

Muriel Gold.

THE FICTIONAL FAMILY: IN DRAMA, EDUCATION, AND GROUP WORK. (1991)

Springfield:IL., Charles C. Thomas, 262 pp.

Muriel Gold has written a clear, practical guide to working with students in theater. The emphasis of the book is on experiential training. Its twenty chapters are an in-depth explication of the organization, growth, and development of a university drama course, with a judicious selection of illustrations.

After an introductory overview of the "Fictional Family" strategy, each of the nineteen remaining chapters is devoted to written accounts of live drama course sessions. The book reflects that the author has an acute understanding of and sensitivity toward a wide variety of styles and strategies for the teaching of drama. Her description of drama management is the practical application of a comprehensive humanistic view in drama training. One has the impression that she sees the learning of drama as an aspect of living, and views performance as a way of developing strengths, suppressing or removing blocking symptoms, and discovering skills that facilitate living. She goes deeply into experiential learning and expects students to change; her teaching philosophy is unorthodox and humane, yet pragmatic.

This book may be called an integrative or eclectic approach to teaching, since she advocates experimentation with different instructional techniques and styles, rather than rigid adherence to one specific, favored theory. The author has developed her conception of teaching drama in a way that is based upon the general systems theory, including conceptual contributions and techniques of Gestalt, psychodrama, the theory of communication, and guided imagination. Despite the diversity of sources, she manages to convey a consistent version of her style of teaching.

The richness of the students' experiences and comments and description of specific teaching strategies, as well as an unfailing belief in the human capacity for growth make this book useful for any professional, especially drama teachers. Its relevance for teachers of drama is specifically its potential to show how insights gained through acting experience can be extended to understanding daily events, and can be used to educate others.

Muriel Gold, in this book, supports the basic idea that in family groups, all members influence and are influenced by every other member, creating a system that has properties of its own. In this sense, family is a unique system. Thus, she is very sensitive to the impact that many group events, teacher techniques, and student participation have on the functioning of the entire group performance. This perspective represents a consid-

erable advance over the heavy emphasis given in many instructional writings on an interpersonal point of view, which pays relatively little attention to the dynamics of the group performance, and its effect on individual members.

The only drawback to this book is that it may induce drama teachers and students with little experience and training to misuse these techniques. Even though Ms. Gold suggests that they have to be adapted to specific situations, she neglects to say that to apply these techniques one must have adequate training. It is hoped that the drama instructor who uses these techniques is very aware of their risks and will be able to develop awareness in their students. A weakness of the author's approach is the lack of a clearly established point on the principles of confidentiality and professional responsibility. As one that has been trained and who has worked with these principles and these types of techniques in education, and family, couple and group therapy, I do have some concerns about their applications.

To summarize, despite my reservations regarding the clinical risks, the book reads well and is didactic, yet entertaining. It leaves the reader with a great respect for the author and her dedication and motivation to make a difference in her drama students' lives. The authors' model or strategy, "The Fictional Family," is an acronym for trust, autonomy, closeness, interdependence, and closure, presented in a sequential way. I recommend this book to trained drama teachers who would like to use it as an experiential approach to learning.

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Roger I. Simon

**TOWARDS A LANGUAGE OF HOPE AND POSSIBILITY:
TEACHING AGAINST THE GRAIN.**

Toronto: OISE Press, 1992, 172 pp.

This is one of the latest books in the Critical Studies in Education and Culture Series. It is the third time that Simon appears as an author in the series. On the two other occasions, he first appears as a co-editor (with Henry A. Giroux) of a volume entitled *Popular Culture, Schooling and Everyday Life* (1989) and then as co-author (with Don Dippe and Arlene Schenke) of *Learning Work: A Critical Pedagogy of Work Education* (1991). This time, though, he is sole author of the text at hand. Roger I. Simon is regarded as an important figure within the Critical Pedagogy movement