

Drama

Guidelines for Teachers of Students with

MILD

General Learning Disabilities



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Rationale and introduction

The approach advocated in the *Primary School Curriculum, Drama* constitutes a broadening in focus from the concept of drama as a performance-orientated activity towards the use of drama as a learning and developmental experience.

Through a process of collaboration, and exploring a range of human feelings, drama can help students to explore a variety of social situations and moral questions within a supportive framework.

In this way, drama can enable students to gain confidence in making decisions and in solving problems.

Rationale

These guidelines envisage three main goals for drama:

- to foster personal and social development such as
 - promoting self-expression
 - building self-confidence
 - enhancing creativity
 - encouraging co-operation
- to use drama as an active learning strategy in the teaching of other subjects
- to value drama as an art form in its own right.

Drama is a valuable tool which contributes to general intellectual growth and personal development. It enables students to develop the ability to pursue enquiry, and to extend learning and insight. Part of the role of teaching drama is to help students to consider ideas from different perspectives. As a result of this informed consideration they are better able to resolve problems and issues. It allows the students to experience, discuss, plan, and reflect on the work they are doing.

Drama can be seen, in part, as a way in which students can *let off steam*, as a psychological release from tension. However, drama is not simply about letting the students exercise their energies in whatever way they wish; it is, in part, about introducing a new perspective on how to look at their world. In this sense, drama enriches the participant in a way that few other subjects can.

In drama, the students are at the centre of the learning experience, and this allows them to build their own bridges of understanding. Drama in education is a process of negotiation between students and the teacher. In drama, the teacher suffers a reversal of his or her usual role, which is that of the *one who knows*.

The importance of drama for students with mild general learning disabilities

Drama in education affirms the notion that everything can be taught in several different ways. This is a particularly important concept for students with mild general learning disabilities. It attempts to provide students with several different entry points to learning.

Drama functions as a way of making the world simpler and more understandable. It can be a kind of *playing out* of living in real life situations. It enables students to put into practice skills they have learnt in the fictional context of the classroom. It is a subject that can affect their fundamental reactions to everyday situations. If students with mild general learning disabilities have the opportunity to work in and through drama, their imaginations and their repertoire of skills are developed. They are able to tackle new situations more competently as drama helps to increase their awareness of the human reaction to particular circumstances.

Communicating is central to drama, and it is important for teachers to be aware of the various modes of verbal and non-verbal communication. It is equally important to realise that a student may adopt different ways of communicating his/her thoughts and emotions to others, of which language is only one. Physical gestures and facial expressions may give a clearer impression of his/her thoughts and intentions than words could convey.

The *Primary School Curriculum, Drama* enables students with mild general learning disabilities to

- experience how people behave in particular circumstances by exploring a variety of social situations and interactions
- explore a range of human feelings and responses to situations through *acting out* a range of emotions in a structured role play experience
- explore choices and moral dilemmas
- make decisions that are tested out in the drama and later reflected upon
- achieve a sense of responsibility and confidence as decision-makers and problem-solvers in the real world
- improve the social health of their group and foster improved relationships with the teacher

- play alongside their peers and begin to learn to compromise in order to sustain and develop the activity
- extend and enrich their use of language in simulated real-life contexts in which language use arises out of a genuine need to communicate
- explore material from another perspective and deepen their knowledge
- develop their ability to work in groups, trusting and relying on each other
- appreciate and respond positively to the part played by others in the drama
- explore the skills and processes involved in the negotiation and resolution of difficulties, problems and conflict in their environment.

Introduction

Overview of content

The content of the *Primary School Curriculum, Drama* is presented in one strand across levels:

'Drama to explore feelings, knowledge and ideas, leading to understanding'.

The detailed elements of content are presented in three strand units:

- Exploring and making drama
- Reflecting on drama
- Co-operating and communicating in making drama.

These are further explored through the eight elements of drama, (see p.6).

It is advisable to refer to the *Primary School Curriculum, Drama* in parallel with these guidelines. It is important to note that they do not have a strictly prescribed content. Content can be drawn from any other area of the curriculum or from themes, issues, events, and activities drawn from life itself. The *Primary School Curriculum, Drama* places considerable emphasis on the development of higher order thinking skills, such as creative problem-solving and critical thinking. It also emphasises interpersonal and intra-personal development.

Accessing the Primary School Curriculum, Drama

It is expected that students with mild general learning disabilities will be able to access most of the *Primary School Curriculum, Drama*. However, students with mild general learning disabilities may experience difficulty in

- accessing the full range of dramatic genres
- becoming drama literate
- engaging fully in make-believe play and using that experience to reflect on parallel situations in real life
- making spontaneous drama scenes (improvisation)
- engaging in text making and dramatic literature
- surrendering to the fiction.

Focusing on skills development

The *Primary School Curriculum, Drama* provides opportunities for students with mild general learning disabilities to develop a range of skills including the following

- working with others and developing the ability to contribute in small groups and whole class discussion
- planning and solving problems
- interpreting different stimuli and employing different resources
- working collaboratively to meet a challenge
- reasoning, considering different perspectives, and identifying what needs to be done in order to achieve particular effects
- evaluating
- watching
- listening
- recognising personal, emotional, and intellectual responses.

Drama provides opportunities for students to develop these skills by facilitating their practice, integration, and application using appropriate content.

Enhancing self-esteem

Students' levels of self-esteem are largely determined by the feedback they receive from their social environment. Students with mild general learning disabilities sometimes do not progress in school because they are afraid of failing. They often prefer not to try rather than risk failure. They may adopt defense mechanisms and become unwilling to accept criticism. Students may display arrogant or withdrawn and timid behaviour.

Participation in well-structured drama activities can help students with mild general learning disabilities to experience success, positive reinforcement, and validation of their worth in a nurturing and challenging environment. The *Primary School Curriculum, Drama* operates on the premise that students are empowered and motivated by learning in and through the creation of meaningful fictional contexts. Thus, through engaging in drama students are provided with a significant learning experience that can enable them to

- acquire insights and perspectives not available through other learning experiences
- gain significant social skills
- develop positive attitudes of altruism, kindness, and respect for others.

Furthermore, providing opportunities to discuss feelings and experiences within drama activities serves to instill positive self-assurance in the student with mild general learning disabilities.

It is generally recognised that one of the principal factors involved in determining an individual's self-esteem is the relationship they have with his/her significant others, such as parents, teachers, and peers. Peer approval, facilitated by active participation in drama, can support a student's self concept. Drama activities can allow students with mild general learning disabilities to integrate fully with their peers since, in the process of exploration that the drama entails, there are no right or wrong answers.

As students' self-esteem increases through participation in drama activities, students may feel more empowered to offer their ideas and suggestions within the formal class setting. It is vital, therefore, that teachers create an environment in which everyone's opinions are valued and respected, and all students are given the time and space to express their ideas. Establishing an agreed code of practice from the outset is necessary if students with mild general learning disabilities are to feel supported and valued in their efforts to take part fully in discussions and debates in the drama class.

Accessing the eight elements of drama for students with mild general learning disabilities

Belief

The element of belief in drama, as in literature, is rooted in imaginative truth (i.e. things can happen in our imagination that may not be possible in our daily lives), and depends upon the ability of the students to temporarily suspend disbelief and accept the fantastic, the wondrous, the often seemingly impossible. In drama we can explore these possibilities, speculate about them, and extend our view of the world. This depends, of course, on our acceptance of the possibilities that the imagination offers (the validity of imaginative truth). For example, we must accept or believe that we are in a forest talking to the woodcutter (teacher in role) who has asked for our help to solve a problem. The degree to which students can enter into the imaginative world by accepting the fiction of the drama will, to a great extent, determine both the success of their drama experience and the learning experiences that will result from it.

The teacher's function in building belief in drama with students with mild general learning disabilities is crucial. He/she may choose from various stimuli or use the strategy of teacher in role (TIR) to generate and sustain this belief. Students with mild general learning disabilities could be invited to create the specific environment where the action takes place, using props and objects to demarcate the classroom space, for example, a football pitch or desert island. Being receptive to the students' questions and responses in this fluid engagement builds up the belief in the drama and allows it to take on its own life.

In the story of *Jack and the Beanstalk* the students could draw or recreate the kitchen where *Jack's* mother (TIR) speaks to them about her financial problems. The use of familiar signs and symbols will also ease students into the make-believe or fictional world. For example, when the teacher puts on a particular apron she becomes *Jack's* mother for a little while in the story, and when she takes it off again she returns to being the teacher.

Role and character

Students tend to adopt roles quite spontaneously, for example becoming a doctor, a shopkeeper, a teacher, or a police person. They may assume one or two of the major attributes of that role, such as changing the tone of their voice or standing in a particular manner. Characterisation is an extension of role-playing, and involves an attempt to assume the characteristics, desires, thought processes, and physical attributes of a particular person in order to represent him/her accurately. Thus, people can recognise that you are not just playing the role of any police man; you are portraying the character of *Mr. Plod*.

In the early stages of playing a character in a drama, the student will do no more than 'assume a role'. In the drama *Jack and the Beanstalk* the student takes the collective role of *Jack*, which enables him/her to participate in the drama. However, it is important that few demands are placed on any individual student other than to listen to the teacher (who may also be in role) and watch for clues as he/she sets up the background to the fictional situation and explains what has happened so far. At this stage, the student knows relatively little about the situation and its characters, and needs to be eased gently into the fictional world before being asked to contribute actively. This will help to build belief in the situation as the student is gradually learning about his/her character and coming to know how *Jack* thinks, and what his hopes, view of life, background, etc. are. This is characterisation.

The benefit of characterisation is that the student learns to view the drama world from the point of view of someone other than himself/herself. This promotes understanding and empathy, which will enhance the student's ability to understand people with different personalities from himself/herself. It also assists greatly in exploring relationships, in developing an awareness of the use of the appropriate language register, in using non-verbal means to communicate, and in developing a willingness to accept responsibility.

Note: It is important to distinguish between taking a role and what is often called role-playing. Role-playing is the acting out of a limited activity for the purpose of forming or representing habits and attitudes, for example road safety drill. It does not demand the same attention to detail as characterisation.

Action

Action arises from the interaction between character and situation and does not necessarily involve physical movement. In drama, characters and situations are chosen so that certain unresolved conflicts, tensions, questions, or choices are highlighted and addressed. The nature of the engagement will vary with the stage of development of individual students. When the students are truly involved in drama they can come to new insights, gain further knowledge, and reach new understanding.

Once sufficient belief is established in the situation (i.e. students accept the fictional context and characters involved), the teacher or students can develop and lead the story to a point where *something happens*, and the students, in or out of role, are called upon to engage with the action and attempt to resolve the problem or dilemma that has arisen.

Time

All dramatic action, like all human existence, takes place in a dimension of time. The student may find it easier to assume a role by creating a past for their character. For example, ‘*What type of child was the character at school?*’ ‘*How did the child cope when he/she got lost at the seaside?*’ ‘*How many brothers and sisters does the character have?*’ The future outcome of the character’s life is revealed as the drama is created and unfolds.

Time helps to frame the action and constrain it. It can also contribute to the element of tension. For example, ‘*We have to get Jane to the doctor urgently, but how are we going to cross the city when there are enemies on every corner looking for us?*’ The drama is created when students try to find ways to cross the city within a given time constraint so that *Jane* can be seen by the doctor. Look at the map for possible underground routes. Travel around the perimeter walls. ‘*Should a disguise be worn?*’, ‘*Can the enemies be distracted?*’. As these creative possibilities are discussed and tried out, the drama or story line is developed in the direction the students want to lead it.

As some students with mild general learning disabilities have a poor concept of time, the teacher will need to heighten the lapse of time through the drama. For example, in *Jack and the Beanstalk* the teacher in role as *Jack’s* mother throws the seeds out the window and tells *Jack* it is bed-time, and when they awake in the morning *the giant beanstalk* is discovered as mother prepares breakfast. These events could be narrated or experienced concretely, so that the students mime going to sleep and eating breakfast to reinforce the concept of the passage of time. The lights could be dimmed in the classroom to further evoke a sense of nightfall.

Place

Character, action, and time constitute *the who, what, and when* of drama. The element of place encompasses *the where*. Just as drama takes place in a dimension of time, it also has a location: it happens somewhere. The location helps the students know how to respond and behave in the drama. For example, if they are stowaways on board a ship, they will assume certain physical attributes and lower their voices so as not to be seen or heard. Whereas if they are in hairdressing salon and their hair-cut has not turned out very well, they will assume a different body language and vocal register.

To help create a sense of place in the drama for students with mild general learning disabilities, objects, props, and pictures can be used as stimuli to help the students associate the objects with the place in the story. For example, in *Jack and the Beanstalk*, the teacher and students will make use of what space is available to set out the table and chairs in *Jack’s* kitchen and, with the teacher’s guidance, will decide where the fireplace, the cottage door and the windows are. A symbol can be placed in position. For example, a drawing of a fireplace, a door or a window would help the students to accept this make-believe of *Jack’s* home. Pictures of the kitchen with tables, chairs, cups, saucers, utensils, etc. can represent *Jack’s* kitchen. In this way the element of place will not only influence the enactment but will stimulate students to give it a greater vividness and immediacy.

Tension

Tension arises when characters in the drama are faced with conflicting needs, or want to take different courses of action. It is from a combination of the elements of action, role and character, time, and place

that tensions derive, and this helps to drive the action forward. Tension is one of the defining features of drama, usually characterised by a dilemma, difficulty, or problem in the storyline.

An example of tension can be found in *Jack and the Beanstalk* when the teacher is in the role of *Jack's* mother worries aloud about Jack not being home early. Tension also arises between mother and *Jack* when she learns he has sold the cow for a handful of seeds, and again when the giant discovers *Jack* has entered his house. For students with mild general learning disabilities, it is important to build up to the moment of climax, gradually increasing the tension, so that they are prepared to some extent for what is to come rather than being suddenly launched directly into the action. It will also serve to maximize opportunities for decision-making and reflection on the action rather than merely physically responding to the tension, which could lead to unnecessary noise levels and confusion thereby losing opportunities for learning.

Significance

Significance can be described as the underlying relevance or deeper meaning that a piece of drama has in relation to some aspect of life. Drama seeks to illuminate, clarify, explain, or redefine human experience. The significance of a piece of drama can be related through the theme and the plot, but also through objects, lights, sound, and words. The utilitarian function of an object often takes second place to its deeper significance within the moment of drama, for example a well-placed chair, a half-empty glass on an old wooden table, a broken knife on the mantelpiece, or a sod of turf on the fire. The object or sign chosen to point to the significance of a moment in drama may stand for something concrete. For example, a twig with buds may represent a broom, a fan, or an umbrella, or it may stand for something abstract, for example renewal, spring, new life, hope.

For students with mild general learning disabilities, the teacher's choice of signs, as well as how they are used, is crucially important in terms of communicating meaning about the significance of the drama to the students. The signs chosen must be clear, uncluttered, and absolutely focussed on the learning area of the drama. For example, in *Jack and the Beanstalk* the drawings of a fireplace, door and

window signify the lay-out of *Jack's* kitchen, and the lighting of a candle signifies nightfall.

Genre

Genre refers to the form of dramatic expression—naturalistic, comic, tragic, absurd, etc. Naturalistic drama is the genre that imitates most accurately the details of life and is the one which comes most easily to students. However, genres may become interwoven as a drama unfolds. For example, in *Jack and the Beanstalk* the kitchen scene is naturalistic but *Jack's* encounter with the buyer of his cow borders on the comic.

Potential areas of difficulty

Students with mild general learning disabilities may experience difficulties that have particular implications for learning through drama. The most salient of these are

- short term memory
- short attention span, lack of concentration and application
- difficulty in understanding dramatic concepts/abstractions
- lack of spatial awareness
- difficulty with the application of previously learned knowledge
- difficulties with transfer to *fictional reality*
- difficulties with transfer to real life
- confusion with signs and symbols
- difficulty in following instructions
- difficulty in negotiating and co-operating with others
- difficulty in communicating (either verbally or non-verbally) with others
- difficulty in handling other forms of communication
- limited vocabulary
- difficulty understanding the relativity of time.

Particular strategies to enable students overcome these difficulties are dealt with in detail on pages 23-31 in '*Approaches and methodologies*'.

School planning

It is important that the school plan reflects the central role that drama, as one of the arts subjects, plays in the holistic development of all its students.

General principles

The section on school planning in the *Primary School Curriculum: Drama, Teacher Guidelines* (pp.16-24) offers essential advice in relation to school planning for drama. The following are additional points that will help in the planning and structuring of drama experiences for students with mild general learning disabilities.

- It is essential to create a supportive climate throughout the school in which students' creative work is respected and valued.
- In drama, teachers should see themselves as learners alongside the students, helping to foster autonomous learning while empowering their students.
- It is highly desirable that teachers themselves, not solely outside drama practitioners, implement the *Primary School Curriculum, Drama*, thereby experiencing the positive benefits that engaging in drama can bring to the teaching and learning process and to improved relationships in their classrooms.
- Engaging with drama allows for a change in the teacher-student relationship. The traditional paradigms of power and authority are shifted somewhat, and there is a gentle move towards increased autonomy and independence on the part of the student.
- As some students with mild general learning disabilities may not have had a lot of experience of drama, phased implementation will be helpful until the students are secure about how to behave in drama, and with its rules of operation (see '*Approaches and methodologies*', p.19).
- In teaching students with diverse learning needs, the aim is to enable participants to develop the necessary conceptual understanding and interaction skills. However, it is important that the learning targets enable them not just to participate but to achieve the highest possible learning outcomes from each and every engagement in the arts as in any other area of the curriculum.

The focus of planning for drama for students with mild general learning disabilities

Although the importance of engaging with new material is central to students' experience in drama, students with mild general learning disabilities may need to revisit knowledge and skills several times, applying them to familiar and new situations each time. Drama provides the opportunity for the same material to be consolidated and extended by engaging in age appropriate contexts that are also developmentally appropriate, dignified, and relevant to the students.

In using the time allocated to drama it is important to recognise that, despite a relatively short concentration span, time is required to get students with mild general learning disabilities *into the drama*, to *de-role*, and to reflect and discuss the work afterwards. These activities are essential in allowing students sufficient time to make a distinction between make-believe and the real world. It will also allow for the transference of learning from the drama experience in the fictional world to the real world, where it can be later applied.

A good supply of high-quality, well chosen resources are required to support learning for students with mild general learning disabilities. Visual props are effective in enabling students to achieve meaning. They are particularly useful to the teacher in changing from one role to another. For example, moving from being *Jack's* mother to the giant in the drama *Jack and the Beanstalk* can be signalled through the use of an apron and a big overcoat respectively, and this helps to cue students into the action.

Curriculum planning

The Primary School Curriculum: Drama, Teacher Guidelines (pp. 26-33) offers valuable advice on curriculum planning for drama. In the case of students with mild general learning disabilities particular attention should be given to the following issues

- **make-believe play:** Drama, to a great extent, relies on make-believe play. Students with mild general learning disabilities may be developmentally

capable of engaging in make-believe but may lack drive or initiative to generate and sustain the make-believe. The use of many well structured drama-in-education strategies, such as TIR, clear signing techniques and the use of collective role can assist students in entering the fictional mode more easily and effectively. Students with mild general learning disabilities must know that they are engaged in make-believe or *pretend*, otherwise they may be inadvertently exposed to sensitive material. If it is not clear that it is make-believe, the students may be left feeling bewildered during and after the drama session.

- **transferring and generalising learning from the drama experience:** Students should be enabled to transfer and generalise learning from the drama experience to real life. Students with mild general learning disabilities may find this problematic because of developmental and/or social reasons. Therefore, the drama activity will need to be planned to accommodate the needs of differing levels of students' symbolic and social development. Work should be differentiated in mixed-ability groups to enable students with mild general learning disabilities to transfer knowledge and skills to different situations, and to recognise the relevance of an issue or aspect of learning to themselves and their own experience.
- **sharing responsibility in the drama:** It is important to empower students and to encourage them to take risks in the drama. This is best achieved through ensuring that they assume a significant amount of responsibility for the drama and so gain ownership over the work. Planning, therefore, must allow for an element of unpredictability in the development of any drama activity.
- **tension in the drama:** By its nature drama hinges on sustaining tension and on maintaining the group dynamic. The teacher uses the elements of drama to create a sense of urgency and draws on a range of drama conventions and teaching strategies to explore the tensions created in the drama. Students with mild general learning disabilities may not readily appreciate the significance of the tensions inherent in the material. This may present the teacher with a difficulty in generating and sustaining meanings with the group.

- **a wide range of abilities:** Working with students with mild general learning disabilities involves working with a wide range of abilities. Some may be more engaged than others, and the teacher is faced with the challenge of engaging all the students effectively. Fortunately, drama tends to rise to the level of the most able student while still catering for individual and diverse needs. It is better to keep a natural class group together when working in drama. It is possible and highly desirable to differentiate drama teaching.
- **the rules and conventions of drama:** As the focus in drama is predominantly on experiential learning, in which the traditional paradigm of teacher-student relationship is shifted, teachers may initially experience some degree of disruption as students get used to this new found freedom to express themselves and to move about in the classroom. It is important to stress that with increased freedom comes increased responsibility. Establishing an agreed code of conduct will help reduce most indiscretions in this regard, and once students with mild general learning disabilities get used to this way of working they tend to become more mature and socially responsive in taking turns and listening to one another's ideas. The exciting nature of most drama contexts tends to motivate students to work together in an effort to solve the dilemma posed or to help the character in trouble.
- **unpredictable behaviour:** Students with mild general learning disabilities can on occasion exhibit unpredictable behaviour. If a teacher's attention is diverted in drama there is a danger that he/she may lose the attention of the entire group. Planning material that will of itself motivate and interest the students will help reduce the instances of negative or disruptive behaviour, and, if the teacher has to respond to a particular indiscretion, the remainder of the students should be able to remain on task.
- **the physical aspect of drama:** Drama techniques involving students with mild general learning disabilities focus strongly on the physical aspect. Expressive use of face, hands, and the whole body is within the domain of drama, as is a certain amount of physical contact between students. Many students with mild general learning disabilities have a difficulty with physically touching others. This could present problems in a drama class where touching others may be integral to

the work. On the other hand physical excesses can occur in a situation where students want to reinforce a disgruntled point of view. The teachers will need to intervene if *push* becomes *shove* and to remind students that symbols, words, and gestures can be used just as effectively to communicate feeling in drama. The use of simple physical games and drama activities that involve movement which is controlled and directed by the teacher help to concretise touch, and may serve to gently overcome students' sensitivity and concerns in this regard.

- **channelling energy:** There is a danger of some students using the drama experience to *let off steam*. This is not necessarily a bad thing, and it can be catered for at the outset of a drama lesson by engaging in warm-up games and exercises to facilitate the release of excess energy. However, a distinction should be drawn between physical and psychological release.
- **personal and sensitive material:** The material explored in the drama session can sometimes come too close to a particular student's real life experience, for example doing a drama about loss and separation, or bullying. By its nature, drama explores life issues and may unearth sensitive, raw emotions and may produce inappropriate but often understandable responses from some students. It is important not to steer away from such issues, as they are important to students and need to be aired in a well-structured and safe environment. The key to good planning in this regard is to handle these issues from an objective distance, that is, one or more steps removed from the student's direct experience. These concerns are dealt with in the following section, which aims to provide teachers with greater detail on how to handle such situations. It is also important to remember that there may be occasions when professional help and advice should be sought.
- **protection into emotion:** Students with mild general learning disabilities may experience some difficulty in entering make-believe and engaging with a fictional context. As there is a risk of students failing to differentiate between the real and fictional (make-believe) world, some teachers have tended to either steer away entirely from this hugely valuable learning experience or else try to disengage students with mild general learning disabilities from experiencing any emotions in

relation to the make-believe world. However, it is recognised that some emotional engagement is necessary for any real learning to occur; that is, we must have some feeling towards the material in order to be motivated enough to take an interest in learning about it. However, the important factor to bear in mind is that we must not protect students with mild general learning disabilities from emotion but into emotion so that learning can take place. This is best achieved through planning drama episodes that are well removed from the student's direct experience.

- **distancing strategies:** It is important that students with mild general learning disabilities do not become totally immersed in the drama; they need to remain distanced and objective as well. It is not a good idea to handle sensitive or controversial themes directly. Strategies can be employed that will allow for resonances to permeate through the drama and make links between the student's own reality and the reality of the character in the drama. For example, bullying or inappropriate behaviour is best explored through an exploration of animals or toys at junior level, or through a context involving people working in a different environment at senior level when one of the characters has changed and is upsetting all of the others. The aim is to engage thinking and feeling simultaneously. If students are distanced from the event and explore the issue from another angle or perspective, removed from the student's direct experience, the drama process will be safer and less threatening, and the student's responses and interaction can be maximised.
- **self spectator:** The concept of the self spectator is closely linked with further protecting students with mild general learning disabilities in drama and with affording greater reflection on, and deepening of, the work. The concept implies students being aware of what they are doing and what is happening to them in the drama, while ensuring that they do not become overly immersed in the action. This can be achieved if they are encouraged to monitor their emotional and cognitive responses to the dramatic stimulus. The students' failure to monitor their participation in the drama may result in missed learning opportunities and may increase the risk of dangerous emotional engagement. It is important that students with mild general learning disabilities are alerted to and understand what they are doing in the situation, what their role is, and why and how they are involved.

Ideally students should be encouraged to do this for themselves and to share their perspectives with others during regular moments of reflection during the drama. Continuous teacher monitoring may be necessary in order to fully protect students with mild general learning disabilities when they are in the drama context and to ensure a high quality of participation and learning.

Organisational planning

The *Primary School Curriculum: Drama, Teacher Guidelines*, (pp.21-23) offers valuable advice on organisational planning for drama. However, in the case of students with mild general learning disabilities consideration should also be given to the following:

- **the use of space:** The effective use of space is important so that students with mild general learning disabilities have the opportunity to talk and listen at ease in different situations, to work effectively, and to use resources which specifically encourage an active exploration. Establishing an appropriate physical space is the responsibility of the school. Although most drama activities can be conducted within the classroom, and it is important that drama is integrated with other curricular areas, there are occasions when the allocation of a separate, dedicated space that provides the students with an opportunity to work without disturbing other groups, will be appropriate.
- **support staff:** Classroom assistants are an invaluable resource when working with students with mild general learning disabilities because they can support the activities of both the teacher and learner. It is important that they are taken into account when planning. Their personal comfort levels should be kept in mind when engaging them in any drama activity. Putting a colleague in role may help develop the drama, but for some people working in role can be a huge psychological hurdle and may be best left until people themselves feel ready to undertake the activity. When planning for the involvement of support staff it is important to take into account
 - whether they are comfortable playing a role
 - what sort of role they feel comfortable in
 - whether they are likely to be over-supportive of students
 - what discreet signalling system should be used during the drama
 - their other duties of care for students.

■ **parents and the wider community:** Parents, family, friends, and members of the wider community are often an under-used resource in arts education. They can be an important resource in drama, particularly when students with mild general learning disabilities need additional support in order to engage with the make-believe situation or in helping them reflect on, and transfer the learning gained during the drama experience into their daily lives.

■ **subject specialists:** A teacher with special responsibility for drama can provide valuable support for staff by directing them towards resources, courses, conferences, and available literature in the field. However, it is important that he/she is encouraged to work with the class teacher in developing and integrating drama in the curriculum. Drama should be a central part of the student's learning experience and, since the content of the *Primary School Curriculum, Drama* encompasses every aspect of the student's experience including learning in other curriculum areas, it is essential that it is fully integrated with all facets of the student's learning in school. Careful planning in the mediation of the *Primary School Curriculum, Drama* by the classroom teacher is central towards achieving this end.

■ **extra-curricular drama experiences:** There are quite a few visiting theatre groups and freelance practitioners who tour the country and present their work in schools. This can be a valuable experience for all students and particularly for students with mild general learning disabilities who tend to enjoy the excitement of actors in costume performing to music. On occasion, theatre-in-education groups devise programmes targeted specifically at students with mild general learning disabilities, and, consonant with its own particular needs, the school can avail of such programmes. For example, a play could be presented about the challenges faced by senior students with mild general learning disabilities entering the world of work.

Visits to the theatre are highly recommended for students with mild general disabilities, but teachers should choose the play or production carefully in order to meet the specific needs of their students. The multi-sensory experience they afford can particularly appeal to and stimulate students with mild general learning disabilities. They can help students to

- develop an appreciation of drama performances
- enhance their appreciation of the process of devising theatre and staging a performance
- increase their understanding and appreciation of the elements of drama in practice
- deepen their understanding and appreciation of various aspects and genres of drama
- gain experience of responding and appreciating drama
- gain a life-long leisure interest in and appreciation of drama for personal fulfillment and enjoyment.

Classroom planning

Classroom planning for drama ought to be directed towards providing students with mild general learning disabilities with a coherent and meaningful context for achieving expressive and instructional objectives.

The *Primary School Curriculum: Drama, Teacher Guidelines* (pp.26-33) offers detailed advice in relation to classroom planning for drama.

Additional considerations that may be useful when planning drama for students with mild general learning disabilities include

- **choosing content for drama:** Teachers should choose and handle content sensitively, structuring it carefully in order to offer students a valuable learning experience while avoiding unfocussed activities or emotional unease. It is important not to *throw* students with mild general learning disabilities *in at the deep end*, and thereby exposing them to raw emotion or sensitive situations that are too close to their own experience of life.
- **believing in the drama:** The power of drama lies in the imagination, and in enabling students to engage in imaginative experience and believe in what they are doing. This is not always easy to achieve with students with mild general learning disabilities, but is necessary if students are to be provided with effective simulated experiences of life, for example enjoying the seaside, or how people feel when excluded from a game in the playground.
- **the rules and conventions of drama:** Students with mild general learning disabilities do not engage well with drama without preparation and training. The approach to drama can differ significantly from other more familiar experiences of teaching and learning. Students need to understand that there are rules and conventions that need to be followed in drama, and become familiar with applying them.
- **sharing responsibility for drama:** Students with mild general learning disabilities should share responsibility in drama activities. Negotiation and student's involvement should be central to the planning, performing, and reviewing of tasks.
- **reflecting on drama:** Reflection is an important learning aspect of drama. It allows the teacher and students, working collaboratively and individually,

to assess and evaluate the implications of what they have explored through their drama work. It also facilitates the appreciation of a greater depth of meaning and significance in the work. Students with mild general learning disabilities may need to develop strategies to enable them to reflect at a more engaged and reflective level. Re-phrasing of questions is usually quite effective in encouraging students with mild general learning disabilities to reflect. Instead of asking direct questions, for example *'What is down that path?'*, to which there appears a definite answer, it is often more effective to pose, *'I wonder?'* or other speculative type questions to which there appears no definite answer, but rather a range of possibilities.

- **working in pairs and groups:** Students with mild general learning disabilities may initially experience some difficulty working in pairs or small groups. Therefore, when starting drama for the first time it is better to work mainly with the whole group. Pair work and small group work can be undertaken gradually.
- **defining clear parameters:** It is useful to define clear parameters for the work since this makes it easier to *block* unthinking responses. Strategies that are inherently directive allow for greater control of the work. Students with mild general learning disabilities can be quite effectively managed through the use of tension and role. If they want to see what is in the box the teacher may say, *'We will have to sit very quietly for a while and check that there is no-one else around before we open it'*.
- **behavioural problems:** Behavioural problems can largely be avoided if the material chosen is relevant and accessible to the students. Drama games used at the beginning of a class are also valuable in engaging the students and in encouraging them to operate within the rules of the drama class. In addition, it is more advantageous initially to do drama at regular and perhaps shorter intervals, rather than to attempt large blocks of work.
- **the physical aspect of drama:** The active, physical aspects of drama provide an invaluable contribution to the development of students with mild general learning disabilities. Students can re-arrange the furniture when setting up a drama *in the bus, in an aeroplane, etc.*, and this helps them move into symbolism by working from the concrete to the abstract.

Important characteristics of successful drama activities

If students' experience of drama is to be effective, and if their learning through drama is to be maximised, drama activities should have certain salient characteristics. The most important of these are

- establishing a clear context for the make-believe
- engaging students with the content of the drama
- using appropriate strategies that will help students focus on the task
- accommodating students purposefully in the context of a diverse range of abilities.

The following are some practical suggestions that will help the teacher to address each of these issues, and so enable students to gain the maximum benefit from an experience of drama in the classroom.

Establishing a clear context for the make-believe

It is important to establish a clear context for working in make-believe. The following guidelines will gently ease students with mild general learning disabilities into working in fictional environments.

- Talk students *in and out* of make-believe (the fictional scenario).
- The nature of the fiction should be explained *in process* by stopping briefly to make quick cross-verbal checks during the lesson.
- Students should be helped into symbolism by working from the concrete (for example, furniture) to the abstract.
- The pace of the activity should be adjusted to suit the students' needs. This will help them to gain as much as possible from each situation, as against rushing onwards and failing to grasp the significance of an event.
- Roles should be signalled clearly, preferably with physical objects, such as an apron for the cook or a crown for the King.
- Stop the drama at regular intervals to consolidate developments and reflect upon the outcomes.

- Provide plenty of opportunities for discussion in and out of role.
- Move the narrative forwards and backwards to focus on significant moments. This convention of *elastic time* can be facilitated through comparison with video.

The meaningful engagement of students with the content of the drama

- Plan the work so that it is well within range of students' experience, and in such a way that they can perceive the relevance of the content in terms of their own lives.
- Use strategies of discussion, questioning, and cross-checking to maintain the focus and to ensure students are on task.
- Use support staff in-role, in ways in which, they can broadly retain control of the drama without providing all the ideas.
- Provide opportunities for all students to contribute something, if they so desire.
- Limit the boundaries within which students have to make a decision. This enables certain students to engage in creative divergent thinking.
- Use simple props and visual *hooks* or cues to support entry into the make-believe world.
- Plan a clear focus and sense of purpose in the tasks.
- Ensure that all signals and instructions are clear and unambiguous.
- Ensure that roles are adopted sincerely and not over-acted. They must be sufficiently defined to serve an identifiable purpose.

Focusing on the task

- Divide the drama into a series of sequential activities.
- Employ a mix of discussion, activity, and static strategies to allow for the ebb and flow of energy.
- Allow those with very short concentration span to *come and go*, and vary the stimulus regularly.
- Use all the ideas students offer if possible, and integrate them into the unfolding story or drama. Seeing their ideas incorporated in the drama empowers the students, and they begin to realise that they have the capacity to influence and affect events. It is important to be particularly sensitive to students' non-verbal modes of communication. For example, a shake of the head or a frown could be an important comment on the action, and should be acknowledged.
- Support staff, if briefed beforehand, can question students in role and help to keep them *on task*.
- Use short sentences and succinct language at all times.
- Limit the amount of extended periods of listening to teacher talk in order to involve the group and minimise switching off.
- Working directly in role helps circumvent complex language structures '*What would you do if ...?*'. This is easier to do after the drama session.
- Pause at high points of tension in the drama. This helps to generate a sense of urgency and enquiry.
- Use visual props (plates, apron, and beans). Strong visual elements tend to grab students' attention.
- It is important to have all props readily available and thus minimise interruptions.
- Constant questioning and cross-checking keeps students with mild general learning disabilities on task, but a variety of modes of questioning should be used, to ensure that the activity does not disintegrate into a question and answer session.
- Decide on student roles (if any) when planning an activity.

Accommodating students with a diverse range of ability

- Establish the range of ability among the group, particularly in terms of symbolic understanding and social development, and plan for this.
- Consider whether it would be more viable to combine students of similar abilities from other classes.
- Plan to meet the needs of all students in the group at some point during the activity.
- Decide on the strategies (music, song, ritual, physical task, drama game) to be used in order to synchronise activities, bearing in mind the length of time it may take for some students to comprehend what is required by these activities.
- Identify aspects of learning in other subjects that can be integrated with drama.
- Plan to include topical content, issues, and concerns of particular interest to the students in the content of the drama.
- Ensure that the content is age-appropriate, or, if not, adapt it to make it relevant and accessible.
- Are there particular friendship groups among the students that could be exploited while doing improvised work?
- Ensure that boys and girls work well together.
- Take account of personality clashes among the students.
- Be generally vigilant about the social health of the group in all drama activities.
- When choosing content, beware of the susceptibilities of the different students and avoid, or be careful to accommodate, particular fears or obsessions.

Planning for assessment

People are generally sceptical about assessing drama. Fortunately, in drama there is not a *right way* but a multiplicity of possible interpretations and representations of a given theme. This provides scope for students with mild general learning disabilities, who have many and diverse learning styles and needs, to work to their individual strengths. Recording students' attainment and progress in drama can be easily done. For example, as part of their engagement in any drama scheme of work students with mild general learning disabilities will produce a variety of written documents and materials and easily assessable oral output that may be used for the purposes of assessment. For example, students may write letters of invitation to the ball, prepare posters to advertise it, complete diary entries for those not invited, order gowns and slippers to wear with accompanying illustrations, make lists of all the necessary preparations required, etc. Similarly, students' oral competencies can be assessed at the fairy godmother's meeting or when the students discuss why Cinderella's step-sisters treat her quite badly and whether anything can be done to resolve this. The challenge for all teachers is to develop manageable assessment procedures that will not only provide relevant information but also feed into the planning of future students' work.

It is important to remember that assessment will always relate to the aims and objectives of the curriculum and the particular learning goals the teacher has identified for the lesson or series of lessons. Learning outcomes can be assessed through careful observation of students in drama activities in conjunction with written or other expressions of their work generated through the drama itself or through subsequent reflection on drama activities.

Furthermore, students with mild general learning disabilities can review, plan, and assess their own work. They can also be supported to criticise their work constructively in order to help them play an active role in their own progress. This is important in encouraging students with mild general learning disabilities to become independent learners and to develop responsibility and ownership of their work.

However, the emphasis should be on a positive approach to criticism because students with mild general learning disabilities can be overly negative about their own progress and may suffer from low self-esteem.

Students with mild general learning disabilities need to be asked about their work. They also need to learn how to ask questions about themselves; about each other and about the dramas they see on TV, in the cinema, in the theatre, etc. In this way they can be encouraged to relate their own experience of drama in the classroom to the wider dimensions of drama, and so deepen their appreciation of the nature and power of drama.

Assessment strategies

Responses to drama do not always have to be verbal. Students can draw characters, trace them in sand, or mould them in plasticine/márla in ways that suggest what was interesting about them. Colours, shapes, and other details can help to portray character traits or moods. For example, *'if this person were a colour, what would that colour be?'* *'If he/she were a line, would the line be curvy or straight?'*

Diary, checklists with specified criteria (related to the objectives of the lesson), participant (and non-participant) observation accounts, portfolios, and student profiles are all appropriate tools for assessment in drama. The *Primary School Curriculum, Drama* offers useful information on assessment in Drama (pp.42-46).

Approaches and methodologies

A well-established body of knowledge and set of practical techniques have been developed in the field of drama in education. Many of these are demonstrated in the exemplar lesson plans. A detailed glossary of these techniques can be found in the *Primary School Curriculum: Drama, Teacher Guidelines* (pp.108-110).

Accessing the Primary School Curriculum, Drama

The approaches and methodologies outlined in the *Primary School Curriculum, Drama* are generally appropriate for students with mild general learning disabilities. In addition to the potential challenges described in the introduction of these guidelines, and in the context of the exemplar lessons offered in the *Primary School Curriculum, Drama*, students with mild general learning disabilities may

- experience difficulty in drawing on their own resources and experiences
- not immediately seize upon an idea or stimulus and develop it
- delay in showing initiative
- fail to abstract and generalise from the learning experience
- see little potential in someone else's idea for a drama
- be unable to sustain concentration and interest for the duration of the drama session
- have a poor memory span relating to a previous lesson
- experience difficulty with unfamiliar terminology and concepts in drama, particularly with many of the terms used to describe the drama strategies
- have a poor retention span
- experience difficulty with the social interaction skills that are highly desirable for group experience in drama.

The following recommendations deserve consideration in order to adapt the approaches and methodologies recommended in the *Primary School Curriculum: Drama, Teacher Guidelines* for students with mild general learning disabilities

- Good planning is required to structure the drama experience in a way that affords students with mild general learning disabilities the opportunity to draw from their own experiences and resources to engage with the situation presented. This includes the selection of relevant and age appropriate material that engages the students, resonates with their life experiences, and takes account of their personal resources.
- Students with mild general learning disabilities may require targeted support in making connections and developing ideas and stimuli.
- Concrete materials are required to consolidate learning. Multi-sensory approaches and first-hand experiences are needed to support students' transition from reality to the fictional environment. Appropriate musical, visual, tactile, and olfactory cues should be provided to evoke the atmosphere of a desert island.
- Sessions must be manageable in length and level of difficulty.
- Feedback must be meaningful and immediate in order to ensure that students with mild general learning disabilities appreciate the subtlety of techniques such as teacher in role (TIR) or the teacher assuming a deliberately opposing viewpoint (for example, playing *the devil's advocate*).
- Explicit teaching in relation to concepts and skills is required.
- Students with mild general learning disabilities need numerous practical experiences of drama techniques so that they are familiar with the concepts before the terminology is introduced.

Planning for differentiation

The needs of the individual student with mild general learning difficulties have to remain paramount in curriculum planning. Drama offers opportunities for teachers to plan for differentiation both by task and by outcome. Questions can be differentiated in order to

challenge all students individually at some point in the drama. Students may be working on the same theme, but at levels appropriate to their different stages of development. This will help to emphasise the social aspect of their learning.

In drama it is possible to match each student's strengths and abilities to suitable tasks. For example, in a drama about a missing person, those with some writing skills or representational skills can prepare the missing person poster, those with verbal competence can interview those who last saw the missing person and create a case file, and pre-verbal or non-verbal students can physically sign or symbolise what they think happened to the missing person or follow the route that he/she could have travelled. If possible, non-verbal physically disabled students can also be brought on the re-tracing journey through the area, or be invited to inspect the evidence found and work with the teacher, other students, or support staff in examining the information and available clues, in order to look for a solution as to where the person has gone.

Drama is a subject in which students with mild general learning disabilities can be actively engaged and challenged through a motivating and meaningful tasks without the perceived stigma often associated with differentiated tasks in other subject areas. For example, students focussing on the issue of refugees could quite feasibly be invited to create a fictional centre for refugees. This would involve many varied tasks, and students could participate at their own level of ability in designing the building, deciding the size and use of the rooms and their décor, the menu to be offered, the provision of appropriate entertainment, the training courses that could be offered to the refugees, the selection criteria, who would need to be employed to run the centre, and the costs involved. Further activities could be developed that might involve planning for the official launch and opening of this centre. Then, at an appropriate moment, when everything appears to be running smoothly, the teacher could introduce a problem (dramatic tension) that all the students would have to address and resolve. For example, the centre could be faced with closure as a result of spiralling costs.

Drama games and activities to help students with mild general learning disabilities access the Primary School Curriculum, Drama

Potential areas of difficulty for students with mild general learning disabilities were outlined on pages 23-31. These areas and the consequent learning implications for drama may inhibit students from taking part effectively in the full range of experiences envisaged in the *Primary School Curriculum, Drama*. It may be helpful, therefore, to use the games and activities outlined below to enable students to bridge the gap to a fuller experience of the curriculum.

When choosing drama games and activities it is important to be aware of the wide range of skills and development levels of students with mild general learning disabilities. The activities suggested in these guidelines take account of the need to select and plan appropriate activities. Three broad categories of junior, middle, and senior are referred to throughout. However, it should be noted that most drama games are fun to do as activities in themselves and, because participation is often the only criterion of success, many games are, therefore, suitable for a wide spectrum of developmental levels.

In selecting and planning appropriate drama games and activities, teachers are advised to refer to the *Primary School Curriculum: Drama, Teacher Guidelines, School Planning*, page 16. This offers advice on the selection and planning of suitable approaches with different groupings, some of whom, for example, may experience difficulties with touch or may react slower than others.

The potential areas of difficulty for students with mild general learning disabilities referred to earlier are dealt with separately, and in each case

- the learning implications for drama are outlined
- possible strategies for addressing those implications are considered
- one or more games, and variations of these, are suggested
- the level of suitability of each activity is indicated.

Other drama games and activities

In addition to their value in addressing the characteristics of students with mild general learning disabilities, drama games and activities can be used for other purposes. These games and exercises are a complement and support to drama activity rather than a substitute for it.

Drama games and exercises are useful

- when beginning work with a new class
- in releasing tensions within a group or class
- when the teacher or students have limited experience in drama
- as part of a warm up routine
- in revitalising students at any time of the school day
- in injecting energy into a lethargic group or in calming down an over excited-one
- as motivating introductions to theme or topic work
- in including students with mild general learning disabilities in an active role in a given task
- in helping young people understand the need for rules and codes of behaviour
- in developing physical and mental dexterity
- in promoting intellectual and emotional flexibility
- in helping young people learn how to manipulate space and time
- in developing a sense of trust by being non-threatening
- in developing the confidence of individual students
- in developing and building trust and co-operation among the members of a group or in a whole class context.

Some practical pointers in the use of drama games and other activities

- Drama games and exercises can be done with the whole class or with smaller groups.
- Plan the activities carefully. It is often a good idea for the teacher to practise them first in order to increase confidence in using them.
- The teacher should involve himself/herself where possible in order to avoid students seeing the activity as a competition in which the teacher is watching to see who does best. Genuine, natural responses are far better educationally than stereotypical ones aimed to please the teacher.
- All drama games and exercises take time to develop, so do not expect too much in the first few attempts. Equally, try not to flog the game to death by over repetition.
- The atmosphere should be calm and uncritical. This helps build trust between the teacher and student.
- If the lesson is not going well for one reason or another then do not continue it. Establish what is going wrong, and return to the activity at a later date.
- Criticism should be constructive. Students should be encouraged to be responsible for their behaviour in class. Punishing or embarrassing an individual will do nothing to help his/her concentration, and may destroy the atmosphere of the class.
- Choose the right time to engage with games and exercises. These activities should be integrated flexibly with the rest of the curriculum.
- Initially, it is better to introduce drama work in short sessions rather than attempt one long block each week.

Addressing potential areas of difficulty for students with mild general learning disabilities

▲ Potential area of difficulty	■ Implications for learning
The student may experience difficulty in relation to short term memory.	The student may forget earlier decisions made in the drama or character choices/actions.
+ Possible strategies	
■ Frequent reviewing and reflection of '<i>what has happened so far?</i>' (both in and out of the drama). ■ Using still images to remind the students of key moments in the drama. ■ Repetition of games and drama exercises, such as KIM'S GAME Set out a number of objects from the prop box on a tray or cloth. Give the group a full minute to concentrate and remember what is there. Then remove or cover if possible. Give a minute (or whatever is appropriate according to the ability level of the students) to see how many of the objects they can recall. <i>Note: the number of objects on the tray can be limited according to the ability level of the students.</i> Variation: Students whose language skills are not developed could draw the objects. This could also help in developing spatial awareness if students were asked to describe or draw the location of the objects on the tray. Age suitability: This activity is suitable for students at all levels, and the nature of the objects displayed can be varied to reflect age appropriateness, for example, toys for students at junior level, and music CDs for senior level students.	

▲ Potential area of difficulty	= Implications for learning
The student may have a short attention span, or lack concentration and application.	There is a need to vary the work and teaching approaches and methodologies.
+ Possible strategies	
■ The use of concentration exercises and drama games such as ‘<i>Pass a clap</i>’ or ‘<i>One, two, three</i>’. GAME: PASS A CLAP <i>Note: this exercise is non-verbal and emphasises ritual.</i> The group sits on the floor in a circle (or whatever is appropriate to the group). Explain that a special clap is given and taken and, when doing this, each person will look into his/her neighbour’s eyes. The teacher may start by looking at the student on his/her right and clapping once. The student who is also looking at the teacher <i>receives</i> the clap by clapping back once, also looking into the teacher’s eyes. This student in turn does the same to the person on his/her right and so on around the circle. The clap should <i>come back</i> via the students to the teacher who can pass it on again. Variation: When working with students at senior level or with those who get good at this game, the teacher can send out more than one clap after the first one has gone down the line a bit. He/she should always get back the number he/she sends out. Age suitability: This activity is suitable for students at all levels. GAME: ONE, TWO, THREE <i>Note: it is recommended that students get plenty of practice and fluency in doing part (i) before moving to part (ii) and so on. Alternatively, any part of the exercise can be used as is deemed appropriate by the teacher.</i> (i) Students face each other in pairs A and B. The aim is to count repeatedly to three, taking turns. Therefore, A says ‘<i>one</i>’, B says ‘<i>two</i>’, and then it is A’s turn to say ‘<i>three</i>’. B starts at ‘<i>one</i>’ again, and so the game continues. It can take time to get used to the rhythm and so plenty of time should be allowed for practice. Once the students have got used to it the teacher can add momentum by encouraging them to speed up the tempo, if possible. (ii) Show the students how to make a simple gesture, for example slapping the side of your thigh or wiggling your hands above your head to imitate the ears of a sheep. Add a sound to the gesture, so that as you slap your thigh you might say ‘<i>whee haw!</i>’, or while making the gesture of a sheep’s ears with your hands, you may add the sound ‘<i>baaa</i>’. The sound and gesture are substituted for the number ‘<i>one</i>’. The sequence in the game now is: ‘<i>sound and gesture, two, three</i>’. Each time number one crops up in the sequence, the person whose turn it is must make the sound and gesture instead of saying ‘<i>one</i>’. Practice will be needed to get a rhythm going. (iii) The next stage is to replace number two, with a new sound and gesture. The sequence continues with both numbers one and two now having been replaced by sounds and gestures, while three still remains as a number. (iv) The final stage is when three also becomes a sound and a gesture, and so instead of verbalising ‘<i>one, two, three</i>’, each pair of students is making the chosen sounds and gestures instead of each number. Age suitability: This activity is suitable for students at senior level but junior and middle level students may be able to participate in some of the earlier stages of the game.	

▲ Potential area of difficulty	= Implications for learning
The student may have difficulty in understanding dramatic concepts/abstractions	This limits the scope for make-believe and fictional opportunities in drama.
+ Possible strategies	
■ Careful clear signing. ■ The use of concrete examples, such as teacher in role using an apron or spectacles to signify a character or simple mime and role-playing activities when introducing students to make-believe (The teacher should be quite explicit when assuming a role and let the students see him/her prepare for the role). GAME: ANSWERING THE TELEPHONE A <i>prop</i> telephone is placed in the middle of a circle with the class and teacher sitting around it. The teacher tells the group they are each going to receive a telephone call in turns and they will have to answer the phone when it rings. The teacher can further brief the students that they may receive good news ‘<i>We are going to a concert on Friday</i>’, bad news ‘<i>Swimming has been cancelled this week</i>’, a surprise ‘<i>A favourite person is coming to visit</i>’, or just gossip chat ‘<i>Ciara got a new pair of jeans</i>’, ‘<i>Peter is going to Spain on holidays</i>’. Students must also be told that there is a time limit to report their news – a minute, three/four sentences, whichever is appropriate. 1. The teacher outlines the game and asks each student to think about the kind of news they are going to get when they answer the phone. 2. The teacher then rings the phone and points to a student who answers. There is no second person except in the student’s imagination. When the student hangs up, he/she tells the group who rang, and what the news was. Teacher affirms this by telling the student it was very clear that it was good (or bad) news. When everyone has had a turn the class discusses the type of things that constituted good news, bad news, or gossip. 3. The students work in pairs. One calls up and gives the news to his/her partner who responds appropriately. When the roles are reversed, the news should be different. Allow time to plan and decide the news while moving from pair to pair to make sure the students are clear as to what they have to do. On a given signal, the teacher <i>rings</i> the imaginary phone, each partner picks it up and the game begins. Variation: The telephone with teacher in role Sitting as above, each student is told that they can call someone with news. The teacher is going to be that <i>someone</i> (parent, friend, auntie, etc.). Discussion follows on what the call may be about. When the teacher points to a student, he/she must dial the number on the prop phone (or imaginary phone) and say ‘<i>Hello...</i>’ (naming whoever he/she is calling). They have a brief chat and teacher reacts accordingly. <i>Note: This gives the teacher an opportunity to extend the conversation in role depending on what his/her objectives are. For example: ‘How do you know Ciara got a new pair of jeans – did she phone you or did you meet her? ... Oh, you met! Where? ... Did you travel by bus or did someone drive you? ... Oh, I didn’t know the shopping centre was near your house. What is it called?’ and so on.</i> Age suitability: This activity is suitable for students at all levels and the nature of the conversation with the teacher will be determined accordingly. However, the variation is less demanding and provides another <i>way in</i> to role-playing and drama, while the original game demands quite a lot of imagination.	

▲ Potential area of difficulty	= Implications for learning
The student may experience difficulty in relation to spatial awareness.	This will impede the flow of drama; a student may experience difficulty in <i>entering and sustaining a fictional location</i> in his/her head. A symbol on a map may be the same as that on a key, but if they are oriented differently the student may not recognise them as being the same.
+ Possible strategies	
■ The student should be given the opportunity to experience his/her relationship with space, and what happens to objects when they are revolved/reflected? ■ Games and exercises requiring a student to imagine specific spaces may be utilised. ■ Pictures, images, and objects may be used to denote place. GAME: THE SLOW CHASE The students decide in pairs who is A and who is B. Depending on the story or theme that the students might be studying at the time, A can be the secret agent and B the villain (or a thief and a stroller/ shopper, an animal and its prey, <i>Jack Frost</i> and spring buds, etc.). The secret agent shadows the villain (the animal follows its prey; <i>Jack Frost</i> follows the spring buds, etc.). If the facilities are available and it is safe, the dramatic landscape (the area used) can have a few blocks or upturned chairs or tables, perhaps covered with a sheet, to represent corners to creep round or places to hide. The pursued always keeps a step ahead of the pursuer. It can be done in slow motion in order to exaggerate the actions and movements. <i>Note: The idea is not simply to have one person chasing another round the room. Music can be used to make the slow chase more effective and to signal times to hide (by stopping the music or making a percussion sound). There should be a reasonable distance between each pair to give them room to move well and time to hide.</i> Extension: a) The teacher may like to encourage a few stylised movements (a quick turn-round, a clever dive to cover). b) The teacher may encourage eye and head movement, each watching out for the other. c) The pursued may reach a telephone and make a call. <i>'What happens then?'</i> (This is an excellent way to lead subtly into a drama as the students work out what to do next or who the villain is calling.) Age suitability: this activity is suitable for students at middle or senior levels. Extension activity (c) may be more appropriate for students at senior level.	

▲ Potential area of difficulty	= Implications for learning
The student may experience difficulty relating to the application of previously learned knowledge.	The student may experience difficulty when the drama <i>moves on</i> and he/she is faced with a new dilemma in the story that demands the exercising of skills and knowledge acquired so far in the drama.
+ Possible strategies	
■ Consolidating, reviewing, and reflecting in different ways on what has happened and what has been covered so far in the drama, for example questioning or seeking information in role, or using still image to reflect on characters' actions and motives. ■ Drawing students' attention to the similarities between various games/stories already explored. GAME: VOX POP The teacher explains to the students that <i>John</i> (one of the students or TIR as someone from a young people's magazine) is going to ask them one or two questions. Make it clear how many questions the interviewer may ask. On the signal <i>action</i> from the teacher, the exercise begins. Students walk along <i>the street</i> minding their own business (moving around the room adopting whatever activity they wish to, for example window shopping, rushing for the bus, standing in the queue for the bus, waiting to cross the road, cleaning the streets, pushing a child in a pram, walking home with their shopping bags, etc.). They can practice this activity first. In turn, the <i>interviewer</i> stops them and asks their opinion, '<i>Which boy band do you think is the best?</i>', '<i>Why?</i>', '<i>Do you think buying records is a waste of young people's money?</i>' etc. It may help to hold a real microphone or mime holding one. Other students freeze or pause to listen to the responses. These can be discussed and reflected upon with the group after the exercise. <i>Note: This is a game/exercise in its own right but it can also have several applications leading to the development of a drama. It is an excellent way to consolidate, review, and reflect upon learning from any topic that they students are studying at the time.</i> Age suitability: This activity is suitable for students at middle or senior levels and the questions asked should be age appropriate. The game can be adapted for use with junior level students to get them to express their opinions about something that has happened in the drama, for example '<i>Why did Mr. Wolf blow down the pigs' houses?</i>' and '<i>What should be done with him as a result?</i>'.	

▲ Potential area of difficulty	= Implications for learning
The student may experience difficulty relating to the transfer to <i>fictional reality</i> .	It may be difficult to find the appropriate <i>hook</i> to lead the students from everyday reality into the fictional scenario.
+ Possible strategies	
■ The use of a collective role for the class. ■ The use of good signing techniques, for example the teacher ritually puts on the crown and cloak to make it clear that he/she is now the King. GAME: THE GLOVES THAT HAVE A LIFE OF THEIR OWN <i>Note: This can also be played as 'The Magic hat, Magic Shoes,' etc.</i> Use an old pair of gloves, for example washing-up gloves. They are magic. When someone puts them on the magic begins. The teacher can decide what the magic properties are, for example: they make you big, small, happy, dance, jump, write, draw, and children respond accordingly. Background music to the movement creates a nice effect. Variation: A number of students can wear gloves at the same time (but taking it in turns to call out a magic property). Age suitability: This activity is suitable for students at all levels as it is quite an enjoyable game. With senior level students the magic gloves can be replaced using more age-appropriate objects or concepts, such as <i>DJ Rock</i> when students follow the lead of the DJ as he/she plays and responds to the music.	

▲ Potential area of difficulty	= Implications for learning
The student may experience difficulties relating to transfer to real life.	Confusing the fictional situation with real life. The student may not be able to apply what was learned in the drama (fictional world) to real life situations.
+ Possible strategies	
■ Discussion with the class about their characters (in the drama) in the third person. ■ Discussion and reflection on the similarities and differences between fictional and real life situations. GAME: WHO AM I? One student thinks of someone (or the teacher might confer with the student beforehand about who she or he will be). This student sits on a chair facing the group who ask questions in turn to find out who he/she is. Each student can ask only one question at a time. For example: Q. 'Are you a man?' Q. 'Are you on TV?' Q. 'Do you play music?' <i>Note: This game should be modified according to ability, i.e. choosing people who are well known to the students and thus more easily recognisable.</i> Age suitability: This activity is suitable for students at all levels, although age appropriateness should be considered when selecting a character to portray, for example <i>Ronan Keating</i> or <i>Jack in the Beanstalk</i>.	

▲ Potential area of difficulty	= Implications for learning
The student may experience difficulties relating to signs and symbols.	The student may be confused when the teacher takes on or signs a role/character. The student may not be able to differentiate between signs and symbols and their meanings.
+ Possible strategies	
■ Signing: Students may need to practise responding to questions such as <i>'Who am I?'</i> when the teacher takes on and off an apron and becomes <i>Jack's mother</i> and the teacher respectively. ■ Symbol: Careful work is needed by teacher to encourage the students to accept the symbol of the apron placed on the chair as a representation of <i>Jack's mother</i> in the story. GAME: WHAT'S MY JOB? The student mimes his/her occupation (either chosen by themselves or given by the teacher), and the others guess what it is. In this game the student says <i>'What's my job?'</i> performs the mime and then asks again <i>'What's my job?'</i> Only then can others offer suggestions. <i>Note: Students can use concrete objects to help them signal their occupations more effectively.</i> Age suitability: This activity is suitable for students at all levels.	

▲ Potential area of difficulty	= Implications for learning
The student may experience difficulty following instructions.	This may affect the pace in the drama session.
+ Possible strategies	
■ Practise following instructions through the use of games such as <i>'O'Grady Says'</i>, and <i>'Freeze Like This'</i>. GAMES: MUSICAL BUMPS, FREEZE LIKE THIS, STATUES, AND MUSICAL CHAIRS Musical bumps: Students dance to music. When it stops everyone flops down on the ground. Freeze like this: This game can be used to encourage the development of any particular skill – standing with arms stretched out, on one leg, hands on head, elbow on knee, etc. Students move around and respond to the music. On a signal, teacher says <i>'Freeze Like This!'</i> (and demonstrates a physical position). Children immediately look at the teacher and copy the image he/she is making. Statues: This works in a similar way only this time when the music stops everyone stands absolutely still like a statue. Anyone who moves is out. The judging becomes stricter as the game proceeds. Musical chairs: Set out chairs back to back, in two lines or in a circle. There should be one less chair than the number of students in the game. When the music starts everyone walks around the chairs. As soon as the music stops every student sits on a chair and one student is left standing. The student who does not manage to get a chair is out. One chair is taken away and the game is repeated until only one student remains in the game. <i>Note: Those who are out early on in any of the games can become judges or teacher's helpers.</i> Age suitability: These activities are suitable for students at all levels, although students at the junior level may enjoy <i>'Musical Bumps'</i> more.	

▲ Potential area of difficulty	= Implications for learning
Difficulty in negotiating and co-operating with others.	This may interfere with the development of the drama.
+ Possible strategies	
■ Exercises working in pairs/small groups, for example mirror or image work as in the following game. GAME: MIRROR OR IMAGE WORK <i>Note: This is a non-verbal exercise.</i> Students stand in pairs facing each other A and B. A performs a simple movement which B copies as exactly as he/she can. Then A performs another one and B copies again. All movements should be slow enough to enable the partner to reproduce the movement. Each movement should follow naturally from the last. This teacher should urge students to be attentive even to the smallest detail of body movement or facial expression. Swap roles, with B leading and A mirroring. Variations: (a) Students can be asked to make their movements happy or sad and their partner copies them. However, if working on a story they could be asked to take on some of the actions of a character (showing anger, disappointment). (b) Students kneel down and face each other, with music playing in the background. One leads, the other following the same movements exactly. Abstract or improvised patterns can be used. Improvised patterns may provide another <i>way in</i> to make-believe activities – brushing teeth, combing hair, shaving for boys, doing their make-up for girls. The same exercise can be repeated, exchanging roles of the leader/mirror image. (c) A dialogue of images. You have bumped into a person on the street by accident and knocked over their shopping bag. Make an image to say you are sorry. Partner, <i>‘What image will you make in response?’</i>, <i>‘It’s all right, don’t worry’</i>, or <i>‘Are you very angry?’</i>, <i>‘Now look what you’ve done – can’t you look where you’re going?’</i> Words may not be used, just images. This may lead into dialogue at a later stage. The teacher should keep a sharp eye out for control and gentleness. (d) The exercise in (c) could be developed into simple improvisations. Students face each other and one begins a simple miming activity, such as eating an apple, making a cup of tea, or looking at a map. The other responds by asking questions about what he/she is doing, and a short dialogue ensues. Age suitability: This activity is suitable for students at all levels, but the variation activities may be more appropriate for students at middle and senior levels. GAME: PERSON TO PERSON Everybody gets into pairs and walks around the space together (students can link arms if they wish, imagining that they are strolling through a park on a sunny afternoon). After a few moments, the teacher (or a student) calls out the names of parts of the body, which the partners must stop and touch together, for example toe to toe, knee to knee, heel to heel, elbow to elbow, head to head, etc. On a signal, they release and walk around the space again. Extension activity: The teacher calls out <i>‘foot to elbow’</i> (one partner’s foot must touch the other person’s elbow), etc.	

+ Possible strategies *continued*

Variation: The bodily contacts can be cumulative, so that when partners have put two parts of their bodies together they must keep them together while they carry out the next instruction. The students can make the contacts in any way they choose: sitting, standing, lying, etc. After giving three or four instructions the teacher calls out '*person to person*' and the pairs separate, everyone finds a different partner. The game begins again.

Note: A number of different students can take turns at calling out the instructions.

Age suitability: This activity is suitable for students at all levels. The extension activity and the variation of the game would be more suited to middle and senior level students.

▲ Potential area of difficulty	= Implications for learning
The student may experience difficulty in communicating (either verbally or non-verbally) with others.	This may present some level of difficulty in assessing the level of engagement in drama.
+ Possible strategies	
■ Devise a simple set of gestures, words, or pictures to help communication. GAME: OPPOSITE THOUGHT The students are grouped in pairs, A and B. A mimes an action, for example eating an apple and B asks him/her, '<i>What are you doing?</i>' A must respond giving a wrong answer, for example '<i>I am riding a bicycle</i>'. Roles are then swapped. Extension activity: A short dialogue can ensue with B trying to persuade A that he/she is not doing what he/she says (for example, eating an apple), and A must create arguments to support what he/she says he/she is doing. For example, '<i>Even though it looks like I am riding a bicycle, it is a new type of approach to healthy eating!</i>' Roles are then swapped. Age suitability: This activity is suitable for students at middle and senior levels.	

Moving from games to drama

GET INTO GROUPS!

Aims

- To encourage students to listen and respond to instructions.
- To foster a sense of group co-operation and self-discipline.
- To enhance students' social and interaction skills.
- To reinforce curricular content (counting, identifying colours, height, etc.).

Method

Invite the students to sit in a circle, arranging themselves alternately boy/girl if appropriate. It is advisable to set a time limit to the activity, for example two minutes.

Invite the students to move around the room and when given an instruction, for example to form groups of three, they must quickly form a group of three people. If the teacher counts to three very slowly while they are getting into their groups it adds further tension and enjoyment. If there are not enough students to make a group of three, then they become a group of two or they can enlarge another group. Students may shake hands with everyone else in their group to congratulate themselves on finding each other. This will also reinforce social skills. Once everyone is settled the teacher asks each group how many there are in the group (to reinforce counting skills). Students are then asked to move around individually again, waiting for the next instruction.

Sample instructions

- Form groups of two, three, four, five, six, etc.
- Form groups of people wearing the same colour shoes as you.
- Form groups of people who are the same height as you.
- Form groups of people who are the same age as you.
- Form groups of people whose hair colour is the same as yours.
- Form groups of people whose birthday month is the same as yours.
- Form groups of people whose name begins with the same sound/letter as yours.
- Form groups of people whose favourite snack/food/drink/band/film/TV programme is the same as yours.

THE NAME GAME

Aims

- To encourage students to initiate a greeting and to respond to a greeting.
- To move confidently around the room or space.
- To practise attending to and responding to an instruction.
- To foster a sense of group co-operation.
- To develop students' social interaction skills.
- To provide students with opportunities to engage in physical contact with other students.

Method

Invite the students to move around the room, avoiding contact with each other. On a signal, for example *'Turn to the person/people nearest to you and say hello!'* the students stop and look for the person/people nearest to them and shake hands. They can say hello and exchange names. Then the teacher calls *'walk'*, and everyone begins to move around the room once again until the signal is given to say hello again.

Variations

- (a) The students walk around the room, stopping to say hello and introducing themselves to everyone they meet.
- (b) The students can say their name and perhaps add a sentence explaining what their favourite food is. Pre- and non-verbal students can be encouraged to communicate using signs and symbols in order to represent their favourite food. Ensure that there are pictures of food available to assist and prompt students to communicate using the representational object.
- (c) Once familiar with this game, students can be encouraged to greet each other with sad, happy, scared, brave, excited or angry faces and tones of voice. Practise these first with the students, and explore occasions when people might experience these emotions.
- (d) As a challenge to students, and to inject a sense of humour and fun, they can be encouraged to greet each other in *silly* ways, such as shaking fingers instead of hands, rubbing backs together gently (a demonstration may be necessary first), touching knees, shoulders, hips, elbows, wrists, feet, etc.

Note: Appropriate music can be played softly in the background. It will help students to move/walk more easily around the room. This may lessen feelings of self-consciousness on the part of some students.

FOLLOW THE LEADER

Aims

- To encourage students to move with freedom, expression, and confidence.
- To encourage students attend to and imitate an action.
- To provide students with an opportunity to exercise responsibility for others.
- To ease students gently into the world of make-believe play.
- To provide students with the opportunity to make simple choices and solve problems.

Method

Invite the students to form a line behind you, and when the music starts lead them around the room wagging your finger, nodding/shaking your head, wiggling your bottom, shaking your hips, jumping, hopping, turning, negotiating a path through the furniture in the room (or under/over/through if desired), sliding along a bench, etc. Use large exaggerated movements (many students with general learning disabilities may need to reduce the scale of the movement), but, whatever the situation, ensure that students are aware of the presence of others when making movements in order to avoid mishaps.

Variations

- (a) The next student in line can become the leader, and so on, to allow as many people as possible the opportunity to lead.
- (b) The line can become a train with students holding on to the hand/waist of the person in front of them. The sound of a train can be added or appropriate music played. The teacher can develop this game into *drama mode* by pointing out various objects to students on their *trip*. Initially these can be real and concrete items visible in the room. If necessary these may have been placed strategically in advance of the activity. Later this may be extended to include *fictional* objects and people that one would expect to meet on a journey through the school, on the student's regular bus route home, on the way to the swimming pool going to the seaside, going through the countryside or the park, etc. The *train* can be stopped at any point if the teacher wishes to develop the drama further. He/she may see/point out a little duckling that has lost its mother and ask the students to consider what the duckling should do, where its mother is likely to be, where the pond is, or show the duckling which way to go. In addition, the teacher may pause and present the students with a dilemma, for example which direction to go next. This can be developed by adding in a further consideration: *'There appears to be a house further down one road and I can't see what's down the other way as there are trees blocking my view. Which way will we go?'*
- (c) This game can be developed into an activity similar to *'We're going on a bear hunt'*. The language and concepts can be changed to accommodate the needs and resources of the group, for example *'We're going on a shopping trip'* or *'We're going to the swimming pool'*. The principle is the same, with students following the teacher through a series of obstacles in order to arrive. These can be narrated or sung if desired. Sensory and visual experiences can be built in along the way to evoke the idea of crossing the river. A blue cloth on the ground gently shaken by the classroom assistant can suggest motion, Leaves and smooth branches can be rubbed against students' faces or hands to suggest going through the forest. A fan blowing on the students faces as they pass by can suggest a strong and howling wind. The smell of cut lemons, strawberries, or onions can suggest nearing the house where dinner is being prepared. The possibilities are endless.

ANIMAL SHAPES

Aims

- To enhance students' expressive and creative skills.
- To foster group co-operation skills.
- To introduce students to the technique of still imaging.
- To learn about shape, size, and movement.

Method

Encourage the students to practice making shapes with their body—bending, curling, twisting, crawling, etc. Invite them to make the shape of '*a stone animal*' (a still image of an animal). Suggest some possible animals that they might make the shape of. Encourage them to make the shapes of the different parts of a chosen animal's body, for example the ears, the eyes, the tail, the mouth with its tongue, the horns, the trunk, as appropriate. Then consider how a large class animal can be created, with different students choosing to represent the various parts of the animal's body. Arrange these, paying particular attention to creating the main body (some students curled up), and then adding on the other parts.

When a good shape has been made, you can *release* individual students from the still image and allow them to stand back from the image and look at the created animal. They return to their original position, assuming the shape that they made, and another student is released to have a look at the shape.

Variations

- (a) Students are encouraged to undergo the same process above, but this time they are making a monster (it could be a friendly monster). The shape can be as expressive and creative as students wish it to be, for example it may have many ears, legs, horns, and a long winding body. Once a good shape has been achieved and the students are happy with their work the *monster* can be brought slowly to life by asking students to open and close their eyes, and move their hands, arms, legs, and other body parts gently and carefully. Sound effects and other sensory and visual cues can be added.
- (b) A particular challenge would be to see if the students can collectively move as the *monster*, slowly in one direction. A story can be created around the *adventures of this good monster* everywhere it goes people are afraid of it, and yet it only wants to make friends, or it needs our help to find its way home.

From story to drama

Stories offer ready-made contexts for developing insight into how things could be different, and as such, provide an excellent stimulus for drama. Activities can be confined to the classroom, or a corner of the school hall with the class sitting informally around or in a story corner in the classroom. The teacher should involve himself/herself in the story and become part of the make-believe. He/she should also choose the right time for telling the story.

Storytelling

Storytelling has close links with drama. Most students have considerable experience of listening to and communicating/telling stories. The drama lesson can serve to re-enact an existing story or to explore what is still mysterious or unknown. Stories contain universal themes that operate at several levels. Most stories contain characters with problems, motivations, and frailties with whom the students could be encouraged to empathise within the safe framework of the drama lesson. Stories also provide an opportunity to experience and explore different environments and cultures.

Storytelling provides the opportunity to encounter familiar situations in new contexts and, through enactment; students with mild general learning disabilities can become increasingly familiar with the pattern and sequence of events. The teacher can gradually find ways of approaching familiar material that will deepen the student's experience and understanding. Stories of all types can be brought to life by being told dramatically, using gestures, sound effects, and various appropriate character voices. Props and puppets can also be used to establish/communicate meaning and maintain students' interest and attention.

The following approaches can be used to support students with mild general learning disabilities in moving from story mode to active participation in drama

- collective story building
- sound story
- direct enactment
- creative story telling
- using the original story to prompt a new direction
- chain stories
- last line stories
- origin of proverbs
- stories from objects and words.

Linkage and integration

Drama is a teaching method that can facilitate and deepen the teaching and learning process across all curriculum subjects. It has personal understanding and communication skills at its core and is an essential tool in the teaching of the skills of language, literacy, numeracy, and life. Drama can provide meaningful contexts for the development of student's concepts, knowledge, understanding, imagination, skills, and attitudes across the curriculum.

Drama helps students with mild general learning disabilities understand the people around them and the social world in which they live. It can help students understand other peoples, cultures, and societies in both historical and geographical contexts.

Effective communication underpins all teaching and therefore learning. Drama can play an important part in the development of spoken language as it allows students with mild general learning disabilities to use language in a wider range of social situations than would normally arise in a classroom context. Drama also involves students in engaging in collaborative communication.

Drama can provide safe and structured situations within which students with mild general learning disabilities may practice language in a variety of ways for a variety of purposes. It also provides the teacher with the opportunity to present students with various models of communication and language use, and can stimulate reasons for communication in meaningful contexts.

Drama can facilitate

- the use of non-verbal communication
- immediate *on-the-spot* communication by speech or signing (for example, a group wrongly accused of trespassing having an immediate need to account for themselves)
- appropriate communication skills in context
- the understanding and use of visual representational information (students in role as pirates relating to signs/symbols on a map or pictorial representation).

Organising cross-curricular drama

The topic grid or web is usually used in cross-curricular planning. It shows the connections between subjects that are linked by a theme or topic, for example money, clothes, or food. Rather than just do a drama about money or clothes, in the same way as one might study a poem or song about money, count money in maths, or look at the origins of money in history, these guidelines adopt an innovative drama in education approach to cross-curricular planning. A drama in education approach to learning with the curriculum attempts to weave the student's interest across the different subjects, in a meaningful (albeit fictional) context. The teacher uses the topic grid to create a fictional framework that will encompass all of the areas on the grid and allow for the teaching and learning of all the subject matter through the fictional scenario or context. By making these natural connections across learning, the teacher can support the student's engagement with the material, and promote greater understanding of knowledge, skills and concepts.

The teacher will decide first what is to be taught in each subject area (it can be related to a specified topic or not, as desired), and then start to plan the fictional framework. The fictional framework can be based on a well-known story or character (or the teacher can invent one), and in the process be allowed to take on a life of its own. When planning a drama there must always be a problem, dilemma, or tension to be resolved, and in the process of solving it the teacher (or the students) will introduce several different twists or complexities in order to make things more difficult or provide a vital clue for the students as they try to understand the character and his or her situation. The essence of this approach is to ensure that the fictional character engage with as many of the subject areas as possible in the course of the drama.

For example, if they are studying directions in geography, the students may have to draw a map (with help as appropriate) on a large piece of paper or on the blackboard, and fill in what features exist in this landscape, for example forests, rivers, mountains, a village, a swamp. The content of the drama might consist of a character in the drama make his or her way safely to the village in order to get help for a friend who has fallen over a cliff and is lodged on a narrow ledge half way down. The students have to decide as to which is the safest and quickest route to and from a given starting point on the cliff. They have to use the directions in order to complete the task. The teacher (or another student) could also physically stand on this map and be guided by the directions of the students. In order to involve other curriculum areas new problems can be introduced. The teacher announces that he or she is lost and has to camp overnight in the forest.

Problem-solving activities could relate to measuring an adequate space for pitching a tent, using a map to discover how far away the river is in order to get water, the amount of food the teacher has and how best to make it last, how long it might take to get to the nearest village, and how to cope if the village cannot be found. Arriving finally at the village and he/she will need to explain the predicament and discuss how it may be resolved. The imaginative possibilities are endless.

The drama can continue on as long as the students are interested in it. New approaches can be introduced which involve challenges for the characters either within the forest environment or involving a different setting (students could be involved in discussions in relation to the possibilities for continuing). Songs, rhymes, dances, and stories about measurement can be introduced. As long as the teacher is clear about what he or she wants the students to learn in any given subject, then the relevant skills and content can be built into a challenge or problem the fictional character has to engage with.

Staging a performance

Being involved in staging a performance is a particularly worthwhile activity for students with mild general learning disabilities. It provides them with an opportunity to express their individuality and creativity, and is hugely important in terms of their personal and social development and self-confidence. To experience the rewards of having their work appreciated by others greatly enhances their self-esteem and prepares them for further occasions when they will have to work as part of a team, sharing skills and expertise in the creation of a productive and enjoyable learning experience for the whole school community. The students, teachers, their parents, and others in the community can also help out with stage management, costume design, props and set design, publicity for the event, sound and lighting, thus helping to increase genuine social interaction and teamwork. Those performing in the show could present little sketches in other classes throughout the school as a way of advertising the event and raising its profile among other students.

Nonetheless, the overriding focus of the *Primary School Curriculum, Drama* is on educational drama 'and is not to be confused with what may be termed performance drama. This activity, familiar to many teachers, usually involves choosing a script and cast, rehearsing, designing and building a set, organising lighting, sound and other technical features, and mounting a performance for an audience' (*Drama, Teacher Guidelines*, p. 2).

The value of such an experience is acknowledged in the *Primary School Curriculum, Drama* in terms of fostering students' self-confidence and allowing them to express themselves publicly on a stage. This aspect of drama is not addressed specifically in these guidelines.

Exemplars

The following exemplars are organised into programmes of work and associated lesson plans. The aim is to demonstrate how an idea (or story) can be developed and sustained for several weeks, or a term if desired, and lead to high quality teaching and learning experiences for students with mild general learning disabilities. The cross-curricular nature of drama in education is emphasised but supported through the art form of drama (using elements such as signing and tension). Where a programme is divided into units, the material in each unit may be covered in one or more sessions, depending on the needs of the students.

Two quite different approaches to planning and implementing drama are demonstrated, which also reflect issues of age appropriateness, although students with mild general learning disabilities of any age should derive enjoyment from both programmes of work. The first relies heavily on teacher in role as a narrative strategy to engage the students and lead them into the drama work. The other adopts a much slower and more methodical approach in order to demonstrate how students with mild general learning disabilities might be led gently into the world of make-believe. Both are fully adaptable and can be speeded up or slowed down as required. It is not necessary to complete all of the lessons offered. They are included to show the potential of extending the work.

These programmes of work and associated lesson plans are intended to provide teachers with a template from which they can plan and create their own drama experiences for students with mild general learning disabilities, perhaps adapting other well known stories and fables (according to age appropriateness), or exploring other social, personal, or educational issues that interest or affect the lives of their students. A key feature throughout all of these planned drama experiences is the opportunity for review and reflection on the unfolding drama and the student's role in it. It is here that a deeper quality of learning takes place. Students with mild general learning disabilities need time and opportunity to engage in reflective practice.

These programmes of work operate under the premise that students are invited to *contract into* drama work. (Students agree to abide by a set of simple rules decided upon by the class and teacher beforehand.) It is also advisable to establish a simple hand signal for gaining students' attention or bringing them back together as a group, for example *Time out* or making the shape of the capital letter T with the hands).

As one of the aims of drama for students with mild general learning disabilities is to expand their vocabulary, authentic language employing simple (but not simplistic) expression is used where possible in these programmes of work. Appropriate language is used to enrich the quality and enhance the authenticity of the experience. It is also important to expose students with mild general learning disabilities to archaic words used and accepted in well-known nursery rhymes, for example '*curds and whey*', '*seamstress*', '*quill*', '*pail*', and '*lady's chamber*'. Their meanings can be made clear by using appropriate objects (such as a needle, a feather, and a bucket), or actions.

The content of the strand and strand units in the *Primary School Curriculum, Drama* is reflected throughout the programmes, as are the elements of drama.

Exemplar 1: Drama

Title: The Happy Prince by Oscar Wilde

Lesson: Outside the Palace (1)

Materials/resources	Out of context preparation
• Pictures of: King, Queen, Prince, Palace (olden times). • Badges showing words and symbols of occupations for the servants and housekeeper. • A well. • Large feather and a picture of a quill.	The teacher tells the class he/she is going to begin a story called <i>The Happy Prince</i>. Pictures of a King, a Queen, and a Prince (their son) are shown. (Suitable pictures may be found in many fairy-tale storybooks) The teacher points to a crown, worn as a symbol of power, and asks the class to suggest a type of house in which the family would live. If an appropriate word, for example castle or palace, is not forthcoming the teacher will supply the word and show a picture of a palace. Discussion may focus on how large the house is and how many other people, besides the royal family, would live there.

TEACHER TALK

*Now, let's begin the story of *The Happy Prince*.*

Narrative

Once upon a time there was a happy young Prince who lived with his parents, the King and Queen, in a beautiful big palace in a large city. They had servants to do all the work and to help the young Prince in every way.

Suspend narrative

I wonder what kind of servants worked in the palace?

The teacher elicits responses.

TEACHER TALK

Remember, there were no vacuum cleaners then, so how do you think they cleaned the palace floors?

Elicit responses.

They had neither electricity nor gas.

The teacher questions the class on the implications of this.

There were no taps for water and the servants had to go to a well in the kitchen yard and pull up (draw) water and carry it to the palace.

There were no phones, no television sets, and no computers.

There weren't even biros or pens. People wrote with a feather called a quill.

The teacher shows the picture of the quill.

Exemplar 1: Drama

So, many people were needed to cook and clean and keep the palace going. It was all quite different from our homes today.

The teacher and the class discuss the differences.

Role-playing activity flagged

We're going to pretend we are the servants who have to clean the palace and cook for the King and Queen and the little Prince.

I have prepared some names and pictures on pieces of paper, so we'll have a look and see what the servants will be doing in the palace.

This one says? Cook

This one says? Floor-cleaner

This one says? Water-carrier

This one says? Duster of furniture

This one says? Silver polisher

Who else might be needed?

Depending on numbers, possibilities include table-setter and washer-up.

Selecting roles

I'll let you pick one and we will see what you get.

Contract

The class selects roles by choosing a card.

Teacher's role flagged

I'll be the palace housekeeper and I will go around, and make sure that you know what to do.

Signing

When I put on this badge, I will be the housekeeper.

Practice

I put on the badge: *who am I?*

I take off the badge: *who am I?*

Setting drama place

Let the cooks preparing breakfast—here!

Building belief

Sweepers can be in the corridor—here!

Table-setters can be in the dining room—here!

Water-carriers at the well—over there

Washers-up and dryers also in the kitchen—here!

Now who will dust the furniture?

You can follow the sweepers down the corridor dusting all the little tables, chairs, and pictures on the wall.

Who is polishing the silver? After you've collected all the silverware you can sit down in a corner of the kitchen—here!

Don't worry at all. I'll help you as the housekeeper.

Exemplar 1: Drama

Signing

All ready now? Let's begin our work. I'll put on my housekeeper's badge.

Teacher in role (TIR)

Collective role as servants

Well, cooks, what are you preparing for breakfast for the King and Queen this morning?

Elicit responses in role as cooks.

And what about the little Prince? What does he like to eat for his breakfast?

Elicit responses

Water-carriers, fetch that big container between the two of you and I'll go out to the well with you.

Mimed activities of all in role

Now, turn that handle and let the rope and bucket down. Keep turning and the bucket will fill up. Good! Here it comes. Let's fill the container and carry it back to the kitchen. Do you find it heavy? Oh yes, it's quite heavy. Be careful!

Teacher and class out of role

All remove badges.

Reflection

The teacher questions the class about what they did as servants, their thoughts on the housekeeper, and whether she was helpful or not.



TEACHER TALK

Well done everybody!

Tableaux

Still images

Individually/in pairs/in small groups/in a large group – the housekeeper and servants at work.



TEACHER TALK

Well done everybody!

Linkages

- Visual Arts: using a roll of wallpaper, children illustrate today's story appropriately. This will form the basis of an on-going record of the story as it unfolds, or it may be used as a mural.
- SESE: History.
- SESE: Science.

The above lesson may be divided into different sessions.

Exemplar 2: Drama

Title: The Happy Prince by Oscar Wilde

Lesson: Outside the Palace (2)

Materials/resources	Reviewing
• A book as sign for the tutor. • A crown as sign for the king. • Pictures of horses, saddles, etc. • Pictures of pets, e.g. dogs/cats/goldfish.	Review lesson 1 through appropriate questions, including looking at their artwork for that lesson.

TEACHER TALK

Now we'll listen to the next part of the story.

Narrative

The young Prince had his own teacher, called a tutor. This tutor taught the young Prince how to read and write and many other things as well. He taught him how to ride a horse and sail his boat on the lake in the palace garden.

The tutor lived in the palace and watched over the young prince to see no harm came to him. They got on very well together and were great friends.

Suspend narrative

Let's pretend that all of you are the young Prince and I am the tutor and we've just been for a ride on our horses.

Signing

When I hold this book I am the tutor.

Practice

I hold the book: *who am I?*

I leave down the book: *who am I?*

Teacher in role

Collective role as young Prince

The teacher holds the book.

Sire, that was a fine gallop we've had on our horses. You sat very well on Magpie. You were able to keep up so much better today with my horse, Ivory.

Now we must help the grooms take care of the horses.

Mimed activities

Open the buckle of the girth. Remove the saddle carefully and gently hand it to the groom. While the groom is using the curry-comb you can use the tail-comb on his tail using long, sweeping strokes.

Teacher and class out of role

The teacher leaves down the book.

Exemplar 2: Drama

Reflection

It seems the young Prince had to learn how to take care of his horse even though he had servants. I wonder why?

Wait for suggestions.

It is important for every owner to know how to take care of and to look after his/her animals.



TEACHER TALK

I think we should meet the King and Queen now.

Do you know how people had to behave long ago when they met a King or a Queen?

Elicit responses.

Practising behaviour and speech

Yes, a man would bow and a woman would curtsy.

Practise both.

Activities

When speaking to a King or a Queen you would say 'Your Majesty', or if you met them often, as servants did, you would say 'Sire' or 'Ma'am'.

Practise these addresses and combine them with a bow and curtsy.

You even had to walk a few steps backwards from them when you were leaving their presence.

Practise this.

You be the Prince's tutor this time and I'll be the King, so I'll wear the King's crown and I'll sit on the throne.

Practice

When I wear this crown: *who am I?*

When I take off the crown: *who am I?*

Teacher in role

The teacher puts on the crown.

Collective role

Come forward tutor!

So, you went riding this morning with his Royal Highness, the young Prince. How was it?

Behaviour and speech as appropriate

The teacher may need to remove crown for a few moments to remind class to move, bow, and reply appropriately as practised. Repeat as necessary.

Elicit responses.

Which horses did you use?

Elicit responses.

Exemplar 2: Drama

I'm glad you chose Magpie for the young Prince as he is still too young to ride Ivory.

It is time now for you to attend to his Royal Highness, the young Prince. Good morning, dear tutor—you are doing splendid work!

Elicit responses.

Remind the class to walk with backward steps when leaving.

Teacher and class out of role

The teacher removes the crown.

Reflection

Did you enjoy grooming the horse? Have you ever been on a horse?

Is the king a nice man? Is he kind? Did he praise the tutor?

What is life like for the young Prince? Is it any wonder he was called the Happy Prince?

Tableaux

Still images

In pairs: – tutor and prince grooming horse
– tutor bowing before the King.

Linkages

- Visual Arts: using the roll of wallpaper as before continue illustrating the story following lesson 2.
- SPHE: care of animals – horses/pets.

Exemplar 3: Drama

Title: The Happy Prince by Oscar Wilde

Lesson: Outside the Palace (3)

Materials/resources	Reviewing
• Pictures of horses and carts with vegetables, pigs, ducks, geese, hens, etc. • Pictures of big horses, small cottages, hovels. • Piece of material with a needle and thread stuck in it. • Pictures of beautiful ball-gowns and other items of olden times. • Samples of embroidery.	Review the story so far through appropriate questioning to point out the rich and happy circumstances of the young Prince.

Now, let us see what it was like for some people who lived outside the city and not in the palace. Let us continue with the story.

Narrative

Outside the palace there was a bustling city. Horses and carts filled with vegetables and fruit trundled along to the market. There were pigs in some carts, ducks and hens in others and geese in other carts. They were all being brought to market to be sold. People walked quickly across the square on their way to work. Housewives with baskets crossed the square looking for bargains in the stalls. There were also beggars with hands outstretched for coins.

Suspend narrative and mime activity

The teacher organises the class so that each child is carefully guiding a horse and cart through the busy square. The teacher then questions individuals about where they have come from and what they have brought with them in the carts.

TEACHER TALK

Now let us continue the story.

Narrative

Councillors, who made the laws for the King, were well-off. They had nice houses, beautiful clothes, and good food. There were others who had to work very hard for very little money and were often hungry and cold. One of these was a poor seamstress. She lived in a tiny cottage with her little son, Fredric, who was often sick in bed. The seamstress made beautiful silk and satin clothes for the rich ladies, and she embroidered wonderful designs on them.

The teacher shows a picture of beautiful clothes of olden times.

This is the kind of work she did. It took her many days and nights to sew it all, but some of the rich ladies only cared about themselves.

Suspend narrative

Let us see what life might have been like in the seamstress's house.

Exemplar 3: Drama

Signing

When I hold this piece of material with a needle and thread in it I'll pretend to be the seamstress, and you can pretend to be my son Fredric.

The teacher holds the material.

Practice

I hold the material: *who am I?*

I leave down the material: *who am I?*

The teacher holds the material.

Teacher in role

Fredric, will you thread this needle for me please? My poor eyes are tired from sewing all day. I'll tell you what to do.

Class in collective role: mimed activities of class as Fredric threads the needle

Hold the needle in your left hand and hold the end of the thread in your right hand. Very carefully put the point of the thread through the eye of the needle and pull gently from the other side.

Oh thank you Fredric, you're such a good son to me. Now, aren't we lucky today. We have soup, which I made from the vegetables that the kind lady gave me this morning when she collected her pillowcases.

When you have finished the soup you can take your afternoon rest and I'll get on with the sewing. I have so much to do for the ladies in the palace that I'll be up most of the night.

Teacher out of role

The teacher leaves down the sewing sign/symbol.

Reflection

The teacher discusses with class Fredric's health, the poverty of their situation, and how hard the seamstress has to work for very little reward.

Tableaux

Still images

Individually:— holding the horse's head.

In pairs: — seamstress sewing.
 — Frederic threading the needle.

Linkages

- Visual Arts: continue the frieze on wallpaper.
- Music: for example a gavotte.
- SESE: History, SPHE.

Exemplar 4: **Drama****Title:** The Happy Prince by Oscar Wilde**Lesson:** Outside the Palace (Continued)

Materials/resources	Reviewing
• A large feather. • Picture of quill. • A tray and matches (or picture of same). • A man's jacket.	Review the story so far.

 TEACHER TALK*Now let's hear what happened next.***Narrative***In that city there lived a young man who wrote plays. Although he worked hard he also got very little money for his work, just like the seamstress.***Suspend narrative***Let us see what his life was like.*

The teacher shows the picture of a quill/feather.

Signing*When I hold this quill I'll pretend I'm the playwright.***Practice**

When I hold this quill: *who am I?*

When I leave down the quill: *who am I?*

Teacher in role

The teacher takes up the quill and sits at the table.

Oh! I am so cold I can hardly hold the quill to write. I have no money to buy firewood, and I have pains in my tummy from hunger.

The teacher stands up, rubs his/her arms, and stamps feet to generate heat.

*Oh! I'll never finish this play in time. My director will be very angry and I won't get paid for the work I've done.***Teacher out of role**

The teacher leaves down the quill.

Reflection

The teacher questions the class about the playwright's situation.

Tableaux**Still images**

Individually:– playwright seated.

– playwright trying to get warm.

Exemplar 4: Drama

Let us now continue with the story.

Narrative

In another part of the city there lived a little girl and her father. They too were very poor and the father was not kind to the little girl. Each morning she was sent out to the city square to sell matches. She was not allowed to go home until she had sold them all.

Suspend narrative

Let's see what life was like for the little match-girl. I'll pretend to be her dad.

The teacher shows the jacket.

Signing

When I wear this man's jacket I'll be the dad.

Practice

I put on the jacket: *who am I?*

I take off the jacket: *who am I?*

Teacher in role

The teacher puts on the jacket.

Why are you crying for more food? Don't you know there is none? Take these matches and go out until they are all sold.

Teacher out of role

The teacher removes the jacket.

Guided imagery

The little match-girl put the matches neatly on the tray counting one, two, three ... ten as she did so.

Mimed activities

There were ten boxes altogether. Then she lifted up the strap of the tray, put it over her head, and when it rested on her neck she went out the door.

The teacher may have to model the above activity in order to help the student.



TEACHER TALK

Let's see what the little match-girl did.

Narrative

When she closed the door after her she shivered with the cold and looked up at the dull, grey sky. She hoped it would not rain. She walked along the narrow lane where she lived trying to avoid the dirty, muddy puddles, as she had no shoes or stockings. Her feet were blue with the cold and so were the feet of the other poor children she met in the lane.

Exemplar 4: Drama

Soon she came to the bigger houses where she could see through the windows the families sitting having a lovely breakfast beside a glowing, red fire. Oh how she longed to be one of a family like that! When she came to her usual place in the square she stood holding her tray and called out to the passers-by,

'Matches for sale.

Matches for sale.

Please buy my matches.

Matches for sale.'

The teacher asks the class to repeat this street-cry a few times.

Reflection

The teacher and the class discuss the life of the little match-girl vis à vis the life of the young Prince inside the palace.

Tableaux

Still images

- In pairs: – father with little match-girl.
 – buyer of matches and little match-girl.
- Individually: – little match-girl in square.
- Groups: – match-girl and passers-by in square.

Linkages

- Visual Arts: continue the depiction of the story.
- Language.
- Maths: counting.
- SESE.
- SPHE.

Exemplar 5: **Drama****Title:** The Happy Prince by Oscar Wilde**Lesson:** Death of the Prince and erection of the statue

Materials/resources	Reviewing
• Pictures of different statues. • Badge with title saying 'foreman'. • Picture of sword in sheath. • Pictures of rubies, sapphires, and other jewels.	Review the story so far – life inside the palace and the fine life of the Happy Prince.

 TEACHER TALK*Let us now continue with the story.***Narrative***Life continued happily for the little Prince until the winter when he got a very bad chill. In spite of the efforts of many learned doctors the little Prince died.**Everybody was very sad and the King and Queen were in mourning for a long time for their little son, the Prince.**The councillors, the men who made the laws for the King, decided to erect a statue in memory of the little Prince.**They asked a famous sculptor to make the statue. He made a fine statue of the Prince from lead and decided to cover it with gold.***Suspend narrative***Let us pretend to be the workers in the lead foundry. I will be the boss or foreman.***Signing**

The teacher shows the badge.

PracticeWhen I put on this badge: *who am I?*When I take off this badge: *who am I?***Teacher in role**

The teacher puts on the badge.

Collective role*Workmen, I want you all to gather around the statue, I want to explain to you what must be done.***Building belief in imaginary statue***The sculptor has done a great job. Do you think it looks like the little prince?**Now we have to decorate it with gold leaf and it will look even better.**Look at this wonderful gold leaf. We will have to cover the statue very carefully with this.*

Exemplar 5: Drama

Mimed activities

Let everybody take up a sheet of the gold leaf, just like this.

The teacher mimes to demonstrate.

It's very light and it must be handled very carefully. Let's start to press it onto the head, forehead, brow, eyes, cheekbones, nose, lips, chin, ears, neck, shoulders, back, chest, right arm, left arm, elbows, wrist, right thigh, left thigh, right knee, left knee, right calf, left calf, right shin, left shin, ankles, heels, insteps, shoes.

Press each piece on gently until the statue is beautifully golden all over.

The statue will sparkle in the sunshine when it is put up on its high column in the square. It will be seen for miles!

His Majesty the King has given me a beautiful red ruby stone to put on the hilt of the sword. I will now do that.

The teacher mimes this.

Building belief

Isn't it beautiful?

Look at these two magnificent blue sapphires, which her majesty the Queen has given for his eyes.

The teacher mimes inserting them.

Aren't they just like his own two beautiful eyes!

Now, the statue is ready to be taken to the square and placed on the tall column already there.

We will now carry the statue of the Happy Prince in procession to the square.

Ritual

They do so solemnly, led around the room by the foreman.

Mimed activities

Now, place the statue on that platform. Good, get the two long ladders there and place one on either side of the column. Some of you will have to go up the ladders to fix the statue, and the others will have to pull the ropes to hoist it up into position.

The teacher organises the groups.

Be careful! Slowly does it! Well done workmen. Isn't it a beautiful sight to see the statue of the Happy Prince gleaming in the sun. His Majesty the King and her Majesty the Queen will be delighted.

Teacher and class out of role

The teacher removes badge.

Exemplar 5: Drama

Reflection

The teacher and class discuss the events.

What did the King and Queen say when they saw the statue? Were they pleased? Did the workmen find it was hard work decorating the statue?

Tableaux

Still images

In groups of three: – the doctor tells the King and Queen that the Prince is very sick.

Individually: – the sculptor is sculpting the statue.
– as the statue on column.

Linkages

- Visual Arts: continue the depiction of the story.
- SPHE: health care, parts of the body.
- Language.

Exemplar 6: **Drama****Title:** The Happy Prince by Oscar Wilde**Lesson:** The Little Swallow

Materials/resources	Reviewing
• Pictures of swallows/reeds/Egyptian scenes. • Pictures of beautiful ball-gowns on ladies at a ball in the olden days. • Thimble. • Fan.	Review the story so far.

 TEACHER TALK

Now let us listen to the next part of the story.

Narrative

Summer passed and autumn came. Birds like the swallows, who fly away to hot countries before cold winter comes, prepared to leave.

But one little swallow told his friends he would stay for a while longer because he had fallen in love with a reed, which grew beside the river. His friends laughed and told him he was being silly because swallows should fall in love with swallows, not with reeds or flowers or trees.

Show pictures of swallows and reeds.

After a few weeks the little swallow realised his friends were right and he decided to follow them on the long journey to Egypt all by himself.

Show picture of Egyptian scenes.

So he set off the next morning and flew all day long until he came to rest for the night under the feet of the statue of the Happy Prince. The little swallow thought that the statue was really beautiful with its gold leaf and ruby and sapphires gleaming in the moonlight. To his great surprise the statue cried real tears and spoke to him and said, 'Little swallow, I feel very sad. Now that I am up here high over the city I can see things I didn't know about when I was alive and living in the palace. I didn't know then about poor people and how hard they have to work and how they sometimes don't have the money for medicines and food. I can see a poor seamstress sewing a dress for a lady going to the palace ball'. The seamstress has a little boy who is very sick and is asking for an orange.

Show picture of a ball.

Suspend narrative

Let us look at the seamstress and her son.

Signing

When I hold this piece of material with the needle and thread I shall pretend to be the mother.

Exemplar 6: Drama

Practice

When I hold this material: *who am I?*

When I leave it down: *who am I?*

Teacher in role

The teacher holds the material.

Fredric, how are you feeling now? Can I do anything for you?

Collective role

The teacher elicits responses asking for an orange.

(If no response is forthcoming, put down the *sign* and remind the class about the orange; take up the *sign* again and ask questions to elicit response as Fredric.)

Oh my poor boy! I have no orange for you but when I have this dress finished for the lady going to the palace ball I shall be able to buy one for you with the money she'll give me.

All I have now is some river-water. Let me give you some to drink and to mop your brow. I shall work all night until I have finished this sewing.

Out of role

The teacher leaves down the *sign*.



TEACHER TALK

Now I shall continue with the story.

Narrative

The statue of the Happy Prince said to the swallow, 'Please take the red ruby out of the hilt of my sword and bring it to that poor seamstress'. The swallow did as he was asked and flew quietly into her room. The poor woman had fallen asleep over the sewing and the little sick boy was tossing and turning in the bed. The little swallow hopped in and placed the ruby beside her thimble. Then he flew around the little boy's hot head cooling his brow like a fan until he fell into a nice, peaceful sleep. When he flew back to the statue the Happy Prince said, 'Thank you little swallow, the seamstress will be able to buy many things including oranges now'.

Reflection

The teacher helps the class to reflect on the Prince's new outlook since leaving the palace, his kindness in giving the ruby to the seamstress, the little swallow's romance with a reed, and the position he is in now.

Tableaux

Still images

In pairs: – swallow and reed.

- statue crying, swallow at his feet.
- seamstress asleep at table, boy sleeping peacefully.
- seamstress finding ruby, boy awake.

Linkages

- Visual Arts: continue the depiction of the story.
- SPHE.
- Language.
- SESE: Science, Geography.

Exemplar 7: Drama

Title: The Happy Prince by Oscar Wilde

Lesson: The Playwright

Materials/resources	Reviewing
- Quill - feather. - Photograph of a playwright, for example <i>Oscar Wilde</i> - Photograph of a scriptwriter, for example <i>Matt Groening</i> (The writer of <i>The Simpsons</i> script). (Photograph may be found on the internet)	Review the story of the seamstress and her son.



TEACHER TALK

Let's hear the next part of the story.

Narrative

Next morning when the little swallow woke up he flew down to the river and had a bath. Everybody who saw him said, 'How extraordinary! A swallow still here in winter! I thought they were all gone to Egypt weeks ago'.

And the little swallow sang, 'Tonight I shall leave for Egypt'.

But of course the people didn't know what he said because we can't understand his language. Then he flew back to the statue to say goodbye to the Happy Prince. But the Prince said, 'Swallow, swallow, little swallow, will you not stay with me one night longer? Far across the city I see a young man, a playwright who is too hungry and too cold to write any more'.

'Very well', said the swallow, 'I shall wait with you one night longer. Shall I take him another ruby?'

'Alas, I have no ruby now', said the Prince, 'Pluck out one of the sapphires from my eyes and take it to him'.

'Dear Prince', said the swallow, 'I cannot do that', and he began to weep.

'Swallow, swallow, little swallow, do as I command you'. So the swallow plucked out one of the blue sapphires and flew across the city to the playwright's cold little room.

Suspend narrative

Let's see if we can remember the playwright.

Signing

The teacher takes up the quill.

Practice

When I hold the quill: *who am I?*

When I leave down the quill *who am I?*

Exemplar 7: Drama

Teacher in role

The teacher holds the quill.

Oh I am so cold I cannot hold the quill to write, I have no money to buy firewood, and I have pains in my tummy from the hunger.

The teacher stands up rubbing arms and stamping feet to generate heat.

Oh I'm never going to finish this play in time. My director will be very angry and I won't get paid for what I've done. This is terrible!

Teacher out of role

The teacher leaves down quill.

TEACHER TALK

Let's see what happens next.

Narrative

When the little swallow reached the house he flew through a hole in the roof. The playwright was sitting with his head in his hands feeling miserable so he didn't see the swallow leave the blue sapphire down on his notebook. When the little swallow had gone he found it.

Suspend narrative

Let's see what happened.

Signing

The teacher holds the quill.

Teacher in role

The teacher sits with hands to his/her head wearily. He/she takes down hands and sighs, looks around slowly, and sees the sapphire.

What's that I see sparkling on the table?

He/she stands up and walks to the table and picks up the sapphire.

Who could have left this beautiful jewel here for me? Why did I not see it before this? Oh, it must be from some kind admirer who wants to help me. This is wonderful! Now I'll be able to finish my play in time for the director. But first I'm off to buy food to eat and fuel for the fire. Thank you kind person whoever you are!

Teacher out of role

The teacher puts down the quill.

Exemplar 7: Drama

Reflection

The teacher helps the class to reflect on the playwright's situation and his hope for the future.

Predicting

And what do you think the Prince said to the swallow when he returned?

'Thank you little swallow.'

Tableaux

Still images

Small groups: – looking at swallow in amazement as it is now wintertime.

Individually: – playwright cold and hungry.
– playwright discovering the sapphire.

Linkages

- Visual Arts: the depiction of the story.
- SPHE.
- Language.

Exemplar 8: **Drama**

Title: A drama about Miss Blake

8 units

Materials/resources

Props: scarves, bags, a briefcase, a jacket, school copies, a walking stick.

Materials: sheets of sugar paper cut into eighths, markers.

Aims

This scheme aims to

- develop students' ability to work in make-believe
- build students' confidence in their own abilities to handle dramatic form
- extend and develop students' understanding of depiction as a theatrical form
- introduce the concept of teacher in role as a narrative device in drama
- enhance students' memory skills
- explore the notion of loneliness, dependence, and frailty, in a safe and structured dramatic environment
- allow the students' autonomy in decision-making
- extend and develop their understanding of dramatic play in a structured form
- explore the meaning of responsibility with the students
- give the students further practice at paired improvisations
- develop students' questioning skills in a dramatic context
- enhance students' spatial awareness.

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Objectives

Students will

- experience and be able to use a range of dramatic form
- develop and extend a vocabulary that will assist in their understanding of drama and the issues being explored
- be able to identify and manipulate dramatic activities to enrich language development
- experience a range of fictional contexts in a tightly structured form
- develop and extend their vocabulary and language use, including skills of listening and hypothesis
- work collaboratively in small groups
- have an enriched understanding of the loneliness and the problems associated with getting older and being dependent on others
- gain experience in problem-solving activities.

Cross-curricular linkages

- SPHE: avoiding stereotyping, loneliness, control over one's life decisions, old age, our interdependence as human beings, the idea of helping neighbours, accepting help, being generous etc.
- Maths: passage of time, scale.
- History: when *Miss Blake* was young.
- Language.
- SESE: creating the garden, winter.

Exemplar 8: Drama

Drama strategies used

Depiction, still image, 'reading' an image, modelling, teacher in role, paper placement, dramatic narration, guided imagery, role on the wall, collective role-playing, review and reflection, ritual, and playing the devil's advocate.

Major elements of drama employed

- Signing (the use of a particular prop to signify a character).
- Significance (of personal mementoes and items precious to a character).
- Representation (paper placement, props).

Differentiation

Differentiation in this scheme of work is by outcome, although opportunities exist to support students in small group activities through the provision of specified tasks to meet individual students' levels.

Note: Units may take one or several lessons to complete. A class may move quickly or slowly depending on their experience of drama, their concentration span, time available, and other factors. Units may be repeated (or skipped over) according to the needs of the students.

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Context for the drama

The teacher will outline the scenario for the drama, with the students seated comfortably around him/her to create an atmosphere of telling them something special.

TEACHER TALK

Miss Blake lives on a road (in a village/town/city) like yours. She is quite old and lives alone now. Her brother Peter used to live with her and they took care of each other but Peter got very sick and died last year. In recent years Peter always did the shopping because he could get about more easily than Miss Blake, who finds walking difficult because of her arthritis. In fact, it is getting harder and harder for Miss Blake to manage by herself. Last winter was very cold. There was a lot of ice and snow and it was very hard for her to get out to do her shopping and meet the neighbours. Lots of the mums and dads on the road would like to help her but they go out to work in the daytime. They worry about Miss Blake. She has a niece, Kathleen, who is very fond of her, but Kathleen's employers have told her she must move further away with her new job and Kathleen will have to move house. Kathleen cannot give up her job because she needs the money. Her husband does not earn a lot of money and they have four children. They must both work to support the family. Miss Blake wants to stay in her own house and she also loves her small garden at the back.

Exemplar 8 / Unit 1: **Drama****A drama about Miss Blake****Unit 1****Introduction**

- (a) The teacher tells the students that they are going to do some drama work about *Miss Blake* and includes as many of the details above as he/she feels the students can absorb in the first lesson. Some of these details can be elicited by questioning if appropriate, and small details may change according to ideas offered. (She may have a cat or another pet, have cycled around a lot on her bicycle when she was younger, and so on.)
- (b) The teacher indicates three areas in the classroom which represent *Miss Blake's* house: her living room-cum-kitchen where she spends most of her time, her bedroom, and her small garden. There will need to be plenty of whole class discussion about the sort of things *Miss Blake* would probably have in these three areas of her home. While there is no need for any realistic attempt to create these areas, chairs and other objects (from the permanent props box) can be placed around as a rough indication of the space.

Building investment in the drama

The teacher leads the class through these spaces starting in the kitchen/living room area, in order to imagine and further discuss what *Miss Blake* would have in this room and where it might be located. It is likely that when the students get used to being in this fictional space they will make more suggestions. Initially much teacher prompting may be required. For example, *'I think she would have a picture of Peter on the wall, her cooker would be here and so on'*. The teacher can encourage further investment in *Miss Blake's* situation by speculating and prompting. For example, *'Now that she is older, is it hard for her to bend down and get saucepans for cooking?'*

Paper placement

In order to introduce the children to the technique of paper placement, the teacher explains to the class that instead of having the real items of furniture, memorabilia, etc. we can just write them or draw them on pieces of paper and place them in the space where we think they might be in the *real* rooms where *Miss Blake* lives. Teacher demonstrates this task taking suggestions from the students. She tells the students that they will be doing it themselves later on in the drama.

Teaching note: The concept of scale may need to be addressed at this point. The teacher can explain that the same thing happens with photographs and maps, and even the pictures we draw. Of course *Miss Blake's real* rooms and garden are much bigger.

Conclusion

The class ends with a summary of what has been done to date, the teacher reminding the students that they must try to remember as much as possible because they will be returning to do more drama on *Miss Blake*.

Exemplar 8 / Unit 2: **Drama****A drama about Miss Blake****Unit 2****Introduction**

- (a) Teacher reviews the work so far by using the concrete representation of *Miss Blake's* home to stimulate the students' memory. The teacher invites the students to further explore *Miss Blake's* home. Her bedroom is next and the discussion develops about what she might have in this room. Teacher can prompt by asking, *'Would she have a walking-stick near her bed? Would she have a telephone close by? Why?'* and so on. The teacher can do a small amount of paper placement in the bedroom, telling the class that the final decisions on all of this will be theirs when the drama begins fully. A similar exploration of the bathroom ensues.
- (b) The class moves to *Miss Blake's* small garden. *'What flowers does she like? Does she have a grass patch in the middle or paving stones? Wouldn't they be easier to maintain or does someone cut her grass for her? Perhaps her favourite garden chair is there?'*

Conclusion

After fully exploring these three parts of *Miss Blake's* home the teacher gathers the students together and they review what they know about *Miss Blake*. The teacher explains to the students that soon they are going to go into three groups and each group will take charge of making one of *Miss Blake's* rooms. (Classroom assistants' support is required here. If sufficient help is not available to support small groups/individuals, this activity can be done as a whole class activity.)

Exemplar 8 / Unit 3: **Drama****A drama about Miss Blake****Unit 3****Introduction**

(a) Teacher reviews the work so far by using the concrete representation of *Miss Blake*'s home to stimulate the students' memory. Questions which reveal that the teacher has *forgotten* some of the details about *Miss Blake* can be used to stimulate students' engagement with the activity, for example '*I don't think she had a garden. I can't remember anything about it.*'

After a review of the work so far, the teacher divides the class into small groups. Using the sugar paper and markers the students are asked to place, as already shown, the main items in each of the rooms and the garden as they think *Miss Blake* herself would have. Students can also use concrete representations if their fine motor skills are not fully developed. Each group works on one room.

Teaching note: Depending on the class, there can be a time limit for this, or a limit on the number of items chosen. The teacher needs to go from group to group to ensure that the students understand the task fully, are working constructively, and to answer any difficulties they may have. Students may also work individually, if this is appropriate.

(b) In order to help the students get to know *Miss Blake* better, each group is asked to select and place in their room three special items which are particularly important to *Miss Blake*. There will need to be a whole group discussion about this first, referring to the students' own experience, for example, '*What do you like best in your living room?*'

(c) When these tasks are completed each group is invited in turn by the teacher to visit the other areas that their classmates have set up. They can ask questions about what they see, and the group in each space can be invited to talk about *Miss Blake*, her garden, bedroom, etc.

Variation

Task (c) provides an opportunity for collective role-playing. The teacher asks the students occupying the different rooms to become *Miss Blake* collectively. (Enough scarves or hats are required for all students to wear when they are *Miss Blake*. These are taken off when the teacher and students are out of role.) The teacher carefully enters each room, and those students who have created that room answer in the first person as *Miss Blake* when asked a question. For example, '*This is where I keep my photograph album. I like looking at it in the evenings.*'

Progression

The aim is that everyone by now has a personal investment in *Miss Blake* and a fairly good idea of what her house is like, what is important to her, and some idea of what kind of person she is. Perhaps *Miss Blake*'s friends and family have come into the discussion, for example, '*This is a chair for my friend to sit on when she visits me*' or '*This is a picture of me when I was twelve and on the school swimming team.*'

Conclusion

It may not be possible to keep these *objects* in place for the next lesson so that, in gathering the class together for final summary and reflection, the students are encouraged to remember as much as they possibly can for the next session. However, the *objects* on paper could be placed on the wall of the classroom under their appropriate headings for easy reference during subsequent classes, as could some of *Miss Blake*'s characteristics, which have been elicited by now (a technique similar to '*role on the wall*').

Exemplar 8 / Unit 4: **Drama****A drama about Miss Blake****Unit 4****Introduction**

- a) After a review of the work so far, the teacher leads the discussion around to talking about *Miss Blake* herself. She was once young, just the same as the students, and enjoyed playing with her friends in the garden. Later on, she got a job working in the village/town/city.
- b) Working with the whole class at first, to teach the skill of depiction and develop confidence, the teacher and students decide on three particular points in *Miss Blake*'s life that they are going to depict. For example, the first depiction could be *Miss Blake* when she was seven years of age. An initial discussion could take place to establish what type of young girl she was. 'Did she go to school?', 'What kind of toys did she have?', 'Did she have friends?', 'What games did she like to play?' The teacher asks the students to help her see what *Miss Blake* might have looked like when she was young. The teacher or a student volunteer plays the role of *Miss Blake*. Through a process of close questioning the students decide where this image of *Miss Blake* is. (If she liked to play, we could place her in the garden.) 'Would she be sitting down or standing up?' – 'why?' 'Has she a smile on her face? and what is she looking at (a book, a toy, her friends)?'

Through this process of sculpting, a still image or depiction of *Miss Blake* emerges. The teacher (or a student who is being moulded) holds this position, which the class has collectively created, and the students are asked if they are happy with this image of what *Miss Blake* might have been like when she was young. If so, they agree to remember it and move on to create another depiction of *Miss Blake* at a different stage in her life. If they are not happy with it, further questions are asked and the image is modified until a new image is arrived at that satisfies everybody. For example, 'I don't think she would have been playing with a doll because we found no toys in her bedroom, and you always keep your toys if you like them.' 'I think she would be sitting down reading, as there were lots of books in her house'. The teacher can play the devil's advocate role and ask these sorts of questions if she feels the students are able for the challenge. It is certainly an enriching process to see variations of the same image. Close attention should be paid to detail. For example, 'Is she comfortable sitting in that chair? Are her shoulders slumped? Is the book up close to her eyes? Where are her legs placed? Is she smiling or frowning while reading?'

Variation:

- (c) Is there anyone else in the garden/room with her? (Friends, parents, grandparents, brother and so forth). Other students may be brought in to assume these roles and sculpted in the same way through a process of deductive questioning. With continuous help and encouragement from the teacher, a still image of *Miss Blake* (and her family) is built up. Questions about the still image can be asked, which help create the profile of *Miss Blake*'s life. For example, 'Everyone in this picture (still image) looks happy except her father. Look at his face, he's sad. What might have happened?' Attention should be paid to facial expressions, bodily positions, proximity between characters in the image, etc. in an effort to extract meaning and further information about the fictional character, *Miss Blake*. This will help the students to get a better understanding of the situation and build a closer bond with her. This process of discussing and analysing a still image is called *reading* the image.
- (d) The same process is repeated to depict *Miss Blake* when she was twenty years of age and working in the village/town/city, showing again friends, family, workmates and indicating the type of job she had, and whether she was happy doing that job or not. The final depiction could be of *Miss Blake* now, as an old woman. This depiction allows an excellent opportunity to vividly show the difference in *Miss Blake*'s circumstances now as compared to the vitality and company she experienced when younger. Both images should be *read* with the students.

Conclusion

The class concludes with a tribute to the students for their work and a summing up of where they have arrived in the drama so far, with clarification of any questions or comments.

Exemplar 8 / Unit 5: **Drama****A drama about Miss Blake****Unit 5****Introduction**

- (a) After a review of the work so far, the teacher invites the students to do some simple exercises to help prepare the class for group depiction (as opposed to whole class work which they did last time). Students are asked to make several still images individually: dancing at a party, putting on make-up (girls), shaving when older (boys), admiring a new outfit in the mirror, having just been splashed by a car driving through a puddle, etc. It is important to stress that this is not a mimed activity, which would involve movement, although it might help reinforce the concept if the students are allowed to mime the activity first and then stop when the teacher calls *freeze*. Some students are allowed to *unfreeze*, so that they can look at the still images of the others, and vice versa.
- (b) Recalling the work during the last session, the teacher now explains that he/she is going to divide the class into three groups again and this time each group will depict *Miss Blake* at one of the stages in her life that was discussed and worked on in the last session. (Classroom assistant's support is required here. If sufficient help is not available to support small groups/individuals, this activity may be done as a whole class activity.) A considerable degree of questioning of the last session's work will be required.

When this has been done there is an addition to the task. The teacher will explain that, this time, each group is going to pick a special day in *Miss Blake*'s life at that time. After plenty of discussion, questions, and suggestions the students might decide on the following:

The first depiction—she is celebrating her first Holy Communion or some other special family or religious event, receiving a prize in school, or getting her first bicycle and she is surrounded by friends, classmates, or family.

The second depiction—*Miss Blake* at twenty might be going to her first grown-up formal dance, or out with friends, or on several other possible outings and again, she is surrounded by other people in her life.

The third depiction—this stage of her life is shown in two depictions.

- (i) *Miss Blake* is celebrating her eightieth birthday. Many of her friends are now dead, but her neighbours and her niece Kathleen have come. *Miss Blake* has to receive them sitting down and her walking stick is nearby. The still image is *read* (discussed and analysed as described above) to elicit how she is feeling.
- (ii) *Miss Blake* has fallen and is finding it very difficult to get up. Is there anybody near her to help? What is she going to do? Teacher and students *read* the image in order to come to a greater understanding of the situation.

Teaching note (i): The depiction exercises will include a lot of discussion concerning *then and now* themes. For example, the young *Miss Blake* would not have had a telephone at home; her dress for the dance would have been made locally by the dressmaker; she would put curlers in her hair to make it nice for the special day. The possibilities are rich, depending on what areas the teacher wishes to concentrate on.

Teaching note (ii): Group activities can be adapted if the students are more secure and comfortable doing the depictions as a whole class exercise.

Teaching note (iii): The teacher has a pivotal role in guiding the drama and can act as prompt/initiator of discussion or the devil's advocate, depending on the level of challenge he/she wishes to create for the students. For example, '*So you seem to be suggesting that Miss Blake as an old lady is sad. But when I saw her in the still picture (image) she seemed quite happy. Even though many of her friends have gone, she still lives in her own house, which she loves, and she has the things around her that are important to her*', etc.

Conclusion

The class concludes with a tribute to the students for their work and a summing up of where they have arrived in the drama so far, with clarification of any questions or comments.

Exemplar 8 / Unit 6: **Drama****A drama about Miss Blake****Unit 6****Introduction**

(a) After a review of the work so far, the teacher explains that he/she is going to be *in role*, that is, he/she is going to pretend to be someone else in the drama. The teacher explains that he/she will use a symbol (a briefcase and a jacket), which will always be associated with that role. He/she is going to speak to them as *Mr. Kirwan*, *Miss Blake's* social worker. (The teacher may need to discuss who a social worker or health visitor is, drawing if possible on the student's own experiences.) The teacher explains that everyone in the class will be *Miss Blake* (collective role). If possible, each student should wear a scarf to signal that he/she is *Miss Blake*. *Mr. Kirwan* speaks to the students and explains that it is clear to him and to everyone in the village that she, *Miss Blake*, cannot face another winter on her own, and she will have to think about moving into the retirement home a few miles from the village. He reminds her of her recent fall in the house. Remaining in role, *Mr. Kirwan* gently asks *Miss Blake* (the students) what they think of this idea and invites them to respond.

Teaching note: The teacher may move in and out of role at key moments in the drama if necessary, in order to check whether the students are clear about what is happening and to reflect and plan ahead. He/she will need to clearly signal that he/she has come out of role (put the briefcase and jacket to one side) and explain that the drama is being interrupted for a few moments and he/she is now speaking as their teacher and they are students again.

(b) To extend the student's skills and to explore the drama further, the teacher explains that the class will be divided into pairs A and B. A is *Miss Blake*, and B is *Mr. Kirwan*. (School folders or large copies can be used to signify *Mr. Kirwan's* briefcase.). The students in role as *Miss Blake* and *Mr. Kirwan* have a short one-to-one discussion on the matter of *Miss Blake* leaving her home. It is important to set up the space physically first so that the students know which room in the house they are in. They are told that *Miss Blake* is sitting reading in the kitchen and *Mr. Kirwan* stands a few feet away from her, ready to knock at the door. It is always helpful to give students the first line to say so that they don't flounder. The role-playing begins when the teacher calls 1, 2, 3 and knocks loudly on his/her desk, saying the first line, '*come in, the door is open*'. *Mr. Kirwan* enters and begins the dialogue with *Miss Blake*. The teacher moves from pair to pair, listens, ensures that everyone is in tune with what is going on, prompts where necessary, and encourages every sign of effort and participation.

Teaching note: It is best to end this discussion fairly quickly, even if all of the pairs have not finished, rather than let it peter out with students wondering what to do next. Pair work is not essential but it is rewarding if the students can do it. Otherwise, this activity can be conducted between the teacher and another student/assistant playing the respective roles while the others watch.

(c) Out of role, the teacher invites the students who played *Mr. Kirwan* to report back on what they have discovered as a result of their discussions with *Miss Blake*, and vice versa. This allows for a revision of *Miss Blake's* situation and attitude.

Teaching note: It is important to remember at this point that some students will take to this kind of work with enthusiasm while others may feel lost. The preparatory work may have to be done over two lessons or more if students are finding it challenging. The teacher must be ready to accept and be pleased with small steps of progress. There is no *wrong way* to do this challenging activity except perhaps a deliberately disruptive one, and sometimes even that can be put to good use. With praise, students generally invest more into the fiction.

Conclusion

The class concludes with the teacher noting that it is a difficult situation, and starting a discussion as to whether people should be made go into a home against their will. '*Is it fair to leave Miss Blake in the house all day when most parents are out at work and the children are in school, especially in winter time?*' The teacher observes that winter is coming shortly (in the fiction); decisions will have to be made soon.

Exemplar 8 / Unit 7: **Drama****A drama about Miss Blake****Unit 7****Introduction**

- (a) After a review of the work so far, the teacher tells the class that he/she would like them to go back into role as *Miss Blake* (scarves for everyone). A visitor is coming to see her. It is *Kathleen* her niece, who has rushed to see her having heard about her fall from one of the neighbours who telephoned her.
- (b) The teacher in role as *Kathleen* (using a bag or other appropriate symbol to signal the role) speaks to the class in their collective role as *Miss Blake*. She places a chair beside a table and sits down in front of the students who are arranged in a semi-circle (if possible). She tells them how worried she is about her, remarks that she (*Miss Blake*) looks unwell, and that she has noticed that her walk has got worse since they last met. She wonders whether *Miss Blake* should consider the retirement home. After all, it is quite near, it is very nice, and she is sure that, as well as herself, she would have many visits from the neighbours in the village. *Kathleen* (teacher in role) attempts to elicit some replies from the students as *Miss Blake*. Discussion ensues.
- (c) Out of role, the teachers and students consider whether anything can be done to help *Miss Blake*. What are her choices?
- (d) The teacher in role as *Kathleen* addresses the students as *Miss Blake* (with their scarves on), and attempts to gather and distill the opinions about *Miss Blake* on this issue. After a little while, the teacher in role as *Kathleen* gently guides the discussion towards the possibility of reaching a compromise. After all, it is the winter that presents the biggest problem. In summer the children of the village have long holidays, and the older ones could take turns to call on her, do her messages, and see that she is all right. Life is easier in the summer. The days are longer and brighter, the weather is warmer. *Miss Blake* probably wouldn't have to light her fire. The teacher in role as *Kathleen* tries to reach a consensus and proposes that *Miss Blake* considers going to the retirement home for the winter months and coming back for the summer. She will not have to face next winter alone in the house. Nor will she have to give up her house and garden.

Teaching note: Clearly, if the students begin to lead the drama in a different direction at this time, then that lead must be followed to see where it goes and what happens. They can return to the planned story line if they wish once other ideas have been exhausted. For example, if the students decide that *Miss Blake* is going to stay in the house, *Kathleen* and *Mr. Kirwan* can meet (using role playing) to discuss what can be done. *Mr. Kirwan* may then meet *Miss Blake* (collective role) to try and persuade her again to go into the retirement home. The teacher can introduce further tension when *Miss Blake* hears someone in her garden and becomes afraid. There was no one around that she could phone to come quickly at that time of the day.

- (e) The teacher sets up a role play between *Kathleen* and *Miss Blake* (A and B), offering the same help and prompting when needed as described above. *Kathleen* (teacher in role) tells *Miss Blake* that she has spoken to the neighbours. They will keep an eye on things and so will *Kathleen* herself when she can. *Miss Blake* has to decide what to do as she listens to *Kathleen's* arguments.
- (f) Students who were playing *Miss Blake* report her decision to the rest of the class and say why they felt she made that decision.

Exemplar 8 / Unit 7: **Drama****A drama about Miss Blake****Unit 8****Introduction**

- (a) This final unit explores the day *Miss Blake* leaves for her winter stay in the retirement home. The teacher explains this to the class and tells them that they will be in role as children of the village and he/she will be in role as *Miss Blake*.
- (b) Secretly, the teacher explains, the children have each brought a little gift by which *Miss Blake* will remember them when she is in the retirement home. Each gift has something to do with the village. There is a whole class discussion as to what these might be—a picture postcard of the village, a photograph taken on a parish outing with *Miss Blake* and some of her old friends, a pretty stone from the path, the children's small treasures, which they are willing to part with to make *Miss Blake* feel loved. These can be paper placement as before, or mimed. The children also need to tell *Miss Blake* that they will visit her when she comes back in the summer.
- (c) The teacher organises a simple ritual for the offering of the gifts. He/she moves from teacher into the role of *Miss Blake* and tells the children that she has heard that they each have a special gift for her. This is a very wonderful thing for them to have thought of and she is very interested to know what these gifts are. Would they each come one at a time to where she is sitting and, when giving their gift, tell her what it is and why they chose it so that she can remember it when she is in the retirement home. It will make her very, very happy. The children do this, and *Miss Blake* expresses her delight and thanks at each offering. (Note: If the class is large this may be done in groups with one spokesperson for each group. However, it is worth keeping to the ritual, most students love it).
- (c) If it is possible, the teacher could now announce that one of the children's parents, *Mrs. Sharkey* (a classroom assistant), has come to drive *Miss Blake* to the retirement home. *Mrs. Sharkey* (briefed beforehand by the teacher) tells the children that their parents and *Kathleen* are going to keep an eye on the house and visit *Miss Blake* whenever they can. She and *Miss Blake* leave together. *Miss Blake* is quite happy.
- (d) The teacher leads a whole class discussion on the outcome, highlighting whichever issues most interest the students.
- 'Was this a good solution for *Miss Blake* and why?'
 - 'How is she able to manage to come home in the summer? Do we all need friends in this way? Is it a good idea to help other people?'
 - 'Just because a person is old is it right for others to think that he/she cannot
 - (a) think for himself/herself?
 - (b) organise his/her own life?'
 - 'Do people make judgements like that about other people?'

Appendix

Basic costumes, props, and equipment

Costumes and/or simple props can help a student assume, sustain, and develop a role. They are often used to enhance a role or character already established in the drama or they can also be used as a stimulus to begin a drama.

Students allowed free-play time with costumes and props may begin to assume a role or character. The teacher may observe, for example, that a student is loosely role-playing a shopkeeper and he/she can progress the activity by asking for the price of a bar of chocolate, allowing a little conversation *in role* to develop. This can be repeated with other roles he/she observes.

Simple role-playing can be developed into drama if the teacher adds in a tension or problem. This is a stimulus to see if the students are ready to take the activity further. For example, after a few moments the teacher may say, *'I've lost my dog (or purse)'* or *'I don't have enough money for the chocolate bar, but I am hungry'* and thus attempts to seek the help of the shopkeeper and any other students who might be playing nearby. The introduction of a problem to be solved serves to attract the attention of students and engage them in working to resolve the dilemma. It can also be used as a motivating, real-life context to help teach other curricular subjects such as money and counting in mathematics, or creating posters for a missing dog in literacy.

Teachers need to be alert to possible opportunities for moving into drama in the free-play/dressing-up area of the classroom. Students who adopt disparate roles in accordance with the costumes or props they have chosen may be drawn into a collective drama if the teacher can select a suitable context, such as a fancy dress party with the teacher in role as the hostess (involving the practicing of social skills), or the teacher in role as the organiser of a local community meeting who gathers everyone together and gradually reveals the reason why they have all been called to attend this meeting (a new road is being built across their public park, or the local library is being closed to accommodate a new parking block, or they have been asked to plan a special party to celebrate St. Patrick's Day). Students are actively engaged in finding out more about the problem or challenge, and discussing/trying out ways to resolve it.

Character bags and sensory boxes

Familiar roles and characters can be introduced to the students through the use of a *character bag* (a garda, a teacher, a fireman, a doctor, a dentist, a nurse, a farmer, a cook, a cleaner, a rubbish collector, etc.). This character bag can contain sets of clothes and tools characteristic of that role. If a specific character from a well-known story or TV programme is being explored personal effects can be added, which might be associated with that particular character and which indicate their job, hobby, and personal habits, for example *Little Red Riding Hood* with her basket of goodies on her way to Grandma's house or the sun-glasses and jewellery worn by a famous singer like *Puff Daddy* or *Ronan Keating*.

Once students are comfortable with the original storyline, a new story can be developed around these objects or a familiar story retold with variations added. For students who require a more sensory approach to learning, a sensory box can be used. This can contain the textures, smells, tastes, and sounds typical of the roles/characters being introduced. Illustrations can be used to support the character bag providing opportunities for stimulating meaningful language development. Teachers can develop an incidental social-sight vocabulary related to the role or characters explored. Worksheets, word/picture lotto games, puzzles, and personal computer activities that enable students to rehearse their knowledge of any new vocabulary, to generalise their understanding of the new concepts, and to provide a structured approach to writing can also be devised, if so desired.

Basic equipment (select as appropriate to the group)

Store in brightly coloured labelled boxes

- cassette/CD player and tapes or CDs
- stage blocks
- table, chairs
- mirror
- notice board
- good quality make-up for special occasions.

Costumes: including masks, bags, coats, cloaks, animal costumes, domestic costumes (fireman's helmet, nurse's outfit, doctor's outfit, etc.)

Props

- hats
- scarves and shawls
- good masks
- coats and cloaks
- unusual long skirts, trousers, exotic coloured tops
- bags
- pieces of flimsy, flowing fabrics
- old sheets
- pairs of reading glasses and sunglasses
- a variety of wearable pairs of shoes
- telephones
- clip-board
- old computers
- bells
- newspapers
- vase of (plastic) flowers
- hairbrushes and combs
- football rattle
- rubber gloves
- knitting
- books
- pack of cards
- doll/teddy in shawl
- tea things – plastic teapot, mugs, etc.
- sweeping brush
- clock
- mirrors and masks
- old TV with inside taken out or a home-made frame
- walking sticks.

Closure activities

It is important to allow time at the end of a lesson for quiet reflective time. The students might be encouraged to engage in one of the following.

- Draw a moment they remember from the work. Crayons/markers and paper can supplied.
Mention the use of colour, shape, size, etc. to reflect the students' response to the drama work.
- Recall/re-cap questions on those parts of the drama the students most enjoyed or remembered. Invite students to respond via their senses. For example, do any colours stand out in their minds – any smells, images, tastes, textures, etc.?
- The teacher can encourage relaxation through guided imagery. The teacher gently talks the students through the drama work they experienced—the people they met and helped, the places they went, the things they did, etc. Students can sit or lie in a relaxed position with their eyes closed and revisit the work and reflect on it.
- The students can relax by listening to gentle music.
- Teacher reads a poem, short story, or the lyrics of a song, as appropriate, to capture the mood of the drama or to reinforce the main learning area.
- Teacher and students can create a collective story about the work they have done.
- Play a gentle, quiet game such as *'My Friend's Cat'*, based on the game *'The Minister's Cat'*, which is done in rounds with alphabetical adjectives, for example:
 - *'The minister's cat is an awful cat.'*
 - *'The minister's cat is an arrogant cat.'*
- This can be modified to suit the class-level, for example using colours:
 - *'My friend's cat is a black cat.'*
 - *'My friend's cat is a white cat, etc.'*
- Or using size:
 - *'My friend's cat is a big cat.'*
 - *'My friend's cat is a small cat.'*
 - *'My friend's cat is a fat cat, etc.'*