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Drama education and improvisation as a resource of teacher student's creativity

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Abstract

Problem Statement: 1) How should we prepare teachers to teach creatively? 2) Can drama and improvisation develop the interaction skills of teacher students in teacher education?

Purpose of Study: One of the most difficult skills for teachers to acquire is how to move away from structured routines and lead disciplined improvisation in education where the students partially guide the direction of the class. Teacher students need routines, but they also need to learn how to flexibly apply them.

According to our hypothesis, drama and improvisation can stimulate creativity and enjoyment in educational processes – both for teachers and students. Both drama work and improvisational exercises can be effective in increasing creativity. Drama exercises can often be artificial and synthetic (fictional) but even as such they are pieces of our cultural reality.

Research Methods: This article is based on the examination of different reviews from drama education, philosophy of education. We have examined different reviews from drama education, philosophy of education. We have used drama and improvisation as teaching methods in teacher education.

Findings: The preliminary studies show, that mastering the ability to lead interactive and creative teaching is a difficult challenge for teacher students even though it is part of their teacher education. The recurring tension between scripted teaching and creative teaching is a manifestation of deeper, competing conceptions of teaching: in teacher education programmes we have noticed that teacher students find it difficult to move away from scripted teaching.

Conclusions: According to our research good teaching is based on confidence, rich interaction and creative passion, which can be taught through drama and improvisational exercises such as verbal spontaneity games, role playing, and physical movement. Drama work and improvisational exercises also train our interaction skills. Training can be done through activities that develop teaching skills, new ideas and thoughts about teaching and deeper interaction skills and that are pleasurable. By training our interaction skills we have new experiences using our sense organs. These can reshape our mental pictures and representations of reality – often in a creative way.

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1. Introduction

One of the most difficult skills for future teachers is learning how to move away from structured routines and lead disciplined improvisation in education where the students partially guide the direction of the class (Sawyer, 2004, 12). Teacher students need routines, but they also need to learn how to flexibly apply them. According to our hypotheses, drama and improvisation skills can stimulate creativity and enjoyment in educational processes for teacher students (see Howard-Jones, Winfield and Crimmins, 2008). Many studies support the use of drama in education as a means of personal and social development as well as the development of self-concept, self-discrepancy and a role-taking ability in pupils (Cooper 2010; Catterall 2009; Wright 2006; Toivanen 2002; Gallaher 2001). By training our creative teaching skills with drama, we have new experiences and through them we can reshape our mental pictures and representations of reality. Howard-Jones et al. (2008, 199-200) highlighted in their study that even a short drama intervention helps trainee teachers show progression in their attention to and understanding of creative cognition in the classroom.

Drama or improvisation can transfer creativity and interaction skills in educational processes – both for teachers and students. Drama can be artificial and synthetic (fictional) but even as it is a part of our cultural reality. This article is based on the examination of different reviews from education, drama and on two preliminary studies. In the first study, Ruismäki and Juvonen (2008) created and tested a model which includes teachers, and art educators, job satisfaction, meaningfulness of work and work enjoyment, in the second Toivanen, Rantala and Ruismäki, (2008) examined young primary school teachers' work as drama educators.

2. The challenge of creative teaching

In the history of education different art subjects have been understood as helping to develop human creativity (Gardner 1983; 1993; 1995; 2006). In spite of this a continuous struggle is seen in curriculums between creative art education and structured teaching. One way to solve this problem has been illustrated by Keith Sawyer (2004; 2006; 2009), who has discussed scripted (structured) and creative teaching.

Sawyer criticizes traditional scripted teaching. According to him, this kind of teaching is too heavily based on instructionism, where knowledge is only a collection of static facts and procedures which teachers should put into students' heads. This type of school, which is common today, was designed during the first half of the 20th century as an answer to the challenges of the industrial economy. (Sawyer, 2006, 1.)

An alternative to scripted schooling is creative teaching, which aims for deeper conceptual understanding by preparing students to create new knowledge. The teacher's role is more to facilitate than to teach in a traditional way. The curriculum of creative teaching consists of non-static facts, which are integrated into contextualized knowledge from culture. Creative learning is also built on the learner's (both the teacher's and the student's) prior knowledge, and this constructivism leads to a classroom where the core is founded on collaborative conversations. The creative element of constructivist learning is based on the fact that classroom conversations are improvisational. This means that the teacher and the students build knowledge together, and unexpected insights emerge. These dimensions show that creative teaching is suitable for postmodern knowledge society (Sawyer, 2006; 2009.)

One of the most interesting features in Sawyer's pedagogy is that he stresses the function of improvisation in deeper learning. According to our assumptions, Sawyer's thoughts are a starting point for a reform of schooling systems. For instance, in every culture in the world, normally developed young children will role play. They will do this because their brains need the opportunity to imagine and because they enjoy role playing! Because the brain needs to pretend, the activity is perceived as enjoyable. So, dramatic play and drama are naturally highly motivating for young children.

Although school gives very limited opportunities to role play, even pupils' brains are still wired to learn through actively reliving and imagining experiences. Because children spent most of their waking hours at school, it is essential that they do not lose the opportunity for spontaneous and imaginative play, both alone and with others. Keith Johnstone (1985) has stressed that spontaneity is an important capacity in all kinds of creativity which can be developed by improvisation. Ingrid Morken argues that an important function of improvisation is that it helps to reveal issues, which happens during improvisation. According to Viola Spolin (1974), the nucleus of improvisation is intuitive activity, which helps in solving real life problems. For begin teachers not to use children's natural facility to improvise and think creatively once they begin teaching would seem foolish, and could even be construed as a form of deprivation (cf. Sawyer, 2004; 2006). However this can happen. Although Finland has scored number one according to the PISA, the results from measures of thriving in school have been on the low end of the scale (Konu, Lintonen, & Rimpelä, 2002; Konu & Lintonen, 2005).

One reason for these problems can be that the curriculums are too standardised. For instance in the US standards-obsessed schools have been discussed recently, and one key to solving this problem has suggested to be facilitating children in handling the vast catalog of information. The problem has considered quite serious because there is no concerted effort to develop the creativity of all children in schools. On the contrary, which child develops creativity is left to chance. Now the results are coming up: Kyung Hee Kim at the College of William & Mary discovered may 2010 that creativity scores had been steadily rising, just like IQ scores, until 1990. After that, creativity scores have gone downward. According to Kim the decrease is very clear and very significant. Many researchers in the US claim that creativity should be taken out of the art class and put into the homeroom of the curriculums. It has namely been noticed that successful creative programmes alternate through several stages of maximum divergent thinking with bouts of intense convergent thinking: "Creativity isn't about freedom from concrete facts. Rather, fact-finding and deep research are vital stages in the creative process. Scholars argue that current curriculum standards can still be met, if taught in a different way. (...) Creativity can be taught." (Bronson & Merryman, 2010, 1-2.)

Improvisation in teaching cannot be done in a *laissez-faire* manner, but should be well planned. According to Sawyer, improvisation can lead to a deeper understanding if it is disciplined. This means that when improvisational teaching occurs "within broad structures and framework it can cause the most effective classroom interaction which balances structure and script with flexibility and improvisation." (Sawyer, 2004, 13.) Sawyer's arguments arise from the theories of neo-Piagetian social constructivists and Vygotskian-inspired socioculturalists. The focus of both is on how knowledge is learned in and by groups. In both theories "effective teaching must be improvisational, because if the classroom is scripted and directed by the teacher, the students cannot co-construct their own knowledge." (ibid., 14.)

3. Drama and improvisation in teacher education

Drama education is an activity in which teacher students invent and enact dramatic situations for themselves rather than for an outside audience. This activity, perhaps most widely known as drama education, has also been called classroom drama (Bolton, 1992, 1998, 2007; Neelands, 2008). No matter which term is used, the drama we are concerned with in teacher education is spontaneously generated by the participants, who perform the dual tasks of composing and enacting their parts as the drama processes. Within drama lessons we may use drama strategies (freeze-frames, teacher in role etc.), drama conventions (forum theatre, playback theatre) or devise short pieces of theatre for each other as part of the drama to help us communicate our understandings in an aesthetic way to ourselves and our fellow participants (Rasmussen 2010; Booth, Neelands & Goode, 2000; Neelands, 1984, 2008). Drama covers a wide area of techniques incorporating physical movement, vocal action, and mental concentration, which traditional classrooms have lacked in quantity and quality in the past. The goals of drama and improvisation as teaching methods in teacher education are

- To increase awareness of the teacher student's self (mind, body and voice) and others (collaboration and empathy);
- To increase the interaction skills of teacher students; to improve clarity and creativity in the communication of verbal and nonverbal ideas;
- To increase the understanding of human behaviour, motivation and diversity in educational situations.

We believe that drama and improvisation can improve the quality of learning and the quality of life in teacher education because drama can be used to extend the worldview of the human being and deal with difficult situations

in a safe environment while analysing them together (see *Bowell. P., Heap. B. 2010; Dickinson & Neelands, 2006; Ferguson, Meyer & Jeanchild, 1992; Colantonio, Kontos, Gilbert, Rossiter, Gray & Keightley, 2008; Way 1973*). Teacher students gain experience in various roles (teachers, parents, pupils etc.) that explore human tensions and conflicts with drama conventions and techniques. Drama and improvisation has both an emotional and intellectual impact on the participants. It holds up a mirror for us to examine ourselves and deepens our understanding of human motivation and behaviour. It broadens our perspective through stories that portray life from different points of view (*Howard-Jones, Winfield and Crimmins, 2008, 187 – 200*).

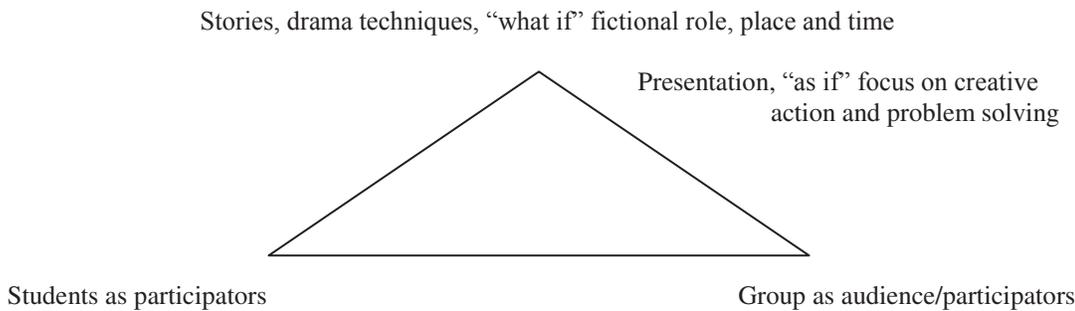


Figure1. The model for drama in teacher education (Toivanen, 2010)

The model for drama in teacher education is based on combining the learning power of fictional situations and stories which enable teacher students to take on characters in situations and stories “as if” they were real to them. Using drama techniques and roles turns the situations and stories into a living experience for students. At the centre of all drama is the use of our natural capacity to imagine ourselves differently. This imagining begins from “what if”: imagining ourselves in different times, places and roles. Real life situations and stories give us the “what if” needed for imaginative drama work to begin. They provide us with a context and with characters and problems that need resolving or understanding. Presentation with drama techniques moves us quickly to “as if” behaviour, as if we were in a different time, place and role (*Bolton 1998, 262–265; 277; Cooper 2010, 17 – 18*).

Drama offers an active dimension for learning about “as if” real life situations in teacher education. By taking the roles of characters in situations and stories, teacher students are able to behave as if they were inside the situation, facing the same experiences and problems as the characters. To implement this kind of teaching skills, which are both creative and dialogic (see *Frijters & Dam & Rijlaarsdam, 2008*), the teacher students must have the capacity to manage unrest, uncertainty and unpredictable situations. There is always a strong element of incompleteness in drama activity (*Heikkinen 2005; Toivanen et al. 2009*). Living in incompleteness refers to the process of drama education. Drama education is a continuously evolving process. The incompleteness gives both the teacher and the learner permission to examine, and indeed to fail, but above all, it provides the opportunity to create functional and evolving solutions.

4. Results

The preliminary study (*Toivanen, Rantala & Ruismäki, 2009*) examines how the use of drama effects young primary school teachers’ education. The research material consisted of the stories of four young primary school teachers, which were collected with the help of theme interviews. The study was an attempt to create a picture of young primary school teachers’ experiences of their teaching at the beginning of their career. The respondents graduated from the University of Helsinki. All four of the young teachers completed drama education studies (25 study points) as part of their primary school teacher studies. The role of a drama educator was established in their drama education studies, which incorporated experimental learning processed through individual projects. The drama studies affected the formation of the interviewees’ professional identity. The four primary school teachers in the study had, in one way or another, peak experiences in their drama studies, which affected the formation of their professional identity. Learning how to use the tools of drama obtained during the drama studies was a challenge to

the primary school teachers after they began to work. All used drama in education in one way or another. Their profile as drama educators was an essential part of their own self-concept as a teacher. Drama was seen as an important part of schoolwork, but using it in everyday schoolwork presented many obstacles.

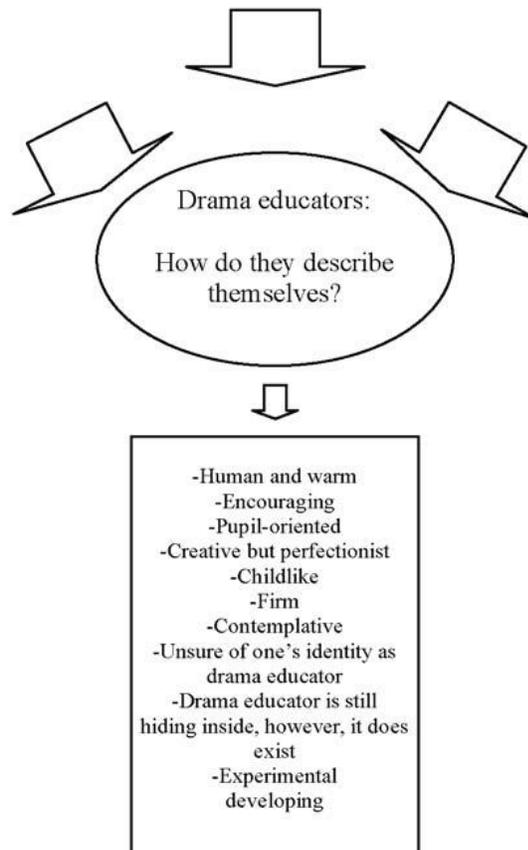


Figure 2. Young primary school teachers' descriptions of themselves as drama educators (Toivanen, Rantala & Ruismäki, 2009)

The teacher's work requires courage to trust his/her own intuition, awareness and a tolerance of ambiguity. Sometimes it is the courage to be playful to give creativity a foundation. In this case the teacher will give the opportunity to the pupils to understand oneself. The young teachers that were examined were in their own opinion moving towards teaching more creatively. Although the role of drama educator was still to some extent hidden because of the limited work experience, the teachers were confident that they would use drama in teaching in the future.

The potential complexity and diversity of creative processes in the drama education is a challenge for young teachers. Similar results have been presented by Sawyer (2006). A teacher needs to balance between his or her conscious self and ideal self, the motivation towards teaching and learning and the intensive, functional (operational) relationship with drama. These all give the ability to act in different situations, to take risks and to tolerate incompleteness in teaching (Heikkinen, 2005, 171–176; Baldwin, 2008, Juvonen & Ruismäki, 2008). Drama education and the direction of the group are challenging for the teacher because the drama processes require skills in drama methods and the abilities to be present in the dialogue and to listen to the group (see Kara & Cam, 2007; Dickinson & Neelands, 2008). An ability to react to situations develops only gradually into a quick intuitive operation (Gladwell, 2006, 133–135). Intuitiveness is one aspect of creativity. According to Goldberg (1983, 31;

Shirley & Langan-Fox, 1996, Weintraub, 1998, 10 – 18), rational thinking both precedes and follows intuition, in other words, these two forms of handling information work in conjunction. Intuitive thinking helps the drama educator when an activity reaches a state of dramatic incompleteness at which time he or she must react quickly to the proposals which arise from the groups’ ideas and activities.

5. Connection, motivation and the conscious self - the background for good teaching

The second preliminary study show that a good teacher is important for all school subjects, and she or he holds the keys to the experiences which form pupils’ values and attitudes. The value of a skilful teacher can never be over overstated (see White 1990). As Kansanen and Meri (1999, 107 – 116) has mentioned a skilful teacher proudly speaks on two levels, the didactic and the pedagogic. The didactic level is the teacher’s relationship with the subject, and the pedagogical level is the teacher’s relation-ship to the pupils. The meaningfulness of education and work enjoyment is based on the mastery of both levels of education.

Ruismäki and Juvonen (2008) created and tested a model which includes teachers’ and art educators’ job satisfaction, meaningfulness of work and work enjoyment – broadly speaking, their well-being at work in connection with their happiness at work. The model was originally developed to describe music teachers’ job satisfaction (Ruismäki, 1991, 277). According to this third study, the basic elements of job satisfaction are introduced. A satisfied and motivated teacher is the best guarantee of high quality teaching and learning. The model was tested with kindergarten student teachers (N = 128) at the University of Helsinki in the spring of 2005. They answered a series of questions based on the model.

The arrow model was built on the basis of earlier research results and on the researchers’ ideas. The model is based on motivation theories, professional self-concept and self-efficacy research (Ruismäki, 1991; Juvonen, 2000; Eccles and Wigfield, 2002).

The model includes three basic elements which are in continuous interaction with each other. Of these elements the most important is the (1) “balance between conscious self and ideal self”. (2) “Motivation towards teaching and learning” is another element, and (3) “intensive, functional (operational) relationship with some art subject” (such as drama education, music, physical education, painting etc.) is the third one. Usually these art subjects are very important to small children. The third element was focused and sharpened in the analysis of the data to “close and positive relationship with some art subject”.

The model is connected with many different research areas on a conceptualistic level (see Hidi, Renninger & Krapp, 2004). The elements are self-conception, self-efficacy (e.g., Bandura, 1977; Pajares, 1997; Welch, 1998; Pajares & Schunk, 2001), motivation, orientation, mastery of skills, meaningfulness at work, satisfaction at work, balance between the conscious and ideal self, and, broadly speaking, general welfare. In this research amongst American teachers Oreck (2002; 2004) showed that of all the personal characteristics, self-image and self-efficacy were the most strongly connected to using arts in teaching.

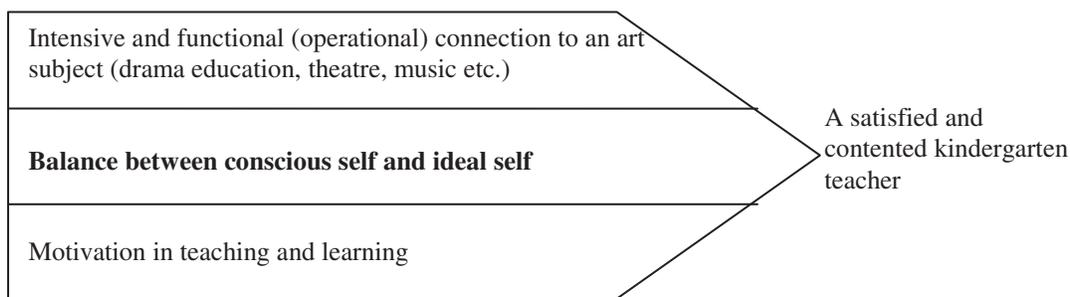


Figure 3. Model of the work contentment of kindergarten teachers

In the preliminary study drama education seems to increase the teacher’s balance between his or her conscious self and ideal self and the motivation to teach and have deeper interaction with him / herself and others. In that

situation a teacher feels that she/he is exactly what she/he wants to be. Motivation in teaching and learning is good, and the teacher has a close, intense functional relationship with an art subject which is also important to young pupils. To feel contented in one's work as a drama educator, the teacher needs all three components mentioned – none of them can be missing. The balance in the self-concept area forms a solid base for meaningful drama education. When a balance is reached, the teacher has strong self-respect, self-confidence and high self-esteem. If one wants to develop one-self as a teacher, one must have a clear vision about the desired new self – which can be directed by ambition. The full balance between the ideal self and the conscious self can rarely be found before one accepts oneself (see Figure 3). One can always develop, but at the same time one must remember that no one is perfect.

This balance alone is not enough; there must also be an interest in teaching and learning connected with the relationship to the art subject. If two out of the three elements are present, a kindergarten teacher may feel that her/his work is meaningful and enjoy his or her work. The motivation to learn is vital in the work of every teacher on any level. In a kindergarten teacher's work an interest in teaching arises most strongly when the work is experienced as a vocation, a purpose in life and a mission associated with a balanced self-conception. A motivation to learn emphasises an interest in small child's learning processes and one's own and also towards learning itself as a phenomenon. One's own learning processes as a teacher highlight the desire to follow processes in the field of education and research together with the passion of developing oneself as a teacher. All this is closely connected with reflection on one's own teaching work and developing one's own consciousness and awareness.

By functional, we mean in this context the teacher's interest, activity and ability to use drama techniques and conventions, take on a role and participate in children's play, and use theatre in education. This interest is also seen in the willingness to develop one's own skills in creating drama either alone or together with other people. If a relationship with drama is intense and functional, the kindergarten teacher is more likely to feel satisfaction and enjoyment in her/his work.

In Figure 3 the straight lines between the elements in actuality should be represented as remind rather wavy lines as the weight and meaning of the elements often change despite their comparative stability.

The main assignment of teacher education is to support and strengthen the three elements mentioned. Teacher education must help the teacher student find the balance in his/her self-concept, develop her/his personality as a teacher, and develop his/her values and interests in different areas of art. This should be done by raising the level of student teachers' consciousness through self-reflection. Naturally, the aim of education must also be to raise the knowledge and everyday skills of a student (see Younger et al., 2004). When a teacher knows the justifications for his/or her decisions, she/he can understand them and also is able to situate them in a larger context. That is when she/he is also able to theoretically understand and master the subject area. Besides institutional education (formal schooling and teacher training), self-education has a very important role in finding the balance between these elements.

6. Conclusions

According to our preliminary studies, it seems that one way to improve teacher education is to use more drama and improvisation in teaching. Also, examples from everyday life can be used in education to promote deeper understanding in teaching and communication. Compared to scripted teaching, creative improvisational teaching is "a very different vision: teachers are knowledgeable and expert professionals, and are granted creative autonomy in their classrooms." Scripted teaching is performative at the lowest level: teachers stand on the "classroom stage" in front of a student "audience" and relay simple facts. An alternative is creative teaching based on improvisational performance. This means that "effective classroom discussion is improvisational, because the flow of the class is unpredictable and emerges from the actions of all participants, both teachers and students." (Sawyer, 2004, 12-13.)

Drama requires the ability to teach creatively, to be a teacher who is ready to become as part of a group as one of the learners in the drama education situation. To implement this kind of teaching, which is both creative and dialogic (see Frijters, Dam & Rijlaarsdam, 2008, Sawyer 2004, 2006a, 2009), the primary school teacher must have capacity to manage unrest, uncertainty and unpredictable situations. There is always a strong element of incompleteness in drama activity (Heikkinen, 2005). Living in incompleteness is typical of the process of drama education and improvisation. The in-completeness gives both the teacher and the learner permission to examine, and indeed to fail, but above all, it provides the opportunity to find functional and evolving solutions. Drama requires of the teacher an ability to function simultaneously in many kinds of roles. The teacher is always in the role required of a teacher, as

Buchmann (1986) has stated. However, the teacher is always in the educational situation also as a person. Commanding this wholeness is challenging, so the ability to be in this situation as a teacher requires daring and risk (Saweyr, 2004, 12 – 20).

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2. Drama engages students in creative problem-solving and decision making. Deep experiences through drama guides and supports student's problem solving skills, while at the same time, works to encourage an increasing awareness in how to solve issues at hand. Instead of school just being a place where students are being taught and told what to think and feel, drama turns this into a deeper experience in thinking, further motivating students to question, respond, and explain what they are feeling and thinking. 6. Drama builds cooperation and develops other social skills. Working together as a group promotes, encourages and motivates cooperation. Some teachers find integrating drama activities to be difficult; convincing and training teachers in their use is essential to success. (MSE). What drama techniques in language education are? The stylised mime may be used as a drama club activity but is less acceptable in the context of the classroom as time is spent on physical training rather than the job in hand. Some pundits would say that because the teacher is using the second/foreign language for the activity, students are being exposed to the language. Teachers, however, need a more convincing argument than that. Teachers want a teaching point to justify the use of the activity and acquiring English incidentally is not one of them.