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## **Drama**

Dramatic play, imaginative development and creative engagement in learning are the key supports that underpin both the Foundation Stage and the Primary School Curriculum. So pupils, teachers and student teachers deserve to experience the power and potential of drama, as part of English, both as a tool for learning and also as a subject in its own right. Enabling student teachers to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding in this area is a challenge however, since the time allocated is likely to be minimal and working with large workshop groups may reduce the opportunity for experiential engagement. In addition, the drama expertise among the ITE English team may not be as strong as in other areas of language and literacy. Within the curriculum, drama is situated in English in Key Stage 1 and 2, but student teachers will quickly realise it should not be confined to the 'speaking and listening domain' in literacy, since it can also make a marked contribution to both reading and writing and across the curriculum itself. In the Foundation Stage too, socio-dramatic play is recognised and profiled through a range of activities and opportunities (QCA/DfEE (2000)).

Student teachers' perceptions of drama are critical since these will shape their attitudes and openness to learning in and through drama. Their perceptions of drama are a useful place to begin, maybe by reflecting together on their previous experiences both positive and negative. It may also be useful to consider how they think the public in general and parents in particular perceive drama. It is likely, influenced by the media and public perceptions of play that this will revolve around performance and theatre, with pupils 'being in the spotlight' and putting on shows. Considering various possible views of drama will prepare the ground for the lectures, seminars, workshops and tasks set that comprise the drama module in the English course, or when drama is used within literacy work on the course and across the curriculum in other subject areas. In sharing their perspectives and experience of drama, both on and off the stage, the group can also begin to discuss the differences between engaging in or watching drama as a member of the public and becoming a teacher of drama at the Foundation/ Primary phase.

Some of the key issues and aspects of drama at Foundation/ Primary which deserve to be drawn to the student teachers' attention include:

- Diverse practice in school
- Role play areas
- Extended classroom drama and teacher in role
- Drama and literacy learning
- Drama across the curriculum
- Planning and management issues
- The assessment of learning in drama

### **Diverse practice in school**

Historically, the nature of drama has been vigorously contested with many highlighting the role of drama in education (e.g. Bolton, 1984; Heathcote and Bolton, 1995) and

others stressing drama as a theatrical art form (e.g. Hornbrook, 1989). It may be interesting for the student teachers to read around this, but in the context of their work in the classroom, they need to be aware that drama, like all other art forms, comprises the processes of making, performing and appraising and that this is the focus of work in the classroom.

Drama is often differently conceptualised and practised in schools, and student teachers are likely to experience only a small selection of dramatic activities in their school based observations. These may include: making puppets and putting on plays, trips to an English heritage site with accompanying role play, history days in school, theatre trips, storytelling, poetry performances, dance drama, assemblies, mask making, the role play area, video making, the use of hot seating, freeze frames and other drama conventions, school plays and so on.

Part of the challenge of working with student teachers is to reduce any desire on their part to simplify and categorise drama, seeing it as simply theatre and role play for example. It will be important for them to realise the dramatic potential in many activities, indeed in the everyday texture of classroom endeavour, whilst at the same time becoming skilled as drama teachers making full use of the artistic processes of making, performing and appraising.

Despite this diversity many would argue that improvisational classroom drama is the core of drama practice in the primary phase. This involves all the arts processes since children explore issues collaboratively, improvise with their teacher in role, and share and reflect upon their ideas. This is commonly referred to as 'process drama' (O'Neill, 1995), or story drama (Booth, 1994); it has no immediate audience and is both unpredictable and emergent, often creating motivating contexts in which reading, writing and speaking and listening are natural responses to various social dilemmas.

In England, drama is placed within the English curriculum. The QCA and PNS joint publication on speaking, listening and learning in the primary curriculum (QCA, 2003) demonstrates some of the scope of drama in relation to the spoken word. But this resource contradicts itself in terms of the nature of drama. Student teachers could be invited to examine selected examples from the video and discuss the tension between the improvisational work recommended and the more performance oriented work shown. Accepting that productions and assemblies are only part of the ensemble of drama activities may help those student teachers who lack the confidence and experience to direct shows or who feel challenged by the sense of the extrovert often attached to actors and performers.

### **Role play areas**

Children from Foundation through to the end of Key Stage Two often find role play areas an inspiring context for learning, and a place to use and apply a variety of skills. As they play in such areas, challenged by the problems that beset them, they expand their understanding of different settings, make inter-textual links, and read and write for different audiences and purposes. Teaching student teachers about organising and constructing role play areas with the full help of the children is not difficult; what is more challenging is considering the role of the teacher in relation to the key skills of observation and in-role intervention. Enhancing their ability to sensitively observe the

children's initiated socio-dramatic play is critical, as is supporting these young professionals in entering role play areas to challenge and develop the children's learning. Although adults can sometimes circumvent children's play in their desire for an identifiable product, the unobtrusive presence of an adult enhances play (Singer and Singer, 1990) and the involvement of the teacher in role can develop it still further through demonstrating the use of different genres in role for example (Cook, 2002). Student teachers will need to decide whether to observe and wait to be invited into the role play area or to select an appropriate moment to play alongside the children, modelling through role engagement and challenging learning through creating problems for the children to solve (Wood and Attfield, 1996; Hall and Robinson, 1995). There are multiple opportunities for adult intervention and involvement in dramatic play, as figure 1 indicates. Once again student teachers might be asked to document and then share examples of such involvement in school or home contexts.

Figure 1 Opportunities for adult intervention in dramatic play  
(Baldwin and Fleming, 2003)

Teacher in role (TIR) is a key way to develop the educational potential of role play areas, as it is in process drama, it involves spontaneous improvisational work to structure, challenge and extend the learning opportunities. The degree and depth of the challenges set through TIR need to be responsive to the age and experience of the young learners. Through observation and TIR, student teachers can see the extent to which children are stimulated and challenged by their interactions with others, the resources and the context, and can make notes, take photographs or videos to record this. By observing the children's serious play, and listening and talking to them both in and out of role, they can evaluate their commitment to, and understanding of the key learning areas in drama.

In addition to creating role play areas, student teachers will also benefit from considering the dramatic potential of other activities such as creating imaginary characters with whom the children can communicate for example. In so doing the student teachers will be developing their own creative potential (Tyrell, 2001). Such characters, in the form perhaps of a stuffed bear, doll or mannequin may be found hiding in the corner of the room bearing a message to the class. Alternatively, mysterious evidence of a visitor may be collected over time until the character is revealed. Older children can also be effectively drawn into communicating with imaginary friends (Graham, 2001). Such friends can become imaginatively vital members of the class who perhaps attend outings, get invited to parties, enjoy sleepovers and so forth. A plethora of letters and notes will pass between the children and this character, with the teacher writing in role as the bear or toy, who may also have their own diary for recording adventures. Student teachers will be able to perceive the wealth of opportunities for real and purposeful writing that such a character represents (Hall and Robinson, 1995) and will benefit from considering the power of 'let's pretend' in early years settings.

### **Extended process drama and teacher in role**

Student teachers are likely to see very little extended classroom drama/process drama in schools, so their need to experience this for themselves in workshops is paramount. Through such workshops they can find out for themselves the nature and scope of the

medium. They can be offered keynote lectures that examine the many facets of drama, be guided to readings which examine the theories of drama in education and given handouts that summarise the many dramatic conventions available, but critically they will benefit most from taking part in experiential drama workshops in both English and cross curricula contexts. A balanced approach to developing their knowledge through engagement *and* considered reflection should enable them to apply their understanding in the classroom context, returning to college sessions to share their initial forays into using role play and drama. Due to the limited time available within the English course and the lack of confidence that tutors themselves may have in working with drama, it may be useful to double groups for some active sessions, to make full use of the expertise available.

Process drama is situated within a social constructivist view of learning, developed by theorists such as Vygotsky (1986) and Bruner (1990), and offers learners the chance to engage fully in spontaneous imaginative scenarios. No script is in evidence, although literature is often used as a pre-text. A range of drama conventions are employed to explore the text interactively, examining perhaps the motivational states, values and emotions of the characters, the events of the narrative or the emerging themes (O'Neill, 1995). Process drama involves the creation of shared fictitious worlds, that materialise through the imaginations of both the pupils and their teacher. Pupils learn from living inside these worlds and making connections to their own worlds. Language is an important component of this symbolic and dramatic play, in which, through the use of teacher in role and other drama conventions, ideas about the text are spun into existence and alternatives voiced and heard.

In the early years children may travel imaginatively together into the world of a book, or go to visit the seaside or the forest for example, using the support of a magic carpet or a time machine to help them. Their dramatic encounter in this world may be brief, but they will learn to accept that drama is an activity using the imagination and will begin to contribute ideas to develop the fictional situation, firstly as themselves and then in role. In the later years they may well encounter famous characters from history or people from all parts of the globe as the opportunity to sustain the dramatic experience presents itself. However the use of drama conventions gives shape and form to the meanings made in these encounters.

Process drama makes use of a range of these conventions, such as whole class improvisation, hot seating, role play, interior monologues, decision alley, overheard conversations, voices off, thought tracking, forum theatre and so on. Neelands (2000a) divides these and many other conventions into four kinds: narrative, context building, poetic and reflective, according to their nature. Student teachers may find it useful to look at a list of drama conventions and discuss those they know, but more valuable still will be the chance to use them in an extended drama to investigate an issue in a text. Through this process they will dig down into the substrata of the text and increase their involvement and insight into the nature of such improvisational drama. Over time and with experience, the student teachers, like the pupils that they teach, will widen their repertoire of the skills and conventions that drama employs. Metaphors and symbols, objects or icons all act as signifiers in drama and they will learn to select and transform these for themselves to enhance the imaginative potential of drama. Drama relies heavily on the imagination and offers real opportunities for its development through the

creation of a questioning stance and the exploration of different possibilities and perspectives (Cremin, 2004).

Tension is a critical element in all drama, so a pre-text needs to be selected to trigger the student teachers' imaginative involvement and entice them into the world frame of the drama. Fiction is full of unresolved conflicts to choose from, and non-fiction too may examine contested issues, enabling student teachers to encounter and resolve predicaments of various kinds. They will need to experience a genuine sense of conflict or difficulty through their engagement in role and learn to live with the ambiguity which is part both of the process of working collaboratively and also of the process of making art (Nicholson, 2000). The work of the tutors in role in workshops will help to model the commitment and belief needed by the students as drama teachers and the need to negotiate and re-negotiate the direction and content of the experience.

Student teachers may not feel sufficiently confident to take up TIR in the more sustained frame of process drama, for this involves taking risks and being witnessed so doing, contributing sometimes to a reluctance to embrace the potential of drama (Wright, 1999). Trainees are likely to need support as they venture into the unknown and may prefer initially to take part in role play in literacy time or in the role play area. In these contexts they can safely extend their tolerance of uncertainty and experience of such open ended play. Gradually they will come to trust the art form, taking small risks and realising that TIR work is not only possible, but also energising and central to the success of drama in education. Booth's (1994) range of options for TIR work (see Figure 2) may help to focus discussion about this convention and prompt a greater variety of roles being adopted.

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Key features</i>
Storyteller	Offers a narrative thread
Leadership	Plays an authority figure and may create conflict.
Opposer	Casts disbelief on ideas and challenges
Messenger	Asks for or gives information
Shadow	Acts as a member of a group or community
Low status	Tends to ask for help or assistance

Figure 2 Different forms of teacher in role (Booth, 1994)

During drama pupils oscillate between engagement and reflection and develop their ability to evaluate the drama, in terms of both its content and processes, as well as make connections and draw parallels with situations in the real world. Student teachers could usefully list ways in which they can prompt reflection during drama and at the close of drama activities. This should enable them to appreciate the critical role of reflection. Making connections will be central to this work, whether these are personal parallels, contrasts or metaphoric analogies. Highlighting the ongoing nature of this reflection, (both inside and outside the imaginary world) will support student teachers who may only have experienced a reflective focus at the plenary stage for example. In process

drama, learners are participants and observers throughout the session, and learn to see in and through their imaginations (Brann, 1991).

### **Drama and literacy development**

Classroom drama can play a motivating and enriching role in literacy learning. It fosters the interdependence of the language modes and prompts engagement and reflection upon emotional, social and personal issues found in texts (Winston and Tandy, 1998). Through drama, pupils can develop their understanding of characters, theme and content, both in the context of a literacy session and in more extended classroom drama sessions. Student teachers need to develop a working repertoire of drama conventions and become more assured in selecting appropriate ones for their purposes in relation to literacy learning. Trainees can usefully be introduced to drama conventions in almost any English session, since drama is a powerful tool for developing learning about reading, writing and speaking and listening.

For example, if comprehension is being taught, then group sculpture or interior monologues can be used. Drama can also be woven into writing sessions, using freeze frames as a support for analysing story structure for instance. Once students are aware of the value of drama in contributing to literacy learning and the possibility of such forays into drama being brief and undertaken in the safe confines of the classroom with seated pupils, they may feel more comfortable in trying to use more drama.

In relation to speaking and listening, the use of gesture, facial expression, movement and voice can all be developed through drama (Kempe and Holyrod, 2004) in which pupils think on their feet and negotiate their way forward in conversation with one another, asking and answering questions, retelling events and creating new ones. Fiction and non-fiction texts can be brought to life in literacy sessions and examined through hot seating or forum theatre for example, requiring pupils to find a spoken register and content appropriate both to their role and the situation.

In relation to reading and literature, drama offers a valuable context for enriching inference and deduction for it 'speaks the silence of stories' (Hendy and Toon, 2001:76) and prompts the interrogation of texts. As pupils establish and resolve dilemmas they will consider their own values through the 'prism of fiction' (Toye and Prendeville, 2000: 115). In drama, an 'aesthetic' reading of the text is created, in which the focus is on the insights and satisfaction gained from the textual encounter (Rosenblatt, 1978). During the drama journey, the pupils will be involved in a variety of processes that are central to both reading and drama (Grainger, 1998), these include predicting, constructing images, making imaginative connections, co-authoring, developing empathy, engaging emotionally and reflecting.

In addition, drama provides meaningful contexts for writing, both individual and collaborative. In-role work can lead to emotive writing from different stances and perspectives and can make a real contribution to children's development as writers (McNaughton, 1997; Barrs and Cork, 2001; Grainger et al. , 2005; Grainger, 2006). Through orally rehearsing and refining ideas for writing orally, and watching and listening to those of others as they create meaning visually, verbally and kinaesthetically, pupils can enrich their written work and put passion into their prose (Grainger, 2004).

Involving student teachers in examining popular literacy texts through employing various conventions will help them develop their subject knowledge and will also demonstrate the motivating power of drama. It will be important to model for the students the process of mining a text's potential, explaining how to select a moment from a text to expand and develop through drama. The students may need to consider questions such as:

- What possible 'offstage' scenarios might be occurring that could be fruitfully investigated?
- What possible roles or conventions could be employed at this moment and with what purpose?
- How much needs to be read aloud immediately before the drama to contextualise the action?

Fictional moments that involve conflict, ambiguity, challenge or misunderstanding, help to trigger more focused dramatic improvisation. The student teachers could bring picture fiction and short novels to a session and identify possible moments of conflict that can be brought to life and investigated through drama. Other tensions may be found through examining gaps in the text, such as unmentioned conversations, nightmares, premonitions, a character's conflicting thoughts on an issue, or earlier problematic events that hint at the challenge to come. Through drama, these 'omissions' can be constructed, investigated and packed with meaning. If small groups work together they can plan drama into the texts brought and then trial these with another group, perhaps even weaving some writing onto the work. The lived experience of the drama can become a natural writing frame, charged with the emotions and engagement of the imaginary scenario, and as a consequence their writing in role has voice, verve and conviction (Grainger, 2001a, b).

Drama enriches pupils' ideational fluency enabling young writers to generate ideas, rehearse ideas orally and shape the content of their writing. However, careful bridges need to be built between the drama conventions used and the form of writing desired. In planning for drama and writing sessions in their school experience, student teachers will need to select the text type and prepare the ground by using drama conventions as the class move in and out of the imagined experience, discussing both the meanings conveyed and the positions adopted. Whilst several conventions may be used to percolate ideas and involve the learners, the final convention employed needs to link to the chosen genre. In this way the last improvised scenario acts a kind of dress rehearsal for their writing. For example thought tracking a character's views and concerns can most fruitfully lead to recording thought bubbles or a written monologue paragraph in the context of the text, or diary writing from the point of view of the character. Each of these is closer in form to the oral rehearsal than would be a letter of complaint or a newspaper article and therefore prepares the young writer to commit to paper or screen.

In placing children in both formal and informal fictional situations, drama facilitates oral involvement in a range of registers, encourages a closer examination of the text being studied, and offers authentic opportunities for purposeful writing. It is an invaluable tool for enriching literacy learning; however it is also a symbolic art form and a method of wider learning.

### **Integrating drama across the curriculum**

With so little time available to teach drama it may be valuable to discuss with primary colleagues who teach the foundation subjects whether they can seize opportunities to integrate drama into their examinations of World War Two, the Egyptians or the stories of Moses or the Good Samaritan for example. Or it may be by working alongside a colleague in geography, the social issues, financial consequences and environmental concerns that orbit around the Rainforest or pollution can be brought to life in an informed dramatic manner. Alternatively, a session working alongside an RE lecturer can provide the opportunity to take part in creative explorations of both secular and faith tales and enable the student teachers to see the potential for children's spiritual development through inhabiting the lives of others, or 'innerstanding' as Heathcote(1980) has called it. The creation of community, the opportunity to engage in open exploration and reflection through being as well as doing, the development of self knowledge and experience feelings of wonder and transcendence are all aspects of spirituality which can be fostered through drama (Grainger and Kendall-Seatter, 2003) and student teachers need to find this out through their own experiential engagement and reflection.

Drama allows children to develop personally, socially and morally in secure imaginative contexts and enables learners to develop qualities such as empathy, self-control, respect for others views and the ability to work constructively with others. Imaginative situations often put pupils in a position of confronting ethical principles, examining their personal values and moral codes of conduct (Winston, 1998 ) and can help them learn to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty (Grainger, 2003b). As they also engage affectively and cognitively in drama, the student teachers will realise its contribution to personal, social and moral issues, its contribution to creating a shared sense of community in their own student group and its potential to embed learning about the content area of the drama.

Collaborative team teaching with colleagues takes time to plan and organise but models good practice and widens students' understanding of the value of drama as a tool for learning across the curriculum. Joint workshops, cross-curricular days and weeks or project work, planned and taught by the primary team, can all represent excellent opportunities to model such integrated teaching and learning. The student teachers will have observed that deep learning is possible when children are given opportunities to integrate their learning and are expected to identify questions of interest, researching these imaginatively and collaboratively. Demonstrating this by planning a themed drama for the student teachers that draws on several areas of the curriculum and allows them to employ their subject knowledge through an imaginative enquiry will be very worthwhile, perhaps combining core and foundation sessions to allow for an increase in time. Heathcote's mantle of the expert approach to the whole curriculum which operates within an imagined context is a powerful way to examine cross curricula issues, since as archaeologists for example; the children can investigate the past yet work in the present. (Heathcote and Bolton,1995). Such work ably demonstrates drama's potential as a teaching and learning medium. Drama can also make a significant contribution to the six areas of learning identified in the Foundation Stage Guidance (QCA, DfEE, 2000), evidence of which the student teachers may be able to provide through their observations.

Collecting resources to support cross curricular drama can be a useful activity for student teachers who are likely to make full use of resource suggestions generated in their later teaching careers. First and second hand evidence and related fiction titles can be used as planning prompts for particular ages and will draw upon the students' subject knowledge in history, geography and RE. Students whose subject specialisms are science and maths could be involved in looking for opportunities to communicate understanding about particular concepts in these areas through drama. It may be useful for small groups of specialists to jointly plan an extended drama session within their specialism and share/ teach this to another small group. This creates a safe context in which to trial their ideas before developing them in the classroom. In such situations the groups may well want to challenge each other to write, demonstrating how the use of different genres can be prompted by drama in cross curricular contexts (Grainger, 2003b,c).

### **Planning and managing drama**

Student teachers may be concerned about maintaining control in drama since many of the skills of instruction and management employed in the classroom will be somewhat displaced in this more open ended context. They may also be concerned about noise levels. Such concerns can be allayed through discussion, demonstration and engagement. It may be possible for student teachers as a group to observe a visiting class of children being taught drama, either in school or in the HE institution or at least watch a video of children working in role. This will provide an opportunity to reflect upon these issues and how control was maintained: through self discipline on the part of the motivated learners and also through the crucial control strategy of teacher in role. From inside the drama, the teacher can influence and shape the dramatic enquiry and legitimately maintain control by helping the children consider the consequences of their actions. In providing time outside the dramatic frame to consider the situation and through shaping the drama through the use of various conventions the teacher is able to hold the reins whenever necessary.

With regard to noise levels, whilst drama often produces humour, heightened engagement and interaction, it can also create close listening and an atmosphere of quiet tension. With time and experience student teachers will find they select a balance of conventions that slow the action down, and examine incidents from different perspectives, which will provide for moments of stillness and even silence as well as full interaction.

Whilst student teachers will need to make lesson plans with learning intentions, they will also need to become comfortable with working flexibly. This will enable them to respond to the needs and interest of the children and to let the children lead at least some of the time, as they journey together into unknown territory. Much of the time, they will be 'raising possibilities, rather than confirming probabilities (Taylor, 1995) making the situation more complex in the process and deepening the children's commitment and involvement. However, trainees will value the chance to map out a range of lesson plans around the core narrative elements of people, place and predicament and their chosen learning areas. They may wish to plan collaboratively around picture fiction texts or short stories accessible to all, so that the sessions can

actually be taught in school and the different way the drama developed in each situation shared with the group. Each session can be divided into the three major sections:

- First encounters: creating the dramatic context
  - Conflicts and tensions: developing the drama
  - Resolutions: drawing the drama together
- (Grainger and Cremin, 2001)

Using the ideas for people, place and predicament (borrowed in part from a fiction or from history, geography or current issues for example) the student teachers can map out an extended sequence of activities which constitute the drama session. A range of drama conventions will be harnessed for this purpose to investigate the issues in the text and build a work.

### **Assessing learning in drama**

One area of challenge is that student teachers may not have observed teachers assessing role play or drama. But it is critical that they develop an understanding of learning in drama and consider ways to discuss, document and assess this. A brainstorming or mind mapping activity may help to highlight the distinctive contribution that drama makes and its particular contribution to the development of the imagination. Progression in drama requires ‘an extension in the pupils’ ability to engage, analyse and transfer understanding’ (Bunyan et al, 2000). Through in-role observation and participation and out of role conversations, teachers can assess pupils’ learning in drama. Drawing and writing produced in role can also contribute to assessment, as can reflection and self or peer assessment. In their early observational work, a proforma may help trainees reflect upon the key areas of learning in drama listed below. When student teachers take part in improvisational drama, (both in college and in school), they can reflect upon their own learning in these areas.

- The Development of the Imagination
- The Development of the Whole Child
- Language and Literacy
- The Content of the Drama
- The Drama Processes
- Reflection

### **Conclusion**

This chapter began by highlighting some of the challenges involved in enabling student teachers to become effective teachers of drama at Foundation and Key Stages 1 and 2. The number of sessions allocated to drama may be limited, but through creative and flexible timetabling and through capitalising on opportunities in English, across the curriculum and in school, students will come to experience the power and potential of drama as a creative teaching and learning medium. Providing their introduction to drama has been positive and affirming, they may well wish to extend their

understanding through ongoing engagement and reflection and continuing professional development in this important area.

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