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SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

Drama And Theatre In Education

F O R E W O R D

It is a great pleasure to edit this Special Supplement on Drama and Theatre in Education for the ETAS Journal.

Drama in Education (DiE) is an umbrella term that refers to the use of the elements of theatre, such as games and acting techniques, in order to engage learners holistically in educational settings with their mind, body, and soul. DiE has a long history in the UK, where it has been a part of the teaching curriculum since the 1950s. While *Theatre in Education* (TiE) focuses on creating an aesthetic product (i.e. a play) to be viewed by an external audience, DiE focuses on the personal development of the learner in a fictive environment (playing a role within a group to explore a historical event, for example). In other words, DiE is process oriented as opposed to product oriented.

During a DiE lesson, the drama-work happens in the classroom, rather than on stage, and it occurs for the purposes of personal development and/or acquiring knowledge about a subject. For instance, DiE might help focus improving public speaking skills or pronunciation, or in an English classroom setting, it might entail learning and practicing a grammatical structure. Drama-work taps into three channels: the affective (heart), the kinaesthetic (body), and the cognitive (mind). As mentioned in many of the



articles in this issue, learners come as a complete package containing all three of these elements. The challenge and the joy for language teachers, is to tap into all three of these channels during class.

DiE comes from the Anglo-Saxon tradition and does not (yet) have a strong presence in Swiss schools. This Special Supplement is a step towards making a change. We hope that the articles in this Special Supplement will inspire English teachers in Switzerland – and beyond – to experiment with DiE in their classrooms. Indeed, DiE is well suited to language teaching and learning, as using drama in the classroom requires learners to engage in oral communication. In fact, there is now a yearly bilingual conference (English/German) in Konstanz, Germany, dedicated to second and foreign language teachers interested in applying DiE in their language classes (<https://dramapaedagogik.de/en>).

The articles in this Special Supplement provide insight not only into the ways drama is used in teaching in the Swiss context, but also into classroom settings all around the world. The contributors are teachers and researchers who all agree that there needs to be room for creativity in the classroom. We hope that readers will be inspired to try out some of the lessons, techniques, and creative ideas presented herein. There is no single recipe for how best to use drama in your classroom – just remember to create a safe space in which your learners can communicate and have fun learning.

Eva Göksel & Nicole Küpfer

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Exploring Drama in Education

An interview with Professor Jonothan Neelands



EVA GÖKSEL

How did you come to work in Drama in Education?

I started out as an English teacher and I literally bluffed my way into a drama job in a high school in Leicestershire in the UK. At that time there were huge resources for supporting drama – lots of advisory teachers, youth theatre, all kinds of stuff. I was brought up teaching in the Drama in Education (DiE) tradition as well as working in youth theatre. In fact, it is very important for me that I was involved in both.

Over time it became the norm the people did just one or the other (DiE or youth theatre), but I was trained to do both right from the beginning.

I later moved to the University of Warwick to do teacher training. We founded a Drama in Education MA at Warwick in 1995, which still runs today. I then became increasingly interested in cultural

policy and I ran the Warwick Commission. I'm now a professor of creative education at the Warwick Business School, where I teach Drama in Education to business leaders.

What is Drama in Education (DiE)?

If I were to define it with limits then I would apply it to a specific model of drama that was pioneered by Dorothy Heathcote, Gavin Bolton, and Cecily O'Neill. I am of course being very specific. Some people are very strict about what is and what is not Drama in Education, but in my own work I really don't recognise those boundaries. I do primarily Process Drama, but I also incorporate elements that come from outside the Drama in Education tradition. In the last 10 years, the notion of 'ensemble', along with the relationship between drama/theatre and democracy, has been a driving force in my work. So that makes me open to the work of any practitioner with an interest in drama and democracy.

How has DiE evolved in the UK since the 1950s?

Over the years, there has been a shift from Drama in Education to Applied Theatre, but people took their methods of working with them. Drama in Education is a distinctive tradition now; it's probably a part of our history. However, it was an absolutely foundational stage in our history, but I don't believe that things should stay stuck; it's fine that DiE has evolved.

It has adapted to political circumstances and it will never quite disappear.

You have recently been doing a lot of teaching in China: What is the attraction of DiE?

Every child in China now has a statutory right to drama and dance once a week. It's in fact about character building – the Chinese see drama as a great way of teaching traditional culture. But it's mostly an economic argument, because China, better than the UK, understands the creative age, understands that creativity is everything, and wants to move from "made in China" to "designed in China".

Where is there a need for DiE in schools in the UK?

Everywhere. The tragedy is that the most disadvantaged children and young people are the ones that are the least likely to get access to the arts in the curriculum and extremely unlikely to get them as part of their home education. That is where the need is, but they are the ones that are under the most pressure to narrow the curriculum down to basic literacy and numeracy and therefore the arts get cut.

What advice do you have for teachers new to DiE?

Before diving into any drama work, you need to have a good working relationship with your class. There needs to be mutual respect between peers and the teacher. It's best to make a contract with the children: teaching drama is a risk for the teacher and for the students, as it's new to everyone. It's best to be transparent right from the beginning: explain what you plan to do in order to make the learning more enjoyable and state what kind of behaviour you expect from the group. Work in small increments; it can be enough to simply work with DiE for half an hour.

The seminal book Structuring Drama Work: A Handbook of Available Forms in Theatre and Drama which you co-authored with Tony Goode has been a best seller for over 25 years.

Structuring Drama Work was first published in 1990. A most recent edition was published in 2015, at which time the book had been reprinted for the 20th time. It is in fact a tool kit. It doesn't tell you how to teach. It lays out the palette of colours a drama teacher can use. How they choose to paint with it is up to them. The idea of laying out the drama conventions came from Dorothy Heathcote:

in *Signs and Portents* (1984) she says that teaching drama has to be made easier and that this should be done by explaining the basic drama conventions and by making them accessible. So that is what Tony Goode and I did.

However, we experienced some resistance to our book when it first came out: I think people liked the mystique of only a few people being able to teach drama. We, however, made Teacher-in-Role (teacher takes on a character) just one of 50 conventions; we collected and made transparent the different drama techniques. And now drama is taught mainly through the conventions.

Are there any particular drama conventions you would suggest to DiE novices?

Teacher-in-Role is very easy if you use the convention to tell a story in role as a character. Still Images (frozen pictures) are quite simple, although you can't do them all the time. Just look at conventions you feel comfortable with, decide if you can imagine trying them out. Structuring is the art: the use of different drama conventions in a lesson does take time to master. Look for opportunities to use still images, do some improvisation, and use some storytelling conventions. If in doubt use someone else's DiE lesson – there is no need to reinvent the wheel.

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Small avalanches, big impact: Diving into literature through drama in the high school (Gymnasium) English classroom

EVA GÖKSEL

Abstract

This article reports on a Drama in Education (DiE) lesson observed at a Swiss Gymnasium in the canton of Zürich. The teacher, Nicole Küpfer, has over 20 years of experience teaching with DiE and regularly uses drama in her teaching. In this lesson, she worked with the short story *Small Avalanches* by Joyce Carol Oates (2003).

Introduction

Encouraging adolescents to engage with literary texts can, at times, be a challenging task – particularly in a foreign language context, such as English in Swiss classrooms. The approach explored in this article first engages students on the affective (emotional) level, secondly encourages them to explore the text kinaesthetically (using the body), and finally moves onto more cognitive tasks, such as summarising or analysing text passages. This three-part approach, which uses the heart, body, and mind to learn, is at the centre of drama-based pedagogy (Drama in Education).

What is Drama in Education

Drama in Education (DiE) is a teaching and learning method that, among other things, uses the building blocks of theatre – for example actors' warm-ups for body and voice, as well as exercises for getting into role – to teach subject-specific content outside of the theatre, for example in the classroom. It has a long history in the UK, where it has been a part of the teaching curriculum since the 1950s.

DiE-pioneer Dorothy Heathcote ("Mantel of the Expert"), explains that Theatre in Education (TiE) is not to be confused with DiE: "The difference between theatre and classroom drama is that in theatre everything is contrived so that the audience gets the kicks. In the classroom, the participants get the kicks. However, the tools are the same: the elements of theatre craft" (Heathcote, cited in Wagner, 1979, p. 147).

An "A-list" of pedagogues and theoreticians, such as Brian Way, Sir Ken Robinson, John Dewey, Paulo Freire, Gavin Bolton, Dorothy Heathcote, and Lev Vygotsky, to name a few, have paved the way for DiE work, arguing for more room for play, creativity, and learner autonomy in the classroom. In the UK, for example, DiE is implemented not only in educational contexts, but also in institutions such as prisons, as well as in work with marginalised communities and groups (usually under the label of "applied theatre" (see Nicola Abraham's "The Creature Methodology" in this issue).

This article focuses on using DiE in the English language classroom to encourage adolescent students to connect with language, culture, and literature in a way that is meaningful to them. References to DiE in this text should therefore be in line with O'Neill and Lambert's (1982) views, where "Drama in education is a mode of learning. Through the pupils' active identification with imagined roles and situations in drama, they can learn to explore issues, events and relationships" (p. 11).

Small Avalanches: Using drama in the English classroom

The lesson described here was carried out in the context of a project-day, in which a grade nine English class (13 girls and six boys ages 14 and 15) spent the day in the drama studio. The work with *Small Avalanches* by Joyce Carol Oates (2003) took place in the morning, totalling about four hours. The lesson structure followed Neelands and Goode's (2015) four-phase model: warm-up, pretext, working with drama conventions, and cool-down. During the warm-up phase, the class was invited to walk around the room to music and to consciously observe and discover all the objects around the room, such as the flip chart, the light fixtures, the doors, bags on the floor, etc. When the music stopped, the group was directed to close their eyes and to point to various objects around the room.

This exercise, sometimes called "where am I standing" (Ulrich & Felder, 2008, exercise W15) is designed to heighten spatial awareness, concentration, and interaction with objects in a given space. It also provides a first step away from everyday routines into a space where the students/actors focus on their own motivations, feelings, and experiences in the moment. As a next step, the group had to determine – again with closed eyes – how many people were wearing glasses, how many were wearing a certain colour, etc. This exercise narrowed the focus from observing the big picture, to focusing on smaller details – a process that was repeated later when working with the text *Small Avalanches*. Further warm-up

exercises aiming to improve the group's focus and teamwork included a two-part mirroring exercise, where A mirrors B's every move and an exercise in which A follows B's hand around the room (Boal, 2002).

The pretext

The goal of the lesson was to understand, analyse, and engage with a fairly challenging short story written in English – a foreign language for the German-speaking students. Additionally, the story is set in the state of Colorado in the American Rockies – a context and location foreign to the students. In order to enhance the students' visual and auditory memory and to help them create an inner awareness of an unknown context, they were asked to sit on the floor all around the room, to close their eyes, and to listen to a soundscape of birdcalls. After listening for about two minutes, the students shared their thoughts with a partner, for example "I pictured myself in the jungle...". They then shared their impressions with the whole group.

The group was then keyed into location: They were asked to imagine being home alone on a hot summer afternoon in Switzerland – the story *Small Avalanches* being set on a scorching hot afternoon. They then wrote down what they might do on such a day: for example, "I would go to the lake...", "I would invite a friend over...", etc. Next, the students wrote the opening paragraph to a story beginning with "It was a very hot day in the middle of the summer holidays...".

With a partner, they took turns reading the story beginnings aloud and commenting on them enthusiastically, for example with "Wow, that's amazing! What happened next?" This served the purpose of giving the students' writing importance and literary value by being given the highest appreciation possible from their peers. The group was then instructed to keep their texts, as the teacher planned to develop them further in a future lesson.

After asking the class what an avalanche was and explaining the concept using the simile of a snowball rolling down a snowy mountain slope, the teacher then began to read *Small Avalanches* aloud. The class remained seated around the room with closed eyes. Afterwards, they were asked to make notes on what they had understood from the story so far. This activity was repeated two more times with further sections of the story – an alternative way to foster listening comprehension and also a technique to help the students focus on the specific context of the story.

Using drama conventions

The students were then divided into groups of three. Using their notes, they created a

30-second semi-improvised scene focusing on an interesting moment in the story. This exercise aimed to bring students' individual understanding of the key events in the story to light, while also fostering negotiation skills and guiding them to reach consensus within a small group. This can be quite challenging, as not everyone may agree on the same moment as being the most relevant for presentation. The teacher monitored the rehearsals and put emphasis on using accurate grammatical structures. The scenes were then shared back to the group.

Using Cawthon, Dawson, and Ihorn's (2011) Describe, Analyze, and Relate process (DAR), the students observed the scenes closely and discussed each presentation in detail, thereby working out relevant moments of the story's plot. Later in the lesson, the students were again divided into groups of three, and were instructed to choose a passage in the story where the relationship between some (i.e. any) of the characters had been clearly worked out. This moment was portrayed as a Still-Image (Neelands & Goode, 2015).

To create a Still-Image, actors remain in a frozen position, mirroring a moment in a scene, like a photograph. Thought-Tracking (Neelands & Goode, 2015), a convention for finding out more about a character's thoughts/motivation, was used as a way to discuss the various Still-Images and to gauge the students' understanding of the text. In a second step, the Still-Images were shown again, with students from other groups stepping in to add the corresponding voices (again via Thought-Tracking). After a brief discussion of the story and the characters as discovered thus far, the students were asked to finish reading the story for the following week.

Student voices: Reflection on lesson

One of the participants, a young woman, reflected that when reading the text towards the end of the lesson, she could compare which passages she recalled clearly from when the teacher had read them aloud: *"It was fun to read it afterwards and to see what I had remembered correctly, and what not"* (Interview, March 8, 2017). She enjoyed the chance that drama work afforded for spontaneously speaking English: *"I just thought it was fun to read English without having prepared... without having [a text] written down"*.

Additionally, she felt that overall, using drama to understand a literary text was rewarding: *"I think you understand the character better by trying to act as one of them"*, adding: *"I kind of got the feeling, all the way along that she [Nancy, the protagonist] was bored, and then afterwards, when I read the text for myself*

I saw 'yeah, yeah, she's bored'". The student ended the interview by saying: *"I sometimes wish we'd had time to prepare [scenes] longer, but it depends on how motivated the others are of course"*.

Two young men, who also participated in the lesson, discussed their experiences later that afternoon. Student 1 felt that *"it was interesting to think about how such a story ["Small Avalanches"] might start, but I don't know if it helped us understand the text"*. To this, Student 2 responded: *"I think it helped set the scene; we could imagine the hot sunny day"*. Both remarked that working with drama takes quite a bit of time, and is somewhat challenging, especially when the class is asked to imagine elements of the story before reading the text.

Student 2 compared the experience to reading a book and then watching the movie, pointing out that it can be discomfoting when one's imagined scenario does not line up exactly with the actual story. When asked about the benefits of using drama from their point of view, Student 1 said that playing the characters *"made some of their actions more understandable"*. In addition, Student 2 felt that the drama work helped illustrate the characters more clearly.

Conclusion

This lesson focused on a fairly challenging text – a short story for young adults, following a young girl's potentially dangerous encounter with a stranger. Both the students and the teacher felt that the use of DiE activities allowed the class to better understand the story and the characters. Using drama in the classroom is a method that requires some time, but – based on the student reflections on this lesson – offers learners a chance to gain a deeper understanding of the language and content of a text.

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