

STORY DRAMA IN THE SPECIAL NEEDS CLASSROOM

*Step-by-Step Lesson Plans for
Teaching through Dramatic Play*

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Adapted song lyrics to *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* are reproduced
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GLOSSARY OF DRAMA-IN-EDUCATION TERMINOLOGY

Drama-in-education: This refers to the use of any dramatic material accessed in the classroom to create and explore an issue in the classroom through the use of story.

Given circumstances: These are the circumstances or conditions that are given in the story or drama. For example, in *The Little Red Hen*, the protagonist is a red hen who is little. This is information that is given and taken as truth based upon the information the author has provided and deemed as true.

Hot-seating: This is when a student, embodying a character, sits on a chair (the hot seat) where the other students can interrogate the character in the hot seat.

Intention: (also known as motivation, objective, desire) Intention refers to each character in the story determining what it is that character is trying to do. Each character wants to do something, such as go to sleep, finish off homework, fall in love, etc.

Mantle of the Expert: The most advanced and involved of the process drama experience is a technique called the Mantle of the Expert, whereby the drama would play out over the course of a semester to the entire year crossing over several different subjects in order to complete the drama. Many teachers who use this technique select a certain time of the week (every Friday) and replace a certain class period or the last hour of the day (social studies if the drama requires a greater understanding

of other cultures). It is during this time the students become imbued as experts in a specific area of exploration.

Narration: This can be teacher or student driven where new information is introduced propelling the drama forward.

Obstacles: These are the circumstances that prevent the character from fulfilling his or her objective.

Process drama: This is the action of an evolved idea that changes and grows and has no finished ending. The purpose of the drama is to guide the students through a series of drama-in-education techniques that enhance and provide greater depth in the learning process.

Prop: This is any item needed in the drama whether real or imagined in order to move the story forward.

Set: This is the constructed or imagined location of the drama.

Stakes: Stakes, often referred to as high stakes, are the height of emotional investment of a character who must achieve his or her goal. In order for there to be high stakes, the student actors must feel as if there is an element of failure. This element of failure must be palpable, forcing the class to work together and compose alternative outcomes in order to achieve their goal. For example, the three animal friends in *The Little Red Hen* at the end of the book clean the house and do their chores because they must have the bread to eat or they will starve.

Story drama: This is a classroom drama that follows the plot of a chosen story perhaps with some drama-in-education techniques (teacher theatrics) to enhance further learning. The purpose of the story drama is to explore character motivations and feelings, themes, relationships, and the overall message.

Student actor: I use the term student actor to indicate when

the students are engaged in the drama as characters versus being students who are not engaged in dramatic activity. When the students are in this student actor role, the teacher should treat the students as the roles they are playing.

Tableau(x): Groups or individuals “devise an image [pose or shape] using their own bodies to crystallize a moment, idea or theme; or an individual acts as sculptor to a group” (Neelands and Goode 2000, p.25). Tableau is also known as still-image.

Tactics and strategies: These are the actions the character engages in to fulfill his or her objective. The character objective could be to finish off homework. A possible strategy is to go to a library to study.

Teacher-in-role: The teacher takes on a role in order to gain more knowledge in the drama, invoke student involvement, and stimulate the next task in the drama.

Theatre-in-education: This refers to a theatrical performance that occurs in an education setting, for example, a school tour show.

Thought tracking: This technique can be used at multiple places in the drama either through a tableau or freezing a moment in the drama where the teacher taps the student actor to either give a word, phrase, or sound describing how they are feeling in a particular moment.

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Drama Activities for Special Needs Students. Strong social skills are one of the most important factors in leading a positive, successful life. Many young students are bombarded with violence on television and spend countless hours in front of a computer or on video games. It is becoming the norm for children to be raised in non-traditional family situations which can sometimes contribute to inadequate social learning. Students with special needs are especially affected by the lack of social skills. One of the issues is that many disorders, namely autism, affects the portion of the brain that helps children learn and understand social cues. It may be extremely difficult for many students with special needs to learn and behave in a socially productive manner. If so, then maybe we need to use drama more in the schools. Using drama in the ESL classroom is not a new concept. Drama provides an excellent platform for exploring theoretical and practical aspects of the English language (Whiteson,1996). The improvisation aspect of drama gives students opportunities for developing their communicative skills in authentic and dynamic situations. Drama is a special communication situation which makes considerable demands on the flexibility and skills of the teacher (Kao,1998). We have Morrow (1981) who gives some guiding principles behind the use of the communicative activities. Susan Holden (1981) adds some definitions as to what drama is and how it provides opportunities for a person to express themselves. Finally, drama promotes class bonding: in drama classes, there is usually a great deal of comradery. Methods for Incorporating Drama in the ESL Class. 1. Act out the Dialogue. One of the easiest ways to incorporate drama in the classroom is to have students act out the dialogue from their textbooks. This is effective for a beginning activity of incorporating drama in the classroom. 2. Perform Reader's Theater. If students are reading a short story such as "The Chaser," about the man who buys a "love potion" for his unrequited love, have students act out the story or part of the story, working in groups and assigning roles and determining the blocking. This is particularly effective with "short-shorts": brief, one-scene stories with limited characters. 4. Write the Dialogue for a Scene. Drama texts help to address the need for sufficient texts for worthwhile reading in which suitable materials can be accessed. The "a" type analytical approach to drama / theatre texts As I have suggested, the analysis of language in a text is just one aspect of its use. In the type "a" approach, language is separated into its phonological, lexical components etc and disseminating strategies then adopted. Identifying the story, characters, plot (achievable at beginner level). Identifying the author's / characters' viewpoint, attitude or opinion. Classroom method Below, I outline the stages of a type "b" approach to introducing a drama/theatre text to a class of EFL learners. The process involves linking standard approaches in drama/theatre to approaches suitable for the classroom.