

EQUALS Semi-Formal (SLD)

Curriculum Scheme of Work

Preview



My Drama



Equals Semi Formal (SLD) Curriculum

My Drama

SECTION 1 Basic Principles

Preview - Some pages from the Basic Principles

What is drama?

Drama in educational settings can be a source of confusion – not least because the word ‘play’ can mean both the process and the product of drama work! Drama is often assumed to be **performance-based**, such as an end-of-term show as celebration of the school community, acting out a story, or watching a production - at the most sophisticated level, professional theatre presents texts that illuminate themes in a way to make them accessible to audiences, for example a touring theatre-in-education company to special schools. Whether a TV soap opera or a Shakespearean play, audiences witness characters in conflict - facing a problem or dilemma – and are brought to reflect on insights and new knowledge gained and on understanding of ourselves and others. The same is true of drama in schools: children can also be encouraged to devise their own performances, although these will be richer if children have had the chance to explore issues and themes beforehand in what is known as ‘process based drama’.

Process based drama is a learning medium – an interactive teaching style that often happens in the classroom, in which issues, themes and possibilities can be explored ‘from the inside’ through improvisation-based role playing that has a ‘living through’ quality. In this way, other subjects may be brought to life in a way that engages children more deeply and meaningfully, such as illuminating key moments in history, or practising a life skill in cross-curricular tasks embedded in the drama. Process based drama can provide multi-layered opportunities to promote learning across the curriculum, and to practise and consolidate learning – for example, helping Snow White (teacher-in-role) by advising her on how to set the table for her seven house mates, or teaching her how to say ‘no’ if offered food by a stranger calling at the door. The group can discover that outcomes can be different, and that they can be instrumental in influencing the course of events, even if this means that familiar stories may not turn out the same as the known narrative. Process based drama can lead to creating moments of theatre to capture an idea or meaning, rehearse and present it to others. This can be small scale, to the rest of the class for example, and not necessarily to a large invited audience.

The common linking thread is that at its core, drama at all levels and in all its forms hinges on make-believe, which is used to explore shared human experience. Participants are motivated by a situation that is simultaneously fun and intriguing, and the lure of drama’s double-edge: that what seems to be about someone else is really about me!

The real potential of drama in schools is to make the most of using the analogous situation of a drama to explore scenarios ‘one step removed’; this means that what happens in the drama can be reflected upon, lessons learned perhaps and links made afterwards to real life. Planning drama does not contradict the essential creative nature of the experience, as genuine opportunities can be incorporated for the group’s decisions, however small and clear-cut choices may need to be at first. The group should still feel that sense of ownership, and will be more likely to engage, with the underlying ‘play for the teacher’ kept covert.

Although pretence is key to both, **drama is not the same as children’s spontaneous role play** as in the home corner or playground. **Rather, drama looks to extend children’s play, to confront their make-believe, slow things down and promote their thinking.** It is in these moments where their existing frame of reference is challenged that new learning can take place, and it is the drama teacher’s job to set up such opportunities. For example, rather than settle for the ‘quick fix’ of leaping into a handy helicopter to escape from an approaching scary creature, this turns out not to be available... What shall we do? The teacher then empowers the group by encouraging their ideas and helping them to draw on their experience, resourcefulness and initiative. When working in this more open-ended way, it is advisable to have already anticipated possible avenues along which the drama could develop in order to explore the learning area – in this case, how to deal safely with a potentially dangerous animal – whilst retaining an open mind-set in case a viable alternative idea is suggested.

Groups with SLD can learn to make and share in drama work, and through it, explore and comprehend their world through encountering a wider range of scenarios in which to make new connections and reach new understandings of universal themes affecting us all – for example, taking responsibility, behaving appropriately in a certain situation, or helping someone in need. Drama can take participants into the past and into the future beyond the here-and-now, to consider what might have been or could be.

Approaching Drama with Groups with SLD

Account will need to be taken that the teacher of drama working with groups with SLD will face additional challenges, especially when there are diverse starting points within the same group:

- Developmentally they may be at the earliest stages of learning and/or have limited communication
- Some may understand how make-believe works but lack the social skills for engaging in the group experience
- Others may be able to engage in make believe but struggle to generate and sustain it

The way forward when working with groups with SLD is to base an approach to drama on what happens naturally in real life so that both teacher and the group can ‘learn how to do drama whilst doing it’! Drama’s appeal is that it hinges directly on the natural way that children learn and make sense of the world – play, in other words. It is not that children with SLD cannot play, rather that they may not know how to. The teacher needs to base their approach to drama on how typically developing children are enabled to engage in play, and replicate this in drama with groups with SLD. Children’s understanding and use of make-believe typically follows a developmental pattern.

Early ritualistic interactive play

- Caregivers across cultures instinctively induct the youngest children into fictitious contexts – for example, adopting exaggerated feigned annoyance at baby throwing a rattle out of the cot, which baby then repeats with squeals of delight as the realisation dawns that they can generate the play format.
- These repetitive ‘games of theatre’ (other examples being ‘peep-bo’, ‘I’m coming to get you’, or ‘look out behind you’) become the pivot on which caregivers extend children’s play into more complex sequences – building up a sense of anticipation by hiding that bit longer before emerging, or knocking down an ever-increasing tower of bricks built by the adult with feigned exasperation.

More complex flexible play sequences

- Young children then begin to use items functionally for their real purpose (pretending to drink from a cup), and
- later understand how one thing can be used symbolically to be another (eg a cardboard box to be a boat or television), and miming without the presence of the object at all.

Exploration of social experience

- A discernable difference can be observed in children engaging in social play, between perfunctory *role taking* ‘as if’ in familiar scenarios from life (for example a bathing baby routine), and
- more elaborate themed fantasy *role playing* where children may assume a character and push boundaries beyond the familiar to explore ‘what if’ scenarios (for example, building a shelter in the jungle, crossing a rope bridge across a canyon, escaping from a monster).
- A key moment may also be captured and/or revisited, with a view to sharing it with others in a short rehearsed play.

So, even if a drama context is beyond their actual worldly experience, children will bring to it their knowledge and understanding from real life – imagination is creative use of memory. In the same way that caregivers immerse themselves in and extend children’s play at all levels, similarly, older children will also support younger children within their make-believe play, even if above their level, effectively operating as ‘play tutors’ by structuring choices and decisions for them and explaining if necessary the motivations, intentions and consequences that influence the unfolding play narrative.

This gives teachers working with groups with SLD a model for how drama work can be structured and supported so that it can become a developmental curriculum suitable for the diverse classroom, with embedded opportunities for progression and differentiating challenge at all levels! (See Figure 1)

Preview - few pages

SECTION 2

Route 1 – Drama-related activity

This section includes examples of activities aimed particularly at the inexperienced teacher and/or group new to drama. Although individual activities can be lifted as warm-ups within the opening phase of a more involved drama lesson, they can comprise a unit of drama work in their own right. There are compendia of drama games available, as they are often used by theatre companies as a means to quickly gel a group (see Section 4 – Resources).

Spending time playing drama games will

- strengthen interaction and the group dynamic,
- develop awareness of individuals within the group
- establish anticipation and participation
- get the group used to focusing their joint attention
- help with understanding how representation works
- develop improvisation

Similarly, movement experiences, such as those developed by Veronica Sherborne (see My Dance), entail relationship play based on a ‘people as apparatus’ principle. In Route 1, movement is given an imaginary dimension as a bridge into make-believe. It can also be embedded in more open-ended drama (Route 3 and 4) as moments of physical theatre. Movement can

- be valuable for learning physical control to enhance the body as an expressive tool,
- help develop trust and collaboration,
- develop confidence and feelings of self-worth
- help with understanding how representation works.

Key ground rules can be agreed, such as:

- Nobody has to join in
- We are careful when we move
- We talk one at a time - unless we are all joining in!
- We give everyone’s acting a chance – including the teacher!

