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Drama: Some Key Strategies and Conventions

Dramatic Tension:	A problem or dilemma or complication is introduced into the drama to provoke thought and to create interest or excitement.
Dramatic Encounter:	When two or more characters meet and interact in the drama/story
Teacher-in-Role:	The teacher takes a role in the drama as one of the characters.
Collective role-play:	The children in the group play the same part at the same time to support each other and extend the range of ideas.
Still Image:	Individuals or the group takes up different poses to construct a still picture of an event or moment.
Freeze frame:	A series of linked still images that can describe different important moments within the drama.
Overheard conversations:	Conversations between pairs or groups of characters that would not normally be heard, spoken while the rest of the class listen.
Mime:	Depicting an action or emotion without words.
Hot-seating:	The children question a teacher in role (or pupil in role) to find out more information about that character or their situation.
Signifier:	A piece of clothing or a prop of some kind that is worn or carried while in role to show that the bearer is acting as another person.
Narration:	The adult narrates a part of the story to help it begin, to move it on, to create atmosphere or to give information.
Improvisation:	Spontaneous pretend talk or action as another person in an imagined situation. Not meant for performance.
Children as Experts:	The children take on the role of people with specialist knowledge and are asked for advice or help or explanation.
Creative Movement:	Children working alone or in groups create shapes and movements that represent objects or ideas.
Roll on the Wall	A drawing of a character from the drama is put on the wall and gradually information is added showing the character's opinions, thoughts and feelings.

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Post meeting group work and in-role reporting: The residents, working in the same groups as previously, list ideas for helping to solve the problems of both the old people and the children to the satisfaction of all concerned (e.g. build a higher fence between the gardens and the waste ground). The teacher circulates, listening, advising and challenging ideas. When the groups have generated a number of ideas, the teacher *in role* as one of the residents, calls the participants back together to a second “resident’ meeting”. All ideas and suggestions are written on a flip chart and discussed.

Episode 4: Helping Ourselves

Drama conventions: small group improvised play-making and presenting; mime; still image; caption making.

Deciding on the ending of the story: The participants, working in the same groups as before, have to decide on an appropriate ending to the story of the old people and the children – how is the problem resolved?

Showing the ending: Each group is going to make up a very short play (one or two minutes) to show the rest of the class. It will depict how the residents have worked together to ensure that the children had a better play area and that the old people were not disturbed. The participants must decide on the setting and a mime of the key actions. There may also be some dialogue, however, this should be rehearsed but not written down and learned. The teacher should assist groups to produce high quality work. Each group performs for the class.

A newspaper report: The local newspaper has heard about the residents’ success and is sending a photographer to take a photo for the front page of the paper. Each group must create a still image to depict their version of events. The other groups then suggest a caption to accompany each still image. The teacher may wish to take a photograph of each image and display these along with the captions.

Debriefing: Discuss the feelings of the people in the story. What made the drama work? What would make it better? What did you learn?

McNaughton, M.J. (2007). Stepping out of the picture: Using drama in Storyline Topics. In S. Bell, S. Harkness and G White (eds), *Storyline Past Present and Future*. Glasgow: University of Strathclyde. be asked to show their improvisations. However, the following activity can serve as a summary of the key points in the work.

Still Imaging: Each pair prepares three still images showing the three stages of negotiation: meeting - persuasion - resolution. One half of class shows their work to other half and then swap. A general class debriefing on the issues arising and on the quality of the drama work can follow this.

Episode 3: The Residents' Meeting

Drama Conventions: Whole-group drama with teacher in role; group planning and writing in role.

Out of role discussion: The class identify the key issues: that having no safe place for the participants to play is making everyone unhappy/annoyed/take desperate steps. What can the people in the community do? A meeting of the local community is called and a local councillor is invited to attend.

Preparing for the meeting: The participants select roles as members of the community – old people, participants and parents. They prepare for a meeting with the local council (*teacher in role*) who is coming to hear the community's complaints. In groups, they plan what they will say at the meeting from the perspective of their characters: relating incidents, events, listing complaints, etc.

The meeting: The meeting takes place in the 'local school hall'. The room is set up for a meeting with chairs in a semi-circle. The teacher in role as a 'council official' enters and addresses the 'residents'. The tone is formal. She might carry a clip-board to *signify* that she is in role. She listens to their problems. However, she suggests she is not in a position to act on a list of complaints and that this is more a matter for community action. She asks the residents to come up with some plans and solutions that she can take back to the council. She leaves.

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eventually she gave in. Off they went one Saturday morning to buy the ball. His mother made him promise to look after the ball and when he set off out to play, she warned him not to dare to come back without it. Off he went to the waste ground. He was alone, but threw his ball up in the air, kicked it and, of course, it landed in the old person's garden. Before the boy could see, the old person rushed out to the garden, grabbed the ball and took it into the house, feeling very pleased. (One up for the pensioners!)"

Movement and mime: The participants are asked to walk round the room filling all the spaces and when the teacher says "stop", they must go into the shape of the little boy gazing at the football in the shop window. Repeat with boy begging mother; boy playing with ball; boy watching as ball flies out of sight.

Episode 2: Ball? What ball?

Drama Conventions: Participants, in pairs, working in role as characters; improvisation; depicting a story in three still images.

Improvising in pairs: The participants are told that they are going to pay out a scene in which the ball has gone into the old person's garden and boy must try to get it back. The group is split into pairs and each of these is allocated a role, A, the old person or B, the boy. This can be done using two concentric circles: those in the inner circle play B and those in the outer circle play A. Pairs face each other and A draws an imaginary line between them. This is the doorstep. Boy steps away, old person goes about business in house (making tea, reading paper) and on teacher's signal, wee boy walks up to door and teacher gives signal for drama to begin ("Knock, knock, knock"). Old person opens the door and boy's first words must be, "Can I have my ball back please?" Pairs then improvise the scene.

Teaching note: Here the teaching emphasis is on realistic movement and language, good persuasion, making it **as if** real. Stop the drama two or three times to check and discuss progress. Ask partners to comment on one successful element of the other's work and to suggest one improvement. The final time the participants should reach a resolution. As this is not rehearsed play-making but "living through" drama, the participants should *not*

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understanding roles and responsibilities in the community; exploring conflict resolution; and taking care of the environment. Before the drama lesson, it important to remind the participants of the rules of good drama and to establish a *drama contract* in which all participants agree to respect each others' contributions, to listen, to never make people feel uncomfortable and, of course, to have fun.

The Drama lessons: Nowhere to Play

Participants' Roles: old person; boy; people in the community.

Teacher's Roles: council official; person from the local community.

Episode 1: You Shouldn't Play There

Drama Conventions: setting the scene through teacher narration; developing a character through movement and mime.

The Old Person: The teacher narrates. "There was an old person who lived in a little pensioner's house at the end of a row of houses. This old person lived alone and sometimes was a bit crabby but the thing that he/she really loved was tending to the garden: planting, reading gardening books, etc. Now the old person had a problem because at the end of the garden was a low wall and at the other side of this was a piece of waste ground that children played football in: and the footballs kept coming over into the garden followed by the children who trampled the flowers, etc. The old people have complained but the children said that they had nowhere else to play. Well, this old person was completely fed up with this and decided that the next ball that came into the garden would not be given back to the children but would be confiscated. That would teach them a lesson."

Movement and mime: The participants are asked to walk round the room filling all the spaces and when the teacher says "stop", they must go into the shape of the old person just as he/she is getting up in the morning ("as if" real). Repeat with; looking in the mirror; working in the garden; taking the ball to the house; hiding the ball.

The Boy: The teacher narrates. "At the other end of the road lives a boy (age about 10). This boy was desperate for a new football. He begged and begged his mother till

Nowhere to Play: an example of Storyline Drama

This drama is part of a Storyline topic based on a local community. It may come under the general heading of Citizenship Education, although the approach is cross-curricular. The setting is any modern town or village though it is probably urban rather than rural. In the storyline, we examine some of the problems facing people living in communities: how do we live together well? There are opportunities to explore a number of themes such as anti-social behaviour (litter, vandalism) environmental issues (waste and recycling, traffic problems) and building community cohesion (meeting the needs of everyone in the community, being good neighbours). After establishing the location and some of the key characters (a large class frieze depicting the area and the people can help, here), the story can start to grow. As in all good stories, and in life, problems, tensions and complications emerge as the lives of the people and their community in the story begin to unfold. From these problems, questions arise – How can we...? What would happen if...? What can we do about...? Thus, episodes in the story evolve.

The Drama Context

In this drama, the participants ‘bring to life’, explore and try to solve, a problem that has arisen in the local community. The context for the drama is that some older residents of the area are concerned that a piece of waste ground adjoining the back of their row of houses is being used by many of the local children as an area to play ball games. Unfortunately, the balls often end up in the older people’s gardens and, while retrieving them, the children trample flowers, break plant pots and cause general inconvenience. What are the issues, here and what can be done to resolve them? This drama should normally take place over two or three sessions of under an hour. After each session the participants should be given opportunities to discuss the key issues and to take part in associated activities, for example, web-based research, art work, design and technology or writing (perhaps in role).

A number of *learning outcomes* are addressed through this work. In terms of Drama these are: skills in listening and responding appropriately; speaking and moving in role; and working collaboratively. Learning related to Citizenship issues include:

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individuals being willing and able to collaborate to recreate or make an event or a situation.

- *Exploring values:* A range of ideas and values about the environment can be explored through the drama. Drama is very suitable for providing learning opportunities across a wide range of personal, social, political and ethical issues.
- *Providing a context for research:* Drama can extend the meaningful context offered by the Storyline approach, offering further opportunities to explore and deepen their knowledge and ideas about themselves and the world in which they live. After drama lessons, often as result of questions raised during the drama, groups and individuals can undertake research into the issues and concerns of the people in the story.

I conclude with a quote from David Booth, who has worked for many years in the area of story-drama:

When children enter into a story, they are transported to other worlds, joining in the adventure and the excitement, freed of their own time and place - and somehow changed by the experience. They learn about the lives of others and in doing so develop a better understanding of their own lives.

David Booth, *Drama, Story and Learning* (1994)

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uniqueness of the art form. A *still image, thought tracking* (listening to the "inner thoughts" of one or more of the drama participants) or an extended piece of *role-play* might offer an insight into an aspect of an issue, or an opportunity for expression, that might never be possible in more conventional forms of learning. For example, in a drama session, the children have taken roles as road developers and residents whose homes will be knocked down to make way for the road. Many arguments have been put forward by both sides and the session ends with all parties going away to prepare for their next meeting. A concluding activity might be for each of the participants to create a still image, showing what their character is feeling or thinking at that moment. The teacher tracks round and, in turn, each character may speak his or her thoughts aloud. ("I've lived in that house all my life"; "Think of the time I'll save getting to work"; "These people will have to learn to move with the times") Using these techniques, many of the key issues in the drama might be summarised, verbally, physically and "dramatically". Some key drama strategies are set out in the accompanying table, here. A much fuller range of drama conventions can be found in *Structuring Drama Work* (Neelands and Goode, 2000).

Drama and Learning in Storyline

In research that I undertook with classes of upper primary school children (McNaughton, 2006) I found that there were a number of areas of learning in which drama was particularly useful. These areas fit well with the central processes in Storyline topics. They were:

- *Engendering sympathy/empathy:* In drama participants often put themselves 'in others' shoes'. Out of drama, they reflect on what has happened and evaluate the "truthfulness" of the meanings and messages they have constructed in their work. How did the people in the drama story feel? Why did they behave as they did? How do we feel about their problems? What would we do?
- *Developing skills in communicating, collaborating, and expression ideas and opinions:* Drama allows children to rehearse and develop the skills across the curriculum in a safe and non-threatening situation. The dramatic process relies on

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a problem in which the local children's lack of play space encroached on the lives of some elderly residents. The pupils are able to suggest ways of resolving conflicts and coming to solutions and compromises. They began to understand the older residents' needs and the problems caused to them by children running through their gardens. In the drama the children try to act like another person, in another situation, at another time. They say what that person might say and they try to imagine how that person might respond or feel. Out of drama, they reflect on what has happened and evaluate the "truthfulness" of the meanings and messages they have constructed in their work. How did the people in the drama story feel? Why did they behave as they did? How do we feel about the problem? What do we believe? Booth (1994) suggests that this type of emotional/cognitive experiencing, followed by reflective distancing, is central to drama.

Teaching Creatively

In today's world, creativity is essential to our social, personal and cultural wellbeing. The teacher's role in building a creative classroom climate is essential. This role goes beyond simple encouragement. It involves intervening: actively teaching creative techniques and strategies to develop creativity. Like Storyline, drama allows teachers to work in interesting, motivating and highly creative ways. It provides opportunities for children to participate in planning and decisions, it allows children to think freely about and express their views and it offers a classroom climate which allows for different perspectives and views. Very importantly, drama allows the pupils a high degree of challenge while at the same time offering a low level of threat. Because in drama there is usually no 'right' answer, all ideas, suggestions and ways of viewing situations are encouraged and celebrated. Most of all, in drama, there is an acknowledgment that the teacher, especially when working in role, is not always right. This encourages an open and democratic way of working.

Drama as a creative art-form

However, although drama may be seen as a method of teaching it is also an art form, with its own unique conventions, languages and methods of expression. A number of practitioners have adapted drama and theatre conventions into techniques that can be used by teachers and pupils to enhance drama in education while remaining true to the

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Some Key Ideas in Story-Drama

The Storyline website outlines the critical elements of Storyline: setting the scene in a particular time and place; involving people and/or animals; investigating a way of life; and planning so that the outcomes of the story are uncertain. This fits very well with the key concepts underpinning story-drama. There is a story: people, place, and beginning, middle and end: there is a problem or dilemma for the people in the story; and no-one knows in advance how the story will turn out. In addition, in story-drama the children, and sometime the teacher, act “as if” they are in the story.

The ‘Drama’ referred to here is not based on pre-written scripts or performance. Rather, it is based on the theories and techniques of international practitioner-researchers such as Gavin Bolton (1984) and Jonothan Neelands (1992). It is concerned with exploring ideas and feelings and looking at different perspectives. Working in role, both teacher and pupils are actively recreating and adapting their perceptions of the world and the people in it. Out of role, reflection and analysis of the drama helps to extend and deepen understanding of what might be termed as ‘the human condition’. Although educational drama employs many of the techniques of theatre, unlike theatre there is often no external audience for the work. In the process of participating in the drama, and during the reflection and evaluation, the participants *live through* the drama rather than watching from the outside.

Bolton (1984) describes the central process of the imagination in classroom drama as being able to engage in "As if..." behaviour. The children and the teacher strive together to engage in an extended piece of pretending. All of the participants know that the situation is not real - that they are not residents in a fictional time or place - but each member of the group engages in a willing suspension of disbelief in order to enable the drama to work. Everyone behaves "as if" the situation is real. It is this experience of inhabiting both the real world and the imagined world, and being aware of both, which allows a deep level of cognition, and thus learning, to take place.

An example of this might be the “Nowhere to Play” drama set out here. In role as members of local community, pupils and the teacher work together to suggest solutions to

Stepping Out of the Picture: Using Drama in Storyline Topics

Marie Jeanne McNaughton

Introduction

In storyline we help pupils to use their imagination to create and develop characters and to set these characters into a place and time. As a class, we then develop a “story” for the characters and, through this story we help children to find out about life in the present or the past, in place and in society. Because the children have invested time and effort in creating their characters and setting, this gives them a real reason to find out more.

Usually, as part of a Storyline topic, the class builds a frieze, a large picture though which the place and time are established, with houses, landscapes, communities: in fact the whole environment of the story. Into this environment are set the key “players”, the people whose lives unfold during the course of the topic. Their story provides a background for a whole range of learning over a number of curricular areas. Storyline, then, provides a context for a meaningful and purposeful cross-curricular learning.

So, how does drama fit in? Drama can add an extra ‘dimension’ to Storyline. It allows us to take the characters down from the frieze and to bring them to life. Instead of imagining the events in the peoples’ lives, drama allows the children to play them out – the children can try out ‘being’ the people from the Storyline frieze. It is as if the characters step down from the picture and are embodied in the children who are then, for a time, able to be *inside* the story. It also allows the participants, through techniques such as *hot seating*, to talk to any of the characters in the story, to ask them questions, to try to discover more about who they are, what kind of lives they lead and why they behave as they do. This article attempts to set out, briefly, some of the key ideas of how drama education and Storyline can link and to suggest some of the benefits of teaching and learning in this way. It also includes a lesson outline from my drama workshop from the 2006 Storyline conference in Glasgow.