

PLAY INTERVENTION: RE-IMAGINING DRAMA

DAN DINNEN



Participating in a typical Drama session requires quite sophisticated socio-dramatic play skills. In a Special Education setting, Drama needs to be re-imagined and re-defined to be truly inclusive and to meet the widest possible range of student needs.

In this context, Drama must be process based, it must focus on playfulness and play rather than “the play”, and it requires educators to lead and extend play through play intervention.

Re-imagining Drama in this way also re-frames an approach to play in an educational setting.

In a typical Drama session teachers are often appropriately “in role” in order to model and guide students through role-plays and improvisations. In a Drama session with a focus on play intervention, educators are:

- actively involved in reciprocal play with students
- initiating and guiding play, as well as responding and extending
- offering specific choices of play objects relevant to themes/narratives/activities
- infusing interactions with dramatic action and narrative shape
- modelling reactions and emotions

Drama is intrinsically about stories and narratives, about bringing these stories to life through re-enactment, through *dramatisation*.

Drama meets play intervention by framing playful interactions with narrative shape and dramatic action.

Importantly, Drama is a group exercise, so even when the focus is a one-on-one interaction this happens in the context of structured group work. Play is at the core of Drama. As is communication. This makes Drama a natural, highly effective way of teaching and modelling play skills.

Dramatic Action, Narrative Shape and Emotional Journeys

Dramatic action is what turns a story into drama. Without dramatic action a story is just a series of facts. Dramatic action relies on the use of suspense, anticipation, obstacles, tension and conflict. These elements have their opposites: tension and release; conflict and resolution.

Play-based interactions are *dramatised* by building suspense or anticipation, using tension and release.

These elements give a natural narrative shape to play-based interactions.

Hide-and-Seek / Peek-a-Boo games are a great example of this:

- We are together (the scene is set)
- I am going to hide! (anticipation, tension...)
- I am GONE! And we cannot SEE each other (tension, suspense, conflict)
- I am hiding behind an object / material, hands, a door etc. (obstacle)
- The obstacle is removed... (the CLIMAX of the story!)
- We are together again (resolution)

Drama is essentially ACTION and REACTION. This is played out in a physical sense and an emotional sense. Seemingly simple, playful interactions like a game of peek-a-boo provide much scope for teachers to model reactions – physical and emotional – at each stage or moment.

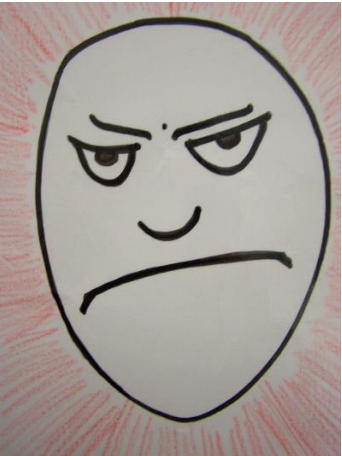
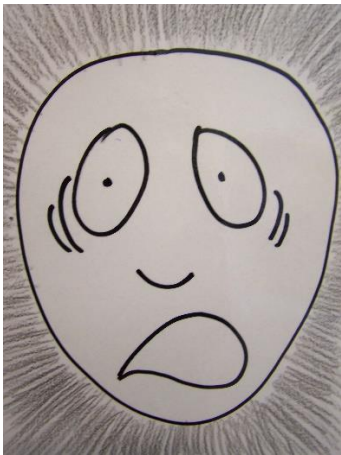
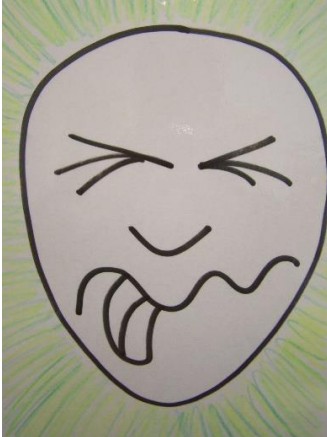
Stories, of course, have their own narrative shape. Nursery rhymes, songs and stories are *not* dramatised simply through performing actions, gestures, movements or repeating key sounds and words.

Stories are dramatised through: highlighting the moments of tension, conflict, suspense; exploring the reactions, feelings and emotions involved; resolving this tension.

For example, we can learn the actions to Incy-Wincy Spider, but we can also explore the dramatic elements of the story: the climb, the rain, the fall... and then the sun, the climb again. From happy to sad to happy again! Actions, reactions, emotions.



An approach to finding narrative shape is to think about the possible emotional journey of an interaction or game. **Below are pictures of some key basic or primary emotions.** Can you use these some of these emotions to chart an emotional journey for Incy Wincy Spider? Or for a game of Peek-a-Boo? Or an interaction with a puppet?



Activities explored during the Workshop

- Pulling faces – mimicry and mirroring
- Clapping together
- Playing with Hoberman Sphere

Types of Play involved: Physical; Exploratory; Tension/release; Imitative; Cause and effect; Object; Interactive; Repetitive play routine; Onlooker; Pretend - (Symbolic)

- Peek-a-boo

Types of play involved: Physical; Exploratory; Tension/release; Imitative; Cause and effect; Object; Interactive; Repetitive play routine; Onlooker

Was used as an example to explore Narrative Shape, Emotional Journey

- Object Play – soft toy or puppet

Can be used for sensorimotor play; to model action and reaction, narrative shape, emotional journey

- Object Play - Balloon

Sensorimotor play: tactile, auditory; dramatic action via use of tension / suspense anticipation and release

Guided social play, working towards social play:

- Greetings: How are you feeling? Create a story (real / imagined) with emotions (using picture cards, communication devices)
- Greeting games to model pretend play... Hello John. I came to school in my jet powered helicopter today. What about you?
- Use material (hide and seek); cardboard tubes, plastic cups, pretend glasses, toy binoculars, etc. to focus gaze, direct voice, play with vibration and resonance for hearing and vision impaired students or ASD students who don't look / attend in a typical fashion

Typical guided Drama Games:

These activities require social play skills, but *don't* require socio-dramatic play skills:

- Zap: passing a "Zap" sound accompanied by a clap around the circle, encourage eye-contact
- Throw a sound / shape: model this with emotions
- "I feel X" with sound /shape

TYPES of PLAY

FUNCTIONAL/PRACTICE PLAY (or SENSORIMOTOR PLAY):

INDIVIDUAL EXPLORATION - PHYSICAL SELF

Socially 'passive' ... however, the individual is INVOLVED IN PRE-PLAY SKILLS as they explore their body and senses. Can include:

- **Reflexive exploration**
- **Visual exploration**
- **Sensory exploration**

INDIVIDUAL EXPLORATION - PHYSICAL SELF & PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- **Discovery play** – awareness that actions can affect immediate environment
- **Cause-and-effect play** – grasp and release, pushing, pulling, physically investigating objects
- **Intentional** – choice/preference of play objects
- **Physical play** –exploring range of fine and gross motor skills
- **Exploratory play** – experimentation, testing boundaries of body and objects. NB: establishing object permanence

In this stage of play, the object and the body are still not totally “separate”. As this stage is mastered, objects become separate to self (“decentration”). They can then begin to take on a life of their own.

INDIVIDUAL EXPLORATION - MASTERING PHYSICAL PLAY

Object permanence is established. Decentration established – objects are separate to self and can now become intentional play objects

- **Intentional** – choice/preference of play objects
- **Physical play** – gaining control over fine and gross motor skills; gaining control over manipulating objects, manipulating objects with intention e.g. banging, stacking

NB: STAFF/ADULTS CAN FACILITATE AND ENGAGE IN ALL OF THE ABOVE

ONE-ON-ONE PLAY INTERACTIONS WITH AN ADULT – establishing social play skills:

- **Interactive play:** two-way playful exchanges; reciprocal mirroring of movement and voice.
- **Vocal play** and vocal dialogues
- **Repetitive play routines** – burst-pause and tension-expectancy games *
- **Imitative play** – copying others' actions, gestures, vocalisations.
- **Object play** – shared attention to an object to facilitate a playful interaction

* using suspense, anticipation of what comes next; heightening moments of suspense/anticipation creates a moment of DRAMA and creates a NARRATIVE SHAPE to a simple interaction. Can be used very effectively in key moments from nursery rhymes and songs!

PLAY IN A GROUP SETTING - PRE-SOCIAL PLAY SKILLS:

- **Solitary play** - plays alone, practicing play skills *
- **Onlooker** - demonstrates an awareness of others at play, observes only
- **Parallel play** - play alongside peers but not actually engaged with or in the same mindset of a game/activity *
- **Associative** - in which the child plays and talks with other players but the purposes or forms of the play may not be the same
- **Solo construction play** – use of blocks or material to make something
- **Symbolic play** – using an object or action to represent something else e.g. a wooden block as a phone or plane etc. (object substitution or endowment)
- **Pretend play** – using objects, actions, movements, gestures, voice; play scripts, sequences of play actions, “doll or teddy play” ... but with no shared attention or interaction with others

*NB: **Solitary play** and **parallel play** *can* include Symbolic and Pretend play

PLAY INTERVENTION - in the form of teachers modelling and guiding play - is HIGHLY APPROPRIATE for students in a Special Ed setting who are exploring these pre-social play skills

SOCIAL PLAY:

- **Co-operative play** - in which the play is shared and negotiated with sharing and turn taking.
- **Construction play** with a peer / peers
- **Pretend play** – using objects, actions, movements, gestures, voice... NB: it is the shared attention to objects actions etc., the investment in a shared narrative, the interaction, give and take (turn taking) that define this as social rather than solitary or parallel play
- **Socio-dramatic play** including role-play
- **Themed fantasy play**

Students who are adept at social play can fully participate in more typical Drama games and activities:

- Guided role-play
- Role-play for an audience (of peers/participants)
- Improvisation - games; to a theme; for an audience (of peers/participants)
- Creating scenarios through guided role-play and improvisation
- Scripting scenarios
- Re-enacting/dramatising all manner of “texts”, both real and fictional

PROCESS-BASED DRAMA IN EDUCATION:

- About play ... not “the play”
- Invites students to play
- Is student centered: teachers facilitate, guide, structure the experience... Drama should involve all participants as co-creators
- Interpersonal, participatory, inclusive, playful
- Is voice and movement; looking and listening; sharing and turn-taking; language rich; rich in the use of gesture, action, non-verbal communication.
- Plays with story and narrative, giving it form and shape: allows participants to interact with, explore and and re-shape both truth and fiction.
- Explores emotions, feelings, and a range of intrapersonal and interpersonal themes in a fun, safe, structured environment.

Further Reading

Corke, M. (2012) *Using Playful Practice to Communicate with Special Children*, David Fulton Publishers / Nasen

Hardy, B (1978) 'Narrative as a primary act of mind' in Meek, M, Warlow, A and Barton, G (eds) *The cool web: the pattern of children's reading*. New York: Atheneum

Hughes, Fergus P. (2003). *Spontaneous play in the 21st century* in O. Saracho & B. Spodek (Eds.), *Contemporary perspectives on play in early childhood education* (pp. 21-40). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.

Isenberg, J. & Quisenberry, N. (1988). Play: A necessity for all children. *Childhood Education*, 64(3), 138-145.

Parten, M. (1932). *Social Participation Among Children* in *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 27, 243-269.

Sherratt, D. and Peter, M. (2002) *DEVELOPING PLAY AND DRAMA IN CHILDREN WITH AUTISTIC SPECTRUM DISORDERS* David Fulton Publishers 2002

Stagnetti, K: <http://www.karenstagnitti.com/pretend-to-play/a-framework-for-understanding-pretend-play/>

Contact:

Dan Dinnen

dinnen.daniel.d@edumail.vic.gov.au

+61 418 655 854