



Leading the way

Emily Madghachian set up the first children's drama school in Dubai, with the firm belief that drama skills create resilient, confident children who will succeed in later life. 15 years later, this belief remains strong. Victoria Bentley finds out more

In this age of celebrity, embarking on a drama course means you want to be famous, right? Star of the stage and screen? Emily Madghachian, founder of Kids Theatre Works disagrees, "Even though I do this job, I don't particularly condone going into the performing arts. We will certainly support those who wish to do so, but I am much more interested in the process and the skills they will acquire to become leaders."

Emily believes that if children attend drama classes, they can learn all the skills they need to become successful in business later in life. In today's competitive

workplace, any sort of advantage is good, and what better way to learn leadership skills than through a drama class?

"We teach children to make positive, affirmative statements," explained Emily. "A great leader needs to be able to know exactly what they want to do. In our classes, instead of saying, shall we buy ice cream? We teach the children to say, I want to buy ice cream now!"

Skills for the boardroom

One of the skills that children can learn from drama classes is how to collaborate

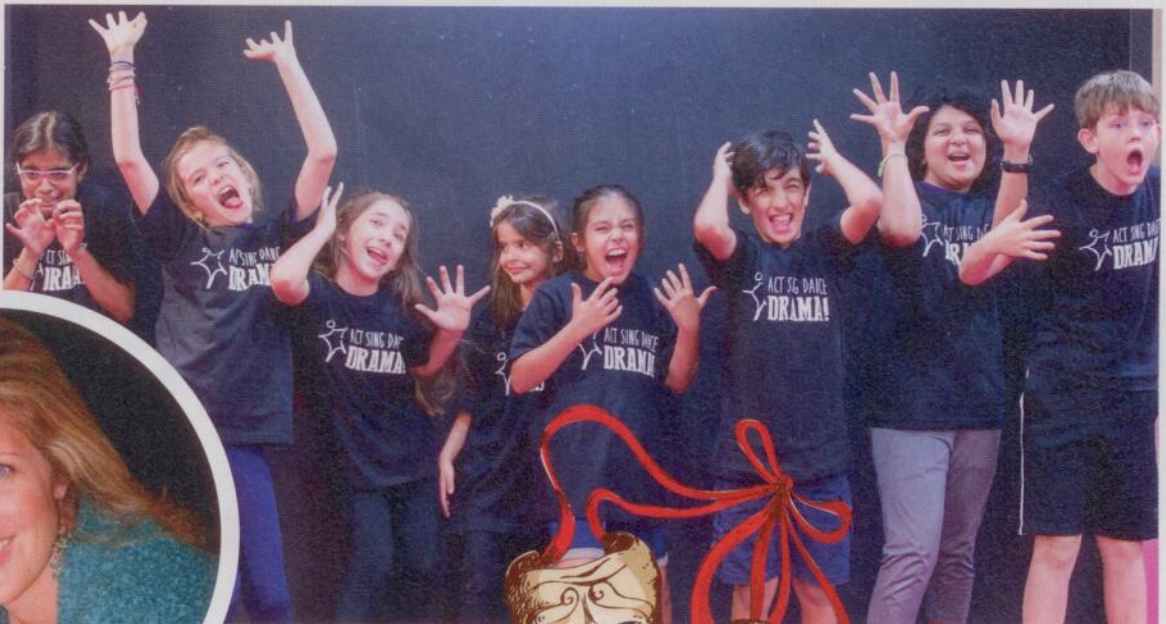
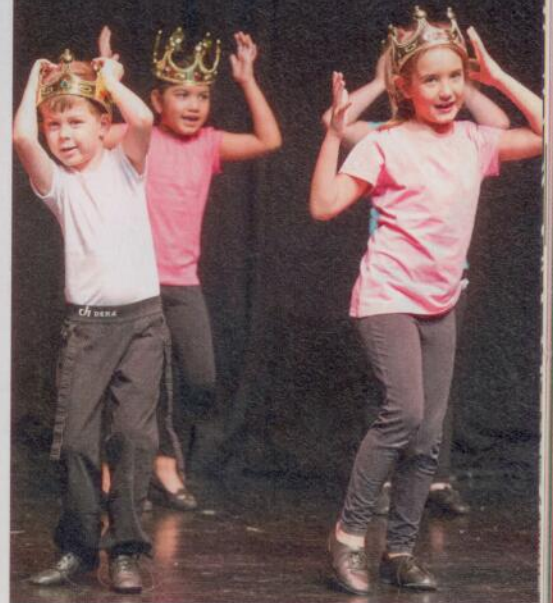
with each other effectively. Emily believes that drama is about "togetherness". By encouraging children to work better together, they automatically become better team players.

Creativity is another key skill. The style of drama taught at Kids' Theatre Works is, according to Emily, "creative drama, a form of drama that allows kids to be really free. There is no right or wrong, there is just the infinite possibilities that come from kids."

"We know that children are naturally imaginative and creative. So (what we do) is bring them into a room and allow them to work dynamically with their imaginations without saying, that's wrong. Obviously we have rules of engagement and rules of behaviour. But if you want to create a world where everyone walks upside down then fabulous, show me how they walk. Use your body and your voice in a new way. Dare to do something new."

Failure is also a big part of learning about life and yourself. "One of my mantras when teaching - if your idea fails as a

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Emily Madghachian

girl in her class, "Sometimes it can take six weeks for them to join in. That's fine. A young girl used to come to class and didn't want to say a word. It was a few weeks in and one week she came bounding in ready to engage. She led groups, she knew all the rules to the exercises. She never looked back."

"Some parents worry that their child is not joining in. Not a problem - they are just being a little more discerning, and a bit more cautious."

Early drama in Dubai

Emily started teaching drama in Dubai when she was pregnant with her daughter. She fell in love with it when she was 20, where she found drama helped her "uncover layers and layers of myself". Her first classes were at the Dubai ballet centre and also at a couple of primary schools.

It was only when the Dubai Community Theatre and Arts Centre at Mall of the Emirates opened up that Emily decided to formally set up her drama school, "When it

opened in 2006, I was the first drama provider there. I'm pretty sure I have the second receipt - number two from DUCTAC! I wanted to be in one place as my baby was young, so people started coming to me for classes."

Kids' Theatre Works now offer four types of classes, with improvisation a key theme running through all of them.

Kids are encouraged to create and devise their own material. "The first five minutes of any class will consist of ice breakers or warm-up exercises, so the children can sort of 'take off' their outside lives and leave them at the door," explains Emily. "Those exercises will incorporate the fundamental skills for acting, or as I say, for life, such as listening, taking turns, daring or risking, projection and adding on to others' ideas." Kids' Theatre Works, Centrepoint Theatre Building, Dubai Community Theatre & Arts Centre, 2nd Level, Mall of the Emirates. Email hello@kidstheatreworks.com, www.kidstheatreworks.com (050 158 56 53).

group, who cares?" shrugs Emily. "You have about three billion other ideas in your head that you haven't even thought yet. Go back and think of something else. It's okay."

Last but not least, the children are taught to say YES! The 'improvisation' aspect to Emily's classes are a key part of this, according to Emily, "The games always have a basis in saying yes and more particularly, yes, and? If you think about a boardroom, if someone says, 'I've had this idea' and someone says, 'no', what does that do? It affects confidence and breaks apart the team ethic. Cultivating a yes atmosphere is good."

Building confidence

Drama classes are not just for natural 'show-offs' - they can also help shy children come out of their shell. Emily says they never force children to do anything they are not ready to do, and cites an example of a