

Session Report - 23 January 03 by Vicky Radwell

### **What makes a good drama lesson?**

Drama requires a teacher who is able to think on their feet and who is adaptable. However, careful planning is the basis of a good drama lesson. When planning a lesson/SOW the following should be taken into consideration:

### **Objectives**

The role of drama as a medium for learning is useful to aid social skills and exploring attitudes. Drama develops skills such as working in groups, communication and confidence. It encourages expansion of imagination and creativity and is a good tool in teaching citizenship. Drama is particularly effective in teaching kinaesthetic learners and SEN pupils.

Drama provides an imaginative context for speech that enlarges the situation and calls on a greater affective motivation; it enriches vocabulary and develops oral expression.

An investigation into the nature of play proved it to be a serious, absorbing and educating process. Piaget showed that children's play activity operated in two ways:

1. experimenting with physical activities such as jump rope
2. using imagination, which Piaget termed as 'Symbolic Play', such as make believe.

He claimed that the use of imagination allows 'action to be translated/developed or interpreted in different ways from the immediate and obvious'.

A. Male says that Symbolic Play is the basis of all drama and link Symbolic Play to Role Play which is used in exploratory and problem solving situations where conjectures and responses are worked out in an active, participatory manner'.

In creating a drama lesson it is important to know the aims of the lesson in:

- developing the SOW - long term aims
- focusing on the subject - particularly objectives for the lesson
- use of dramatic technique.

### **Selection and Use of Resources**

Drama lessons can be effective without the use of any resources at all. However, resources encourage imaginative use of tools and space.

When planning a lesson, resources must be taken into consideration;

- staging blocks
- lighting
- music
- symbolic materials
- space
- pupils

### **Staging/blocks**

Staging can be used in more ways than as a tool to stage a play on. Pupils can incorporate it into their pieces using imagination. For example, in the lesson we observed, staging was used to create/represent machinery.

### **Lighting**

Light is a powerful ingredient in visual experience. It can be used to effect mood - both the pupils' mood and for creating both mood and atmosphere within a piece of drama. Lighting can also be used to indicate the end of a performance and a change of scene.

During the day we used light to highlight symbolism. For example, an image was placed in the light which was symbolic and characters moved in and out of the light for significance.

### **Music**

Music creates mood/atmosphere and evokes emotional response. The rhythm, pitch, intonation, emphasis, volume and words can be manipulated and/or applied for dramatic effect. It can also be used for sound effects such as footsteps, heartbeats, racing pulse, marching and the weather.

Music encourages movement and can be used as a contrast to silence for effect.

### **Symbolic Materials**

Use of a prop for symbolism can be profound and effective, and can say more than a thousand words. Symbolism can dramatise a scene/piece significantly.

### **Space**

J Allen states that, in his opinion, children's' dramatical work can be inhibited through lack of sense of spatial awareness.

Techniques can be used to encourage the awareness and use of space; the use of chairs (as in a classroom setting) inhibits movement - in a drama lesson it is better to sit the pupils on the floor. Also use of drama techniques which encourage individual work can be used to create an awareness of space.

### **Pupils**

The pupils themselves are resources - as an audience member they can be used as part of individual/group drama pieces. For example, in the observed lesson the pupils were in role a group of experts being shown research. The role-play of a small group of pupils was shown (their research) to scientific delegates (the pupils as audience).

### **Strategies and Purposeful Learning Environment**

A purposeful learning environment is a supportive environment; the teacher supporting the pupils, the pupils supportive of the teacher and the pupils supporting each other. It has a routine, and thus an expectation which, ideally, is a whole school approach.

Most importantly, pupils can engage in their topic so that they get lost in what they are doing, are inspired and focused.

### Strategies

- Start lesson with a warm up activity relevant to the lesson and/or setting the scene. End with a cool down activity and plenary.
- At appropriate moments, recap techniques
- Keep students in role
  - teacher in role aide this
    - teacher in role can start pupils' role plays off
    - Sitting a chair when in role and stand up when you want to become the teacher again.
  - use of body language
  - language
  - counter negative comments
- Use of role plays to encourage maturity and responsibility e.g. role of an office worker
- Do not over praise a student who lacks confidence
- Pause group work to repeat instruction/give more ideas/recap techniques and restart.
- Use timing and countdown.

### A Dramatic Experience

A good drama lesson should include some of the following:

<b>Skills 1 Creative</b>	<b>Skills 2 Technical</b>
Techniques Forms Improvisation Narration Still image/Freeze-framing Spontaneous role play Response to teacher in role Hot-seating Mime Slow motion	Technical equipment Lighting Props Use of space Audience role Body language/acting skills: facing audience maintaining role
NB: WHEN CERTAIN SKILLS ARE USED COMMENT ON THEIR USE.	
<b>Social Skills</b>	<b>Content</b>
Team Work Evaluation Listening Discussions Being part of a group/a whole	Concepts, ideas and implications What should a drama lesson be about? A drama lesson should hold interest: a degree of entertainment (which is not necessarily light) but must have thought behind it - a purpose. there should be opportunity for interpretation, investigation, to engage and to think Plot/story/theme.

### **Creative Constraints**

In a conventional lesson plan, activities are organised so that students can understand, internalise and apply the particular skill, concept or knowledge that is contained in the lesson's objectives.

A drama lesson will have aims and objectives and a sequence of activities. However, Neelands says that 'in addition to the curriculum objectives, the sequence must also provide students with a living experience of drama'. 'The sequencing of the lesson needs to be as subtle and as drafted as any other dramatic sequence that is planned to unfold its meaning, or them, and moves progressively towards an understanding of the issues/themes being dramatised'.

The various activities/tasks in a drama lesson are assembled in such a way that the attention of the students is drawn to themes/ideas which develop and deepen as the work progresses, but without being driven by a stated/verbalised logic.

In a good drama lesson plan constraints do not appear to be a punishment or indeed a constraint. A positive constraint frees pupils to use their imagination effectively. Once a piece has been created through the use of constraints, it can be built upon.

For example, in the lesson observed, the pupils were constrained in how to present their ideas. (The task called for a role play whereby a group of scientists must display their research to delegate scientists at a conference. Therefore, presentation of their research must be through creation of a video or short presentation to a conference.) However, the teacher suggested a range of techniques that could be used, such as narration and freeze frames, and their imagination was free to explore their ideas as to their invention.

### **Rules**

Neelands says that a teacher should develop an explicit contract that is a negotiated and agreed set of rules or 'manners' to control, protect and respect the students.

He also suggests that the teacher does not force the students to do drama. In group work allow student s the possibility of contribution to the making without having to perform themselves. Students are more likely to perform if they have to.

Rules create routine which saves time and creates a safe environment. For example, pupils come in, quietly remove shoes and make a boy/girl circle on the floor. Use of equipment should only be allowed with permission of the teacher.

## Drama/English

Drama and English is cross curricular. Similarities and differences include:

Similarities	Differences
Use of voice Use of constraints to direct Co-operation; group work, pairs, whole class Structure - plenary No creative constraints Creative process is similar	More active Appeals to different learning styles Opportunity for teacher to take themselves away from teacher status and get involved. Code of Practice Students can be more involved and sometimes contribute more: easier to settle easier to achieve good quality work difference from others not highlighted equality no LSW No written work at KS3 Share ideas more Self evaluation and evaluation of others Not immediately physical Dramatic experience

NB: NOT MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE

## **Bibliography**

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