or the situation
under discussion and as a result the general picture received is one of extreme exaggeration. However,
a metaphor is perceived as characteristic of human thought and behavior. The picture does not reflect
reality in a simple manner but rather aids in constructing judgmental attitudes in relation to the
complex and multifaceted phenomenon that is being described, the internal cultural life at school.

My argument here is that the relationship between the culture of schools and the school
performances when examined via the lenses of metaphors can reflect the complex and the
multifaceted relationship between them as will be examined below, in the Standing Tall school
performance example.

**Schools as a textual site**

Like Highet, as early as 1951, as well as Eisner (2002) and Greene (2001), I believe that
education has elements of art. A definition of education, according to Highet (1951), follows:

> Teaching is not like including a chemical reaction; it is much more like painting a picture
> or composing a piece of music, or on a lower level, like planting a garden or writing a
> friendly letter. You must throw your heart into it - you must realize that it cannot all be
done by formulas, or you spoil your work, and your pupils, and yourself. (p. viii).

I suggest to view schools as a textual site when creating a new internal syntactic entity.
Transforming one’s emotional and conceptual viewpoint toward schools is the basis for all change.
Perceiving school as a textual site, the learner can be exposed to various forms of knowledge, such as:
moral, aesthetic, scientific, narrative, contemplation and phenomenological knowledge (Gordon,
1988; Smith, 1991). A person requires all types of knowledge in order to react with critical thinking to
express his/her emotions. By means of various types of knowledge the learner develops greater
conceptual awareness of his/her thoughts, emotions, and actions. Furthermore, s/he is in possession of
the ability to experience events more fully and to enjoy them. Enjoyment, a long disregarded concept
in education, must be restored to the center of educational thought and function.

Education should be perceived as a process of exposing the student to knowledge in order to
create knowledge-ability, thus achieving the enjoyment of knowing, creating wisdom.

My argument here is that school performances can serve as one of the main roads to obtain
such perception of education.

Based on the metaphoric view and the question of the desired education that I have presented, I
will now examine one instance of school performance in an attempt to understand the suitability of
the described above, making an effort to connect theatre to education.

**Standing Tall: School performance and the question of its healing powers**

There are many types of school plays. The following example is taken from the John Meltzer
Charrette School in New York City where I was invited to see a performance on May 24, 2002. The
name of the play was Standing Tall. It was created and written by Robert Landy, directed by Damaris
Webb, and based on the stories and the work of Rachel Croyle's fourth and fifth grade class. The
playbill tells about Rachel: "She had been a classroom teacher for three days when she walked
through the red doors of Public School (PS3) on the morning of September 11."

Schonmann, 2016
Project was created to provide meaningful arts programs for schools identified as being the most directly affected by the events and the aftermath of September 11, 2001.

It is now September 11, 2015 when I am writing this study, and based on my detailed account in Schonmann (2006, pp. 169-193) I can still recall that experience by which I want to expose a principle understanding as follows:

Thirty-one fourth and fifth graders, from the school witnessed the terrifying attack on the World Trade Center outside their classroom window on their fourth day of school. The project, Standing Tall, was intended as a response to this. The goal of the project was to help restore a sense of balance to the children's life and to discover a way to transform their fear into hope via the healing power of storytelling and drama. The developmental stage included guided storytelling and composition work through games and role playing; activities that provided the material from which Robert Landy wrote the script. Landy, a professor of Educational Theatre and Drama Therapy at New York University, is best known for the books, articles and plays in the fields of educational drama, theatre, drama therapy, and various related topics.

The adults in the program confronted the question: In what way would drama aid in dealing with the fear and the anger the children had experienced? The play was designed in episodes. The first presented Osama Bin Laden; the idea was to demystify the man. Then came a piece about heroes. They were the simple people in the streets, the firemen, and the policemen. The scenes were very life like and true to the way the children originally told their stories.

Thirty-one children were on the stage for approximately forty minutes, relating, singing, and presenting their experiences. An adult teacher was on the stage with them, acting along in his role as narrator. I thought it was wonderful that an adult took part on stage, as the play dealt with frightening reality and was full of recent hard memories. An adult on stage was a kind of support.

After the play ended, Robert Landy thanked the teacher and the children. He named every single child by name, which I thought was a warm tribute. Each child received a rose from the teacher and there was a spirit of goodness, a friendly atmosphere in the air. Landy explained that the performance was not the important thing - the significance lay in the process the children underwent.

Up to this point I was fascinated, I was drawn emotionally into the performance as all in the audience. All went so well, so professional artistically presented. However a thread of undefined clamor disturbed me, I deed not feel comfortable.

It was only after the play, it was only later when Landy began to talk to the children and in that conversation, after the play, I suddenly understood something that I had felt while observing the performance but could not express earlier. In the discussion the children were lively and natural. They were emotional and appealing. They spoke from their hearts; whereas in the play they had merely uttered the words that were written for them in the script. On stage they were like "miniature adults", like "slaves" who had to justify the adults’ expectations for a good performance, they were acting like "machines" they were "controlled and behaved". However, during the discussion they were lucid, speaking clearly and coherently. To the question: "How you could learn such a long monologue by heart?" came the simple and honest answer: "I had to: it was homework". To the question: "How did you agree to play Osama Bin Laden?" the answer was: "I did not want to, but I was convinced by the teacher who promised me another good part as well." Slowly, through the course of the discussion, I realized that the event of a school play failed to achieve the joyfulness expected in being involved in a creative process. It is one thing to work with children with the help of art, in this case with theatre for therapeutic purposes, and it is something else to work on a performance as a school play intended to be performed before audiences from outside the school. The children did not "play" their roles; they merely recited the words that were modified for them. Like "chameleons", to use once more one of Foshay's metaphors (1980), they were able to change roles, attitudes, and mood as they were trained to do. The fact that the play was recorded by a TV crew gave the performance predominance over the process, and it is perhaps only one more attribute of the adults' will, to show publicly the result of the hard work.
When a school play is made for therapeutic purposes it should remain in the private yard of the children rather than be placed in the public eye, "enslaving" children to activate "machine" like behavior or "chameleon" maneuvers. At the same talk, I have to point out that through the process the young pupils could gain a basic understanding how theatre operates. Desirable aims were addressed by the very fact that they could play with the conventions of "as if," being Osama Bin Laden, the fact that they could play the terrorists and not only the victims, and that a thorough catharsis could be achieved under the guidance of an expert psycho-dramatist such as Landy.

The Standing Tall story, encapsulates what not many colleagues think and feel about school performance, but it discloses my concern of what we might endanger.

The problematic position of school performances

We should ask ourselves in what ways school performances can cultivate the love for theatre and the development of mutual relation between theatre and education?

The laboratory for research in drama& theatre education of Haifa University conducted an analysis of 52 questionnaires completed by teachers from eight schools (elementary, junior and senior high schools) in various cities in Israel. It was in 2006 (a detailed account can be found in Schonmann, 2006, pp. 169-193), since then a constant interviews with teachers and pre-service teachers are being conducted by the laboratory's students which give us the following picture of school performances and their position in schools in Israel.

The analysis indicates that most of the teachers participated in one stage or another of the preparation of a school play. A large majority of them declared that there was no need for authorization from the principal regarding the contents of the performances. This implies that the teachers who organize are usually free to carry out their plans as they desire. The criteria guiding the teachers include: personal taste, common sense, previous personal experience, intuition, ideas from experienced teachers, and school tradition. Apparently, the majority of teachers received no training to prepare a school play. Furthermore, some may have harbored hostile feelings in regard to the project, which was not in their field of expertise. These teachers claimed they did not enjoy working on performances, but since these were a requirement of the school they accepted the responsibility against their wishes.

Teachers regard the issue of sharing equally with other teachers in the burden of carrying out the production of a school play as more important than achieving artistic and aesthetic quality in the performance. Typically there is no financial or other reward for a teacher responsible for the school play. The Ministry of Education and the school management consider preparing such performances to be an expected part of a teacher’s responsibility. Teachers are aware that they can find a reservoir of plans for ceremonies and scripts for school plays done in the past. However, most teachers choose to create a plan of their own rather than rely on one produced earlier, suggesting that in spite of the difficulties they perceive their task as a challenge.

Many of the teachers stated that the pupils who would participate in an event are chosen according to strict criteria: acting skills, dancing ability, and singing talent, self-assurance and the ability to feel comfortable performing in front of an audience, the ability to express oneself well and use good diction, good vocal ability, and demonstrate a serious attitude toward the role received. Only a small number of teachers made it clear that the choice of pupils who would participate depended on the desire for weaker pupils to take part as well, they were not concerned about the possible damage to the artistic-aesthetic component by offering roles to weaker pupils in order to help them attain a more positive status in the culture of the school.

School plays receive special status and the pupils acting in them are paid more attention, similar to those participating in the school’s sports team.

The role of the school performance in school life is highly appreciated, whereas the status of the arts in schools' curricula is marginal. Theatre as an art discipline is still peripheral to the core academic curriculum, yet, as Bresler, Wasser and Hertzog (1997) claim:
the major moments at which the entire school comes together as a whole (including such instances as holiday programmes, presentations of 'other culture', sport or for recognition of academic honours, and assemblies on drug awareness), often feature performances of the arts (p.88).

School performance as a meaningful aspect of "the actual" of school life should be explored not only via the lenses of cultural life at schools but also via the personal experiences of students. The survey research mentioned that I have conducted through the years since the 2006's found contrasts between the teachers and their pupils in terms of perceptions of and interests in the school play. Whereas the teachers and the alumni view the school play as being the cornerstone of the cultural fabric of the school, today’s pupils, especially the younger ones, tend to emphasize only the personal experience of being involved in the school play and how it impacts their social image. The rehearsals are time-consuming and are held during regular school hours. This arrangement causes pupils to "miss" lessons. Teachers who are not included in the preparations are annoyed by the fact that their lessons are "ruined" because the pupils are taken out of class for rehearsals and lessons are subsequently cancelled. The process of preparing for a school play occurs amidst continual struggle and pressure, and often more severe incidents occur between the teachers and pupils and others involved. Video film taken during this research testifies to the fact that there are numerous incidents of considerable anger and reprimands of the pupil’s behavior resulting in punishment.

In addition, the lack of financial support from school management exacerbates the many existing problems. It is extremely difficult to acquire various accessories, props, proper lighting, and audio equipment due to the lack of a reasonable budget. Technical and logistical constraints are an added problem. Most schools do not have an auditorium and as a result the gymnasium or schoolyard becomes the location for the play; such places are usually unsuitable. Problems regarding professional amplification systems, proper stage arrangements, and suitable seating are additional difficulties that require the kind of sizeable budget that typically is not available. Teachers claim that the tradition of an annual celebration results in recurring problems. The teacher is forced into "a war of demands" to obtain success for the play. Out of frustration the teacher eventually declares never to take part in a play in the future, even though s/he recognizes its worth.

It became clear that on the overt statement level the attitude toward ceremonies, school plays and other performances is guided by the significance of cultural principles, preserving traditional values, and expressions of patriotism and unity. Everyone is convinced that celebrations are necessary. In practice, however, the main emphasis is on organization, budget constraints, and solving problems of pupils’ behavior.

School play as a form of school art

There is no unique nature to a school play and they may vary greatly according to the approach of a particular school, the context in which the children live, whether or not theatre is included in the school curriculum and, basically, whether there is among the teachers a colleague who is "obsessed with theatre". A great deal of tact and respect is necessary for the pupil who is performing, for the pupil who contributes to the overall success of the play, as well as those pupils who are observers only (Schonmann, 1996). Tact and respect are elements that are always necessary when working with pupils; however, in school plays this is even more so as there is always the fear of losing the spontaneity and pleasure in performing due to feeling threatened by appearing on stage.

It is in this context that a clear point has to be made: drama studied in classrooms is different from drama intended for a school play. It is not only the process versus product that it is at stake, but as Barnfield noted (1968):

No child should be forced to appear in a school production...the school play production, which should be looked upon as theatre, must come from the genuine, free interest of teacher and student alike. It should be a natural development of enthusiasm (p. 198).

We can clearly see the warning signs in the experiences described in this chapter.
However, there is a general understanding that in being involved in a school play production the child would be able to learn the interplay between form and content, the child would be attuned to theatrical conventions and their essence, and the child would appreciate what makes a "good" audience and what makes a "good" theatre, the value of applause, and other sorts of appreciation. Furthermore, advantages claimed for the school play include the following: "Interdisciplinary co-operation"; "Contact with parents and other children" (Seely, 1976, p. 103); or: "Demonstrating the creative life of the school"; "The school play can intrigue every part of the school life as no one other activity can" (Courtney, 1966, p. 1 and 5), or: "Heightens the group's sense of responsibility and all that entails, both individually and collectively" (p.5.).

All these and similar assertions are essential in creating the foundation for the theatrical experience of the school play. Yet it is not enough to stress the social and the pedagogical dimensions. In order for the school play to be a crucial component in the cultural life of the school and in exposing children to the theatre as an art form, it should find ways to create what Bresler (2002) calls "child art" within "school art." Bresler examined arts in schools and came to define school art as a hybrid genre. She asserts that school art differs significantly from art found in what she calls Non-school locations that provide different circumstances and conditions for the production and appreciation of art. Thus, school art is a blend of educational and artistic expectations, where the agenda of schools and their expectations seems to be dominant (2002, p. 182).

What I found most interesting in her work is the theoretical differentiation between four art types in school culture: child craft, child art, fine art and art for children. Bresler concludes,

All types ended up emphasizing socialization into following directions and routinized processes and products, rather than leading towards moments of insight and intensification. With a few exceptions, none of the school art types exemplified creativity, ownership and caring (p. 182).

Although Bresler meant only in the context of visual art, her perception can help in making logical implications to a school play. The main idea developed in this chapter goes hand in hand with her findings. We can conclude that in order to develop the artistic phenomenon of the school play as having a central role in the culture of the schools and in enhancing the children's ability to enjoy theatre performances out of school, it is necessary to empower the school arts with intellectual and creative ways of working while increasing the students ownership of their work and supplying them with adequate time to develop real processes. In this respect, drama/theatre education can play a central role by constantly developing the three main interrelated orientations in the field: the artistic-aesthetic, the pedagogical-educational, and the sociological-cultural.

Epilogue: Where does that leave us?

This chapter provides a basis for considering where we are with respect to the role performances play in school culture. School performances have often been praised and rarely criticized as problematic. At the heart of my stance lies a quest for the poetics of an internal cultural life at school, understanding that school culture is a dynamic entity; it is constantly being constructed. The approach of this study enables us to critically explore the theatrical work at schools in order to enhance its quality and find ways towards transforming the school play to a form of school art. The school play, when it rises above "frill" and mere "showing off" and gets to the essence of artistic experience, could bring pleasure to children's life and enable them to participate in building the culture of their schools. Elaborating on this encouraging understanding is a concern of a further examination.
References


