A PEARSON AUSTRALIA CUSTOM BOOK

AED1240 - Drama Arts in Early Childhood Education

This custom edition for Edith Cowan University is compiled from:

CHILDREN, MEANING-MAKING AND THE ARTS
2ND EDITION
EDITED BY SUSAN WRIGHT

MMADD ABOUT THE ARTS: AN INTRODUCTION TO PRIMARY ARTS EDUCATION
4TH EDITION
DEIRDRE RUSSELL-BOWIE

PRETENDING TO LEARN: HELPING CHILDREN LEARN THROUGH DRAMA
JOHN O'TOOLE AND JULIE DUNN

CREATING ENVIRONMENTS FOR LEARNING: BIRTH TO AGE EIGHT
3RD EDITION
JULIE BULLARD

CREATING MEANING THROUGH LITERATURE AND THE ARTS
5TH EDITION
CLAUDIA E. CORNETT

sample pages

Table of Contents

About This Custom Book *iv*

Chapter 1: Dramatic play and the drama in the early years: Re-imagining the approach *1*
Children, Meaning-Making and the Arts, 2nd Edition
Edited by Susan Wright, Chapter 5

Chapter 2: Developing dramatic play centres *22*
Creating Environments for Learning: Birth to Age Eight, 3rd Edition
Julie Bullard, Chapter 7

Chapter 3: Drama education *45*
MMADD About the Arts: An Introduction to Primary Arts Education, 4th Edition
Deirdre Russell-Bowie, Chapter 7

Chapter 4: The basics of drama teaching *78*
Pretending to Learn: Helping Children Learn through Drama
John O'Toole and Julie Dunn, Part 1 (pp. 2–9)

Chapter 5: Exemplars – Level 1 and 2 *86*
Pretending to Learn: Helping Children Learn through Drama
John O'Toole and Julie Dunn, Exemplars Level 1 and 2 (pp. 36–63)

Chapter 6: Integrating classroom drama throughout curricular areas *115*
Creating Meaning through Literature and the Arts, 5th Edition
Claudia e. Cornett, Chapter 8

Chapter 7: Valuing diversity in the early childhood arts classroom: A drama case study *157*
Children, Meaning-Making and the Arts, 2nd Edition
Edited by Susan Wright, Chapter 8

Chapter 8: How do media production and ICT fit into the early childhood context? *181*
Children, Meaning-Making and the Arts, 2nd Edition
Edited by Susan Wright, Chapter 6

Sample pages

ABOUT THIS CUSTOM BOOK

Welcome to ***AED1240 – Drama Arts in Early Childhood Education.***

The material included in this custom book has been chosen specifically for your course. Please be aware that chapter, section and page numbers from the original source texts still appear in this book.

The **Table of Contents** refers to the page numbers of this custom book, not the source texts. These page numbers also appear in the **Navigation Bar** at the top of each page.

Navigation Bar – Use this information to navigate through this custom book. The page numbers here run continuously from beginning to end.

CHAPTER 1 *Dramatic play and the drama in the early years* **AED1240 - DRAMA ARTS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

page **2** A Publication from Pearson Custom Publishing for Edith Cowan University

Children, Meaning-Making and the Arts

particularly, it is focused on identifying approaches that adults might use to support children in the creation of rich and extended dramatic experiences.

Social theorists, such as Erving Goffman (1959, 1967/2005) and Judith Butler (1990), claim that we make selections about language, gesture, clothing (costume) and behaviours as we *perform* our identities. Creative and imaginative play, shaped into dramatic activity, offers children opportunities to experiment with and perform a range of 'selves' as part of the process of identity formation. By responding to performances created by others or to their own performative acts, children gain an understanding of the differentiation between the fictional and the real. They may begin to recognise the elements of drama that are the foundation of all dramatic action, and to manipulate and manage them as they create their own dramatic events. They have the opportunity to recognise imaginative acts and appreciate how these acts may be shaped into dramatic events that communicate meaning to others.

In this chapter we outline three key principles that we believe contribute to the development of effective dramatic learning in the early years. Together they offer a perspective on drama that, in contrast to many earlier approaches, highlights the key role of the adult in the development of young children's dramatic skills and understanding. We will suggest that young children need to have plentiful and regular opportunities to imaginatively explore ideas through playing and drama, supported by adults who have an understanding of and willingness to engage in the art form of drama.

Background

This perspective is set against the backdrop of the changing social environments of children and the growing body of international research that suggests that children's make-believe play abilities are in decline (see reviews by Johnson, Christie, & Wardle, 2005; and Karpov, 2005). Bodrova (2008, p. 365) suggests that this decline is evident in both quantity and quality and identifies a number of factors responsible for this situation, including 'the current emphasis on adult-directed learning that focuses on instrumental and academic outcomes, the increase in adult-directed forms of children's learning and recreation, proliferation of toys and games that limit children's imagination and safety limits set by parents and teachers on where and how children are allowed to play'. However, she goes on to claim (p. 366) that the most important factor is none of these, but rather the 'decrease in adult mediation of make believe play'. According to Bodrova, this lack of adult involvement has emerged because of the stand-off between academically oriented, skills-based approaches and traditional early years activities.

This situation is mirrored in approaches to the other arts as well, including visual arts. Here, early years teachers have also tended to privilege children's natural creativity over skills development, with the result being that, rather than supporting children's artistic development through responsive, targeted and sensitive involvement, teachers have, instead, more usually opted to stand back and let this learning unfold naturally. Eisner (2002) has suggested that these natural unfolding approaches are misguided and notes that 'the artistic development of the individual is not an automatic consequence of maturation' (p. 233).

Within this chapter, we argue that approaches to drama and dramatic play in early years contexts need to be reconsidered to more strongly take account of the skills and understandings that are necessary for effective participation in drama. We will suggest that teachers need to become more deliberate in supporting all forms of dramatic activity, through purposeful involvement

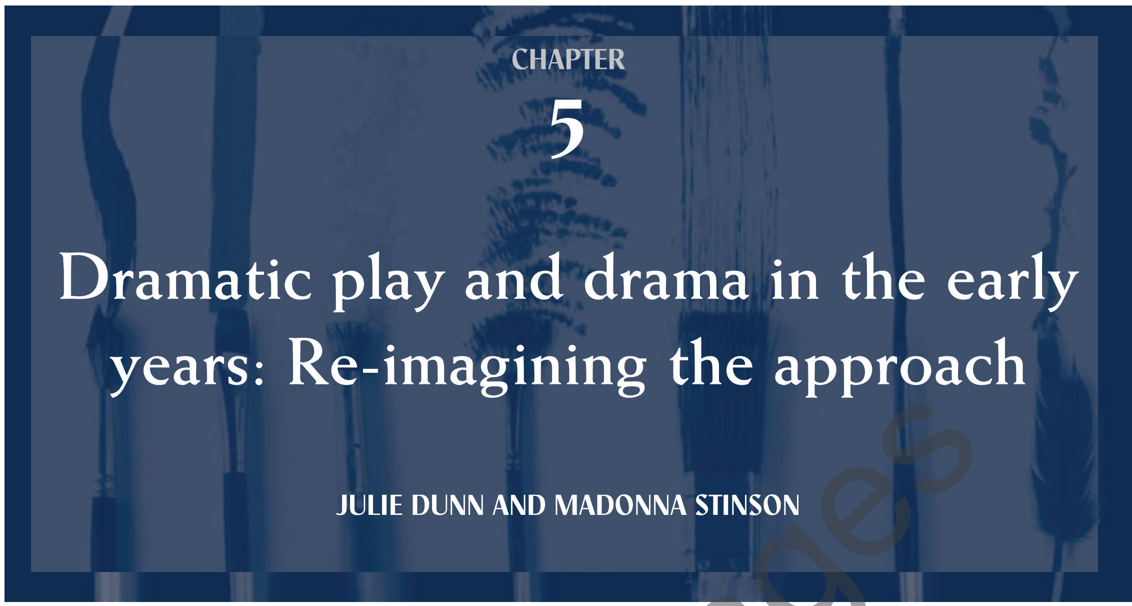
116

Dunn, J. & Stinson, M. (2012). Dramatic play and the drama in the early years: Re-imagining the approach. In Susan Wright (Ed.), *Children, meaning-making and the arts* (2nd ed., pp. 115–134). Melbourne, VIC: Pearson Australia.

Sample pages

Source Text Page Number – This is the original page number.

Reference Bar – This is the citation of the original source text. You need to quote these details, including the relevant page numbers, when referencing your assignments.



CHAPTER 5

Dramatic play and drama in the early years: Re-imagining the approach

JULIE DUNN AND MADONNA STINSON

Sample pages

In this chapter, Julie Dunn and Madonna Stinson consider the relationship between child-structured dramatic play, teacher-structured drama, and picture books. They outline a process where picture books are re-imagined and drama strategies are applied to support and extend children's dramatic learning. The chapter provides an example of these processes in action and outlines three key principles that contribute to the development of effective dramatic learning in the early years. These principles highlight the role of the adult as a supporter of children's dramatic work.

What is drama in the early years?

Drama learning can take many forms in early years contexts. It may, for example, involve children *creating* drama through child-structured play or within teacher-facilitated drama sessions. Alternatively, drama experiences may include children *presenting* their ideas in informal contexts, such as the presentation of a spontaneously created puppet show or sharing aspects of their play with peers or carers. Importantly, drama in the early years should also include opportunities for children to *respond* to the drama presentations developed by others, with these presentations ranging from those informal and spontaneous performances created by their peers to professional actors performing within formal theatre-based presentations. Each of these modes of learning in drama (i.e. creating, presenting, responding) offers the child different opportunities for developing understanding—of drama, of themselves and of their world. Within this chapter, however, the emphasis will be placed on the learning that takes place when children are *creating* drama. More

Dunn, J. & Stinson, M. (2012). Dramatic play and the drama in the early years: Re-imagining the approach. In Susan Wright (Ed.), *Children, meaning-making and the arts* (2nd ed., pp. 115–134). Melbourne, VIC: Pearson Australia.

particularly, it is focused on identifying approaches that adults might use to support children in the creation of rich and extended dramatic experiences.

Social theorists, such as Erving Goffman (1959, 1967/2005) and Judith Butler (1990), claim that we make selections about language, gesture, clothing (costume) and behaviours as we *perform* our identities. Creative and imaginative play, shaped into dramatic activity, offers children opportunities to experiment with and perform a range of 'selves' as part of the process of identity formation. By responding to performances created by others or to their own performative acts, children gain an understanding of the differentiation between the fictional and the real. They may begin to recognise the elements of drama that are the foundation of all dramatic action, and to manipulate and manage them as they create their own dramatic events. They have the opportunity to recognise imaginative acts and appreciate how these acts may be shaped into dramatic events that communicate meaning to others.

In this chapter we outline three key principles that we believe contribute to the development of effective dramatic learning in the early years. Together they offer a perspective on drama that, in contrast to many earlier approaches, highlights the key role of the adult in the development of young children's dramatic skills and understanding. We will suggest that young children need to have plentiful and regular opportunities to imaginatively explore ideas through playing and drama, supported by adults who have an understanding of and willingness to engage in the art form of drama.

Background

This perspective is set against the backdrop of the changing social environments of children and the growing body of international research that suggests that children's make-believe play abilities are in decline (see reviews by Johnson, Christie, & Wardle, 2005; and Karpov, 2005). Bodrova (2008, p. 365) suggests that this decline is evident in both quantity and quality and identifies a number of factors responsible for this situation, including 'the current emphasis on adult-directed learning that focuses on instrumental and academic outcomes, the increase in adult-directed forms of children's learning and recreation, proliferation of toys and games that limit children's imagination and safety limits set by parents and teachers on where and how children are allowed to play'. However, she goes on to claim (p. 366) that the most important factor is none of these, but rather the 'decrease in adult mediation of make believe play'. According to Bodrova, this lack of adult involvement has emerged because of the stand-off between academically oriented, skills-based approaches and traditional early years activities.

This situation is mirrored in approaches to the other arts as well, including visual arts. Here, early years teachers have also tended to privilege children's natural creativity over skills development, with the result being that, rather than supporting children's artistic development through responsive, targeted and sensitive involvement, teachers have, instead, more usually opted to stand back and let this learning unfold naturally. Eisner (2002) has suggested that these natural unfolding approaches are misguided and notes that 'the artistic development of the individual is not an automatic consequence of maturation' (p. 233).

Within this chapter, we argue that approaches to drama and dramatic play in early years contexts need to be reconsidered to more strongly take account of the skills and understandings that are necessary for effective participation in drama. We will suggest that teachers need to become more deliberate in supporting all forms of dramatic activity, through purposeful involvement

Sample pages

Dunn, J. & Stinson, M. (2012). Dramatic play and the drama in the early years: Re-imagining the approach. In Susan Wright (Ed.), *Children, meaning-making and the arts* (2nd ed., pp. 115–134). Melbourne, VIC: Pearson Australia.

and a conscious awareness of themselves as *arts educators*. Like David Best (1992, p. 75), who has suggested that 'to fail to intervene is to fail to educate' and Eisner (2002, p. 233), who believes that non-interventionist approaches are 'a kind of pedagogy by neglect', we will be focusing on the positive pedagogical role of the teacher in early years classrooms. To achieve this, we will outline approaches that serve to scaffold children's learning in and through drama and play, while nevertheless providing an environment that is supportive of the child's need to develop independence as a creative and imaginative learner. Such an environment, we argue, highlights the role of the adult as someone who requires an understanding of the basic elements of drama, the nature of dramatic activities, the materials that are likely to support such activities and sensitivity to the specific needs of individual children.

In addition, this chapter will present an argument that one key aspect of supporting all forms of dramatic activity in the early years is to increase the emphasis currently being placed on the role of narrative. Singer and Singer (2006) have suggested that:

> the great evolutionary development of our human ability to create private story-like structures in our thoughts, to reminisce about the past, and to spin out various more or less realistic scenarios for future events, is an outgrowth of extensive play practices. (p. 98)

However, the opposite can also be argued—that narratives, in the form of stories, picture books and films, are rich sources for imaginative and dramatic play, providing children with roles, situations, tensions, places and language to explore. A note of caution is needed here, however, for we are not suggesting that children 'enact' adult narratives but, rather, that effective and productive drama learning can take place when children, in conjunction with their teachers, develop the ability to 're-imagine' stories, picture books and films, and playfully explore the endless possibilities that this process provides. In the case study that follows, we provide an example of this 're-imagining', in this case, stimulated by a picture book.

Sample pages

CASE STUDY: *MRS MCGINTY AND THE BIZARRE PLANT*

The children in Ms Jackson's early years class have built a garden and are enjoying watching the various plants grow. In their independent play they use a range of real and symbolic objects to pretend to be gardeners—digging, planting, potting and watering. After some time, the children and their teacher notice that their real garden is becoming infested with weeds. Discussion arises about the difference between plants and weeds. The teacher decides that this might be a useful focus for a scientific investigation. She also sees this focus as a chance to engage the children's imaginations and open up opportunities for further dramatic play. She goes looking for relevant resources and amongst the many non-fiction texts she locates, discovers a picture book by Gavin Bishop (1981) entitled *Mrs McGinty and the Bizarre Plant*.

Within this story, Mrs McGinty, who is old, grumpy, lonely and unpopular in her local community, purchases an unusual plant from a market stall. She plants it in her garden and it begins to grow rapidly. Soon it is larger than her house and quite bizarre in appearance. This plant changes her life, making her popular with everyone in the town. One day, however, botanists from the Botanical Garden Flying Scouts arrive by hot air balloon and ask Mrs McGinty to hand over her plant.

The original story sees Mrs McGinty willingly hand over the plant and eventually the reader discovers that another one is growing in her shed. This ending, while being a satisfactory one for

Dunn, J. & Stinson, M. (2012). Dramatic play and the drama in the early years: Re-imagining the approach. In Susan Wright (Ed.), *Children, meaning-making and the arts* (2nd ed., pp. 115–134). Melbourne, VIC: Pearson Australia.

Mrs McGinty and the Bizarre Plant *by Gavin Bishop. © Random House NZ 2007*

The members of the Royal Botanical Flying Scouts arrive. © Random House NZ 2007

Sample pages

a children's picture book, does not offer Ms Jackson the connection to plants and weeds that she is seeking and she suspects that it will be unlikely to stimulate the rich dramatic play of which she knows her students are capable. However, what it does include are two exciting aspects with real dramatic potential: the bizarre plant itself and the arrival of the botanists by hot air balloon.

When sharing the story with the children, Ms Jackson first reads the story as presented by the author and *then* encourages the development of the children's narrative skills by offering them the opportunity to wonder about alternative endings. She therefore poses two questions: Why were the botanists so keen to take the plant away, and what might happen if Mrs McGinty were to say 'no' to its removal? Here the teacher is making use of her understanding of dramatic tension to open the story up so that the children might explore alternative story endings to the one offered to us by the author.

Dunn, J. & Stinson, M. (2012). Dramatic play and the drama in the early years: Re-imagining the approach. In Susan Wright (Ed.), *Children, meaning-making and the arts* (2nd ed., pp. 115–134). Melbourne, VIC: Pearson Australia.

As a result of this discussion, Ms Jackson decides to take on the role of the Captain of Royal Botanical Flying Scouts. She prepares for this role by gathering together a set of goggles, a white lab coat (with a badge attached saying 'Captain') and an important looking green folder that bears the logo, 'Royal Botanical Flying Scouts'. She shows the children these items and together they brainstorm who they might belong to. The children are then advised that Ms Jackson will be taking on this role and they all prepare by polishing their imaginations (literally miming as if they were polishing a shiny hat to wear) to indicate that they are ready and willing to engage in the dramatic pretending that follows. During the focused learning experience that follows, Ms Jackson, in role as the Captain of the Royal Botanical Flying Scouts, explains to the children what her organisation does and why it has suddenly arrived in Mrs McGinty's garden. The problem, it seems, is that the plant is actually a dangerous weed that has to be removed to protect all the other plants in the area. It seems that these bizarre weeds, and others of all different shapes and colours, are springing up all over the place and more flying scouts are needed to support the work of removing them. The children are therefore invited to join the Flying Scouts and use their gardening knowledge to locate bizarre weeds wherever they might be. Of course, this means flying around the world in hot air balloons and attending to the laboratory at other times—critically important work that will need experts to take control!

The children willingly agree and immediately collaborate with each other and Ms Jackson to create the headquarters for the Royal Botanical Flying Scouts. The play corner is converted to become a socio-dramatic play space that includes a hot air balloon and a botanist's laboratory. This space is very engaging for the children and offers rich opportunities for adventures, with the hot air balloon (a large fridge box) being fitted out with telescopes, binoculars, note pads, safety helmets, mobile phones, plant samples, watering cans, magnifying glasses and plant classification charts. The laboratory includes a similar range of 'important' scientific equipment, including materials the children have made themselves from recycled and found materials, as well as real plant and weed samples that need to be watered and examined, computers (real as well as no-longer-working ones), maps, notebooks, drawings, charts, pots, plants, more mobile phones and of course, plenty of non-fiction texts about plants and weeds. The props in the play area are objects that facilitate connections across and between diverse curriculum areas. The children count, sort, classify and categorise; they read, write, make marks and lists; and they discuss and collaborate to plan and realise ideas in their roles as flying scouts.

The laboratory and the balloon play contexts, together with investigations and some focused learning experiences, excite the children and drive much of their learning for an extended period of time. However, one loose end remains to be tied up: Mrs McGinty is apparently refusing to hand over her bizarre plant. She believes that it is the source of her newfound popularity and fears that once it is gone, she will be lonely again. To explore this dimension of the narrative, Ms Jackson once again adopts a role—this time as Mrs McGinty. With a simple pair of gloves and a handbag, Ms Jackson portrays the old woman's concerns with love and care. The children, in role as the botanists, explain to her the differences between plants and weeds, drawing on the knowledge gained through their dramatic play, investigations and focused learning experiences to provide strong arguments for removing the plant. She is unsure, but eventually agrees, based on a proposal put forward by one of the children, that a dog might help her to overcome her loneliness.

Sample pages

Dunn, J. & Stinson, M. (2012). Dramatic play and the drama in the early years: Re-imagining the approach. In Susan Wright (Ed.), *Children, meaning-making and the arts* (2nd ed., pp. 115–134). Melbourne, VIC: Pearson Australia.

Emerging principles

The previous case study provides an example of how opportunities for rich, open-ended and highly imaginative drama experiences can be generated when a combination of dramatic play, adult-structured drama and the re-imagining of narrative texts is used. It highlights a process that saw the teacher and children resist the constraints of the original story ending to find new and imaginative ways to investigate plants and weeds—ways that gave the children permission to be playful, dramatic and scientific learners. Here the teacher harnessed the children's existing interest in their garden project, their natural application of play as a vehicle for learning, the inherent possibilities within the original picture book (including its quirky characters, intriguing situation and the rich visual images created through its illustrations) and the key dramatic strategy of teacher-in-role, to create rich dramatic play and focused learning sequences.

What is of special interest to us here, as well, is the high level of dramatic understanding demonstrated by the teacher. She was able to identify and apply key elements of drama to enhance the play and resulting learning. For example, her selection of roles for herself and the children enhanced engagement and the generative possibilities of the play. In addition, the *vital* input of the complicating tension, when Mrs McGinty revealed that she was reluctant to relinquish her plant in case she became unpopular, also allowed for deeper affective engagement and significant emotional learning. It is through deliberate, skilful and thoughtful interventions such as these that we can recognise the teacher as an accomplished arts educator and fine dramatist.

We suggest, then, that drama learning in the early years is most effective when it is underpinned by the following set of principles—overarching principles that can be used to effectively support children to experience drama and play across a range of early years settings. In the section that follows, three principles will be examined in turn:

1. Through positive, sensitive and skilled teacher involvement that is informed by a basic understanding of dramatic elements and structures, adults can enhance, extend and develop children's learning in, about and through drama.
2. Drama and dramatic play experiences should be built on the children's interests, but not narrowly confined by them.
3. Children should be active co-constructors of drama and dramatic play experiences at all stages.

Principle 1: Through positive, sensitive and skilled teacher involvement that is informed by a basic understanding of dramatic elements and structures, adults can enhance, extend and develop children's learning in, about and through drama.

From the outset, it should be noted that, within this principle, the term 'involvement' is *not* a synonym for interruption! Interruptions, or disruptions, have a negative impact on dramatic play activity and often occur when teachers spot 'teachable moments' and, with the best of intentions, interrupt play to interact with the children about a concept or idea external to the dramatic world the children have created. Characteristically, the interrupting teacher cuts into children's spontaneous play in order to teach a concept that may have emerged (e.g. noting that the children have created a train, and stopping the play to teach them a song about a train). Vandenberg (1998) is particularly critical of this type of behaviour, claiming that this 'incidental' teaching devalues

Sample pages

Dunn, J. & Stinson, M. (2012). Dramatic play and the drama in the early years: Re-imagining the approach. In Susan Wright (Ed.), *Children, meaning-making and the arts* (2nd ed., pp. 115–134). Melbourne, VIC: Pearson Australia.

the play text. Heaslip (1994) addresses this issue as well, and suggests that some teachers are so intent on this form of teaching that they intervene in children's play without even bothering to observe what it is the children are playing in the first instance.

A clear example of this notion of 'incidental' teaching is outlined by Heaslip (1994), who describes a situation where a teacher took the opportunity to teach a pair of preschool children about the concept of taller and smaller just as they were about to dive a submarine they had constructed from blocks. The link between the concept to be taught and the play being enacted is an extremely tenuous one, obviously present in the mind of the adult, but almost certainly not in the minds of the children. The end result is therefore predictable: the two children involved walk away from their play, their submarine abandoned. The teacher's intervention has destroyed the illusion of realness (Dunn, 2002) that the children had so carefully co-constructed, with the result being that the play experience they were generating was rendered useless. As Rogers and Evans (2007, p. 163) point out, play benefits most from those forms of adult involvement that 'extend and rejuvenate rather than constrain and frustrate', so the goal must always be to keep adult involvement positive and targeted at those students who are struggling rather than being seen as a blanket requirement for all children.

However, as noted earlier, an increasing number of children are struggling to create what Elkonin (2005) has described as mature play, and even fewer are experienced and intuitive enough to be given the label 'master dramatists' (Creaser, 1989). As such, adult support of various types and at various stages is likely to be required if dramatic play is to continue to be seen as a viable learning medium in early years contexts.

For some children, this support may be needed to assist them in identifying contexts for play, while others may look to adults to support them in the construction of the physical space itself—to understand how to use open-ended materials to represent their ideas. Others, particularly those children who have had limited play opportunities in their homes, may need to have play modelled for them by playing with an adult who not only understands the unwritten rules of play, but also understands how to inject dramatic tension into play in order to keep it moving. For some, it might be a case of needing support to generate a shared understanding of the context being played out by the other children—understanding that is lacking because of limited real life experience, while there may be children who require support in all of these areas.

However, no matter when support is needed, it will be more effective if it is underpinned by an understanding of dramatic elements and structures. When children play dramatically they are essentially engaged in the creation of dramatic texts. Working collaboratively, players build upon each other's ideas to generate shared dramatic worlds. These worlds are made possible through the management of the elements of drama including tension, symbol, role, place and language. In most cases, these elements are selected and combined by players in intuitive ways with little overt understanding of why one play experience has been more enjoyable than another. As we signalled earlier, if teachers are going to be able to support children in the development of dramatic worlds, an explicit understanding of drama and its elements is needed. In the same way that it might be expected that all early years teachers are able to mix paint to achieve specific colours, it seems reasonable that these same teachers are able to support dramatic play through an understanding of elements such as role and tension. Later in this chapter, these elements will be examined in more detail.

Sample pages

Dunn, J. & Stinson, M. (2012). Dramatic play and the drama in the early years: Re-imagining the approach. In Susan Wright (Ed.), *Children, meaning-making and the arts* (2nd ed., pp. 115–134). Melbourne, VIC: Pearson Australia.

Principle 2: Drama and dramatic play experiences should be built on the children's interests, but not narrowly confined by them.

One well-known mantra of early childhood education is to start from where the child is at: to develop learning based on children's existing interests and to build upon topics in which they are already showing an interest. However, while this approach might be successfully applied in learning contexts where children have a rich repertoire of experiences to draw from, the same cannot be said for children who have had limited experiences or whose horizons have been limited by social or economic disadvantage. For these children, play experiences can become as narrow and dull as the lives they are forced to lead. Teachers, therefore, have a key role to play in extending, developing, deepening and enriching children's lives and, as a result, their opportunities to explore and investigate their understanding of their lives through play, broadening children's interests and not being limited by them.

One way to achieve enrichment is to arrange excursions and field trips, including theatre visits; however, these events can be time consuming and may also be costly, so other opportunities are needed. A viable alternative is to build the shared understanding needed for rich and shared play experiences through adult-facilitated drama. Booth (1994, p. 22) believes that drama allows children to 'leave the narrow confines of their worlds, giving them entry into new forms of existence', and indeed this is clearly evident within the case study above. Here drama strategies, including teacher-in-role, were used to create a shared understanding of a play context that would never be experienced by children in the real world. Bizarre plants and flying botanists are not part of children's everyday experience, and yet these strange ideas became the raw materials for the children as they played.

These ideas did not, however, originate solely with the teacher or the students, but were developed out of a high-quality picture book. The exciting written text of the author, coupled with the engaging illustrations, provided the teacher and her students with the resources needed to generate the play and drama. High-quality texts such as these can be invaluable in generating play, for the various places, roles and situations suggested within them generate ideas that would not have been imagined without them. Of course, individual children will bring to the play situation their own unique interpretations, ideas, experiences and responses, and these different perspectives will result in play episodes that, to the outsider, may not appear to have much in common with the narrative that has informed it. However, this is how it should be, for adult input should never be designed to limit or confine children's experiences but, rather, be used to enrich, extend and bring variety to the possible dramatic worlds that are created. Practices that are reproductive of existing narratives should, therefore, be avoided in favour of those that allow children to re-imagine ideas contained within texts and other source materials.

This approach is evident in the case study above, for the teacher, by intervening in a sensitive and dramatically informed manner, was able to create an environment that gave the children the chance to engage with play experiences that they would be unlikely to have without adult involvement. They were able to experience the thrill of flying in a hot air balloon, become botanists and even meet Mrs McGinty. From a curriculum perspective, they also extended their vocabularies, developed scientific understanding about the importance of eradicating weeds and, perhaps most importantly, were given the chance to help an old woman overcome her loneliness and sense of isolation. These outcomes would not have been available to them had the teacher allowed the learning to be confined and governed entirely by the plot of the book and the children's existing interests.

Sample pages

Dunn, J. & Stinson, M. (2012). Dramatic play and the drama in the early years: Re-imagining the approach. In Susan Wright (Ed.), *Children, meaning-making and the arts* (2nd ed., pp. 115–134). Melbourne, VIC: Pearson Australia.

Principle 3: Children should be active co-constructors of drama and dramatic play experiences at all stages.

Principle 3 is an important one for it reminds us that, in spite of the considerably extended role for adults within this model of scaffolded and supported drama and play, it is essential to keep in mind that children should maintain control over key aspects of their experiences. For example, the children need to be directly involved in the creation of play spaces, including the construction of props. Symbolism is an important aspect of dramatic activity and, as such, play spaces that are overly reliant on realistic materials are problematic.

Similarly, spaces constructed by teachers *for* children are also of limited value. In the case study above, the children worked collaboratively with their teacher and peers to create a play space. They became co-constructors of a shared dramatic world, manipulating a range of materials to represent the components that might make up this world. They have not arrived at school or their early years setting to discover a world created for them by an adult; rather, they have been active co-constructors of that world. Indeed, for some children the construction of the dramatic world may be more important than the play itself, and having the opportunity to realise their ideas through design and construction is therefore a critical component of their learning journey.

Co-construction of dramatic worlds is not, however, limited to the physical space. Children also need to be co-constructors of the action itself, creating roles and situations to explore. Inevitably, some children will struggle with this aspect and the support of the teacher as co-player will be required. Others will revel in the opportunity, developing rich and engaging ideas for others to share. For these children, teacher support will be less vital and, indeed, it will be these dramatically-able children's intuitive understanding of the elements of drama that will be responsible for achieving successful play outcomes for their peers. The teacher's job in this situation then is to hold back, to limit his/her input and empower these players to take their ideas in any direction they choose. At times, these directions will be entirely different from those in which the teacher may have originally intended the play and drama work to travel, but that is the nature of play, and one of its great strengths. Trying to control the content of play is like trying to hold back the tide—and equally inappropriate!

Sample pages

Dramatic understanding

As noted in principle 1, adult involvement in dramatic play and adult facilitation of drama work in early years settings needs to be underpinned by a basic understanding of the art form of drama, its various approaches and elements. In the section below, key aspects of this art form will be outlined.

TENSION

Tension is arguably the most important element of drama and is most easily understood as the 'What's up?' factor. If nothing is happening within play or drama experiences and the children are simply enacting, in a repetitive manner, the roles and situations they have seen adults or other children engage in within everyday life, then most often it is because there is an absence of tension. In most of these cases play will cease, with the players choosing to move into other activities that are more engaging. A lack of tension may also be the reason why play becomes overly boisterous. Like a boring film that fails to involve its audience, play without tension is never

Dunn, J. & Stinson, M. (2012). Dramatic play and the drama in the early years: Re-imagining the approach. In Susan Wright (Ed.), *Children, meaning-making and the arts* (2nd ed., pp. 115–134). Melbourne, VIC: Pearson Australia.

likely to keep children participating or collaborating for long. Tension provides the purpose, the drive to understand or resolve.

There are a number of types of tension most commonly included by children within their play and these include the tensions of mystery, surprise, task and relationships. Young children generally employ the tensions of task and relationships, with surprise sometimes being a component of these. For example, children playing Santa's workshop might use the tension of surprise to introduce the idea that Christmas has been moved forward, or that Santa is missing or even that the elves have gone on strike! But this surprise has generally been offered in order to generate another tension—tension of the task—because the absence of Santa or the strike by the elves will mean that the children themselves must take urgent action. It is this action that will drive the play text forward.

Similarly, two children playing in home corner may apply the tension of relationships to propel their play about a mother and her child. Here the mother may be very bossy, giving her child lots of instructions that need to be followed, while in other domestic situations, a pet may also be given lots of 'tasks' to complete.

Of course, these tensions are also present in narrative texts such as children's stories, films and television programs, and part of the value of dramatic play is that it provides children with the opportunity to understand and enact these tensions. To support this process, the explicit discussion of tension is needed, with children being encouraged to identify how they used the 'What's up?' factor in their play or to suggest what might have been 'up' in a film or television show they have just viewed. This type of narrative analysis is crucial to the development of children's narrative competence (Bruner, 1986), with such discussion providing opportunities to build narrative comprehension skills which, in turn, will enhance children's narrative production skills during dramatic play (Baumer, Ferholt, & Lecusay, 2005).

There were two key moments of tension that offered potential for generating quality dramatic play in our version of Mrs McGinty. The first was when the scientists were given the task of identifying weeds that may harm the environment; and the second was when Mrs McGinty refused to hand over her plant in fear that she would lose her newfound popularity and friends.

Teachers, therefore, need to develop an understanding of how tension operates in dramatic contexts, and learn how to use it to support dramatic learning. By adopting the co-player role and spontaneously entering the action to inject a specific form of tension, or by involving the children in an adult-structured drama that has been designed to include, for example, the tension of mystery, the teacher is supporting children's learning in drama and simultaneously, their narrative competence.

Sample pages

ROLE

Role is the other key element of drama that adults need to understand in order to support and extend children's dramatic activity, particularly if they see direct involvement within dramatic worlds as part of their responsibility as arts educators. In this section, adult role-taking in children's dramatic activities will be discussed, including those times when the adult becomes co-player in children's play, as well as the more sophisticated uses made of role when working in more structured drama contexts.

CO-PLAYER

Within much of the literature relating to dramatic play, the biggest decision for the adult as co-player would appear to be whether to become involved in the play or not. However, once an

Dunn, J. & Stinson, M. (2012). Dramatic play and the drama in the early years: Re-imagining the approach. In Susan Wright (Ed.), *Children, meaning-making and the arts* (2nd ed., pp. 115–134). Melbourne, VIC: Pearson Australia.

adult has decided to join in the play, there are far more crucial decisions that need to be made, many of which relate to role. These include which playwright function to adopt, which role to choose, the status of that role and the duration of involvement.

The first step, and often the most difficult one for many teachers, is to avoid the natural tendency to use the co-player role as an opportunity to 'teach'. Instead, adults who opt to enter a play text as a co-player need to think about how their involvement might best support the children to extend or develop their play, trusting the play experience to provide the learning. The next is to have some understanding of how their use of the various playwright functions (Dunn, 2002) might impact on the emerging play. O'Neill (1995) has suggested that in any improvised form of drama, someone is always operating as the 'playwright' and is, therefore, in charge of the playwright function. These functions influence the play in different ways.

The intervening function tends to be the one most favoured by teachers, for this function is aimed at changing the direction of a play experience by introducing a new idea or set of circumstances. Here an adult may enter a shoe shop play space and demand that she be sold a pair of shoes with wings on them so that she can fly! This demand will clearly have an immediate and very strong impact on the children's play and may provide the children with a set of new ideas that are desperately needed to rejuvenate the play. Indeed, this type of co-player offering is certain to send the play in new directions and will generate a great deal of excitement and frantic activity. However, an offering such as this one tends to reinforce the teacher's position in the classroom context as dominant and, if continuously applied, the intervening playwright function may make the children reliant on their teacher for ideas to drive play forward.

By contrast, when using the reinforcing playwright function, the teacher's role as co-player is to support an idea offered by another player, usually a child who is struggling to have his/her rich ideas accepted. In the shoe shop context above, for instance, the teacher would first listen to the good ideas being contributed by the children themselves and then follow up on one of these by offering a reinforcing comment in role. For example, the teacher may have overheard a child suggesting that she would like a pair of shoes for her baby, but may also note that this child's ideas are not being followed up or supported by the other players. In response, the teacher may enter the space and note that the baby looks like it needs new shoes and that some green ones would be nice if the shop has any.

Another function that might be adopted is that of the reviewing playwright. In this case the teacher may enter the shoe shop to ask reviewing questions such as: What do you sell here? What time do you close? Why do you sell high-heeled shoes? Even a very open-ended question can be suitable, such as 'What is going on here?' Such questions are not aimed at changing the direction of the children's play but, rather, at supporting the existing play by showing the participants that you value what they are doing and understand the dramatic world they have created. Like the narrative playwright function, where the adult simply supports the existing play by going along with the ideas generated by the children, the teacher here is using his/her co-player role to participate without leading or trying to generate new directions.

Of course, a key aspect of the use of any of the playwright functions is the role that goes with it and the means that are used to signal this role to the other players. For example, if the teacher as co-player enters the shop and chooses, as noted above, to simply ask, 'What do you sell here?', his/her co-players need to be supported to understand who it is that is asking this question. The question needs, therefore, to be preceded by some additional information, such as: 'I'm a lost visitor to this area and I'm not sure what you sell here.' Numerous roles in a supermarket play space may

Sample pages

Dunn, J. & Stinson, M. (2012). Dramatic play and the drama in the early years: Re-imagining the approach. In Susan Wright (Ed.), *Children, meaning-making and the arts* (2nd ed., pp. 115–134). Melbourne, VIC: Pearson Australia.

be adopted, with each of these having a potentially different impact on the play, such as that the role of a customer, a fellow shop assistant, the owner of the store, someone from the government doing a check on quality, someone who is lost or even a police officer. Depending on the situation, some of these roles will support the children's existing ideas, while others may divert them; but, either way, the teacher needs to be aware of the impact that these roles are having on the play, and to be sure to vary this impact. In addition, by choosing roles carefully, the teacher is able to introduce new roles for his/her child co-players—roles that the children may not have considered. For example, in the shoe shop context, by adopting the role of a fussy shopper, the teacher introduces the children to the idea that customers are sometimes very choosy about shoes, with the possible conversations between staff and customer being extended and enriched because of this attitude. In this way, the options open to the children are extended, with the new roles leading to different genres of language and different perspectives.

As well as the role itself, the adult must also decide on the status he/she will adopt, with a good rule of thumb being that low-status roles are more useful in early years contexts because the child is empowered by having a higher status than the teacher. Fortunately, any role can be played with a low status. Even the role of a king, which normally suggests power, can be low status if the teacher opts to play the king as muddled and confused. Similarly, a customer entering a supermarket may have a serious complaint to make about a product just purchased and may be highly demanding, or alternatively, the same customer's status may be lowered by being unable to locate a particular item or being unsure about how much money will be needed to purchase ingredients for a very important birthday cake.

Finally, adult co-players need to consider the duration of their time spent as co-players. Clearly there are no set rules about this but, generally speaking, it is useful to remain in the co-player role only long enough to ensure that the play has been supported and is once again viable. To remain in the play longer than is needed runs the risk that the children might come to rely too heavily on the adult or that the children might resent the changes made by the adult in role. An appropriate exit point must therefore be found, and for this reason the adult co-player needs to be constantly on the look-out for opportunities to disengage.

Sample pages

Teacher-in-role

As noted above, one way for the children to gain a shared understanding of an imagined, or indeed real-world, context is for the teacher to adopt a role. This strategy is most commonly called 'teacher-in-role' and is significantly different from the approach of teacher as co-player. The adoption of teacher-in-role requires planning and is driven by a set of purposes or specific curriculum intentions.

Within the case study above, the teacher-in-role strategy was used to introduce new ideas, model alternative roles, develop tensions, highlight relevant language and even model the use of symbolism. From within the action, the teacher challenged the group and outlined new information. Using the teacher-in-role strategy, Ms Jackson also transformed what was happening in the drama, using the role of Mrs McGinty to shift the theme from plants and weeds to that of friendship and popularity.

However, in spite of these valuable contributions and possibilities, there has always been a strong acknowledgment by drama educators of the need to strike a balance between the 'child's play' and the 'teacher's play' when structuring early years drama work (see, for example, Bolton, 1985; Heathcote, in Wagner, 1979). This acknowledgment highlights the tension between the teacher's

Dunn, J. & Stinson, M. (2012). Dramatic play and the drama in the early years: Re-imagining the approach. In Susan Wright (Ed.), *Children, meaning-making and the arts* (2nd ed., pp. 115–134). Melbourne, VIC: Pearson Australia.

purposes for doing drama and the child's desire for freedom in play, but the teacher-in-role strategy, when skilfully and sensitively applied, has a great deal to offer the early years learner.

For example, the teacher-in-role strategy provides opportunities for role-taking to be modelled, with the management of other key elements being part of this modelling process. Time, place, space and mood may all be influenced by the adult's involvement, and the language used within the play and drama sequences will also be affected. Here, it is the adult's use of specific vocabulary and the choice of register that is significant for children's learning. In addition, the adult-structured drama work can provide a means for making explicit links to picture books and other stimulus materials.

Stimulating play and drama through re-imagining texts

As we have seen above, one exciting way to extend and rejuvenate children's play is to draw upon the rich materials gifted to us by the creators of children's picture books, stories and films. The artistry inherent within high-quality materials can be a valuable means of supporting the creation of shared dramatic worlds. Their engaging narratives, rich visual imagery and intriguing characterisations have the capacity to develop children's imaginations, narrative comprehension skills and language development, while also providing springboards for new narrative directions through play and drama. Children can be exposed to worlds that are far removed from the ones in which they are living, with new ideas, places, people and languages being introduced.

However, choice is critical, with not all texts being suitable for play. Teachers need to identify materials that offer children engaging narratives, rich visual imagery and intriguing characterisations. Then, to be most effective in supporting children to create dynamic and open-ended drama opportunities, teachers need to re-imagine the possibilities inherent in these materials by stepping beyond the constraints of their existing plots, settings and characterisations. Finally, the teacher will need to identify approaches that introduce the children to these re-imagined ideas. In the following section, each of these steps will be examined in turn.

Sample pages

Step 1: Selecting the materials

The first step in the process of using narrative texts to support the creation of drama and play is to select appropriate materials. Often this step is driven by the children themselves as they bring to your attention narratives that have engaged and excited them. These narratives may be contained within the picture books on the shelves of your classroom or centre, or may evolve from films or television programs that the children have viewed. Small groups of children may spontaneously play out their responses to stories and you may determine that you can build on this or use this interest to include additional children. Appropriate materials may stem from the children's engagement during reading/story time, and a particular book or set of books may surface as being individually or collectively exciting to them.

However, at other times, as in the case study situation, you will need to locate narrative materials to extend or develop play that has been drawn from some other source. Here, the key skill required is an understanding of what will work and what won't in the context of play, because many materials, no matter how well written or produced, may simply not be suitable. This is because some key attributes are needed. For example, it is desirable that the narrative includes or at least implies a group of people. A story about a single character is more difficult to adapt for

Dunn, J. & Stinson, M. (2012). Dramatic play and the drama in the early years: Re-imagining the approach. In Susan Wright (Ed.), *Children, meaning-making and the arts* (2nd ed., pp. 115–134). Melbourne, VIC: Pearson Australia.

play than one that naturally includes a group (such as the people in the town where Mrs McGinty lived). In addition, play spaces tend to work best when they are occupationally driven—even if these occupations are fanciful, such as was noted in the case study above. This is because players need to have something to 'do', for, as we have already seen, tension of the task is a key tension within drama. Indeed, Elkonin (2005) claims that the role and the actions associated with them represent the basic unit of developed play.

Another important feature to look for is that the text leads you to wonder—to wonder about what might have happened before the story began, or after it concludes; to wonder about what might happen if the action of the story shifts to a different setting or if the setting remains constant but the characters change. You may also discover that you don't need to use a whole story and that just a small portion of it works better instead. Overly long stories, or films with multiple sub-plots, do not necessarily support play, as there are too many ideas to examine, which makes collaboration between children more difficult.

Remember, however, that if you have selected the story, you will need to gauge the children's interest in it before you continue with any further planning. If interest is low, then no matter how suitable this text might be for play, no amount of re-imagining is likely to spark interest. However, if interest is high, then the first step is to understand which aspects of the story were responsible for this and to be sure to maintain these components. Ask yourself whether it was predominantly the characters, the setting, the plot, the language or some other element that invited the children into the story world.

In the case study outlined at the outset of this chapter, it was a combination of the hot air balloon, the flying scientists and the bizarre plant that seemed to capture the children's interests and, as such, it was important that all of these aspects were maintained for play to flourish.

Step 2: Re-imagining the narrative

The second step is to begin the process of re-imagining the materials. This step may be completed by the teacher working alone, or may be done in collaboration with the children. Either way, it is a process that must begin by considering 'the five Ws' of the original text: What is happening, where is it happening, when is it happening, who is it happening to and what is at stake? (O'Toole & Dunn, 2002). The answers to these questions provide us with an overview of the narrative structure of the text, while also offering opportunities to revise and re-imagine one or more of the answers.

In Gavin Bishop's original story of *Mrs McGinty and the Bizarre Plant*, the five Ws can be understood as follows:

What is happening?	Mrs McGinty, a lonely old woman, has grown a bizarre plant. Some botanists arrive and ask her if they can have her plant. She agrees.
Who is it happening to?	Mrs McGinty, the people of her town, the Royal Flying Botanists.
Where is it happening?	Mrs McGinty's garden.
When is it happening?	Now (i.e. not the past or the future).
What is at stake?	Mrs McGinty's ownership of the plant and her potential loss of friends if she loses it.

Sample pages

Dunn, J. & Stinson, M. (2012). Dramatic play and the drama in the early years: Re-imagining the approach. In Susan Wright (Ed.), *Children, meaning-making and the arts* (2nd ed., pp. 115–134). Melbourne, VIC: Pearson Australia.

To adapt this text for play and also to align it with the original interest that the children showed in their garden and its weeds, the teacher in the case study above needed to re-imagine some aspects of the story. Here, the teacher worked on her own (without the direct involvement of the children) and determined that, while no changes were needed to the who, where or when of the story, some minor changes to the what and what's at stake would provide not only the link to the children's interests, but would also generate the tension needed to drive both drama and play. As such, the teacher decided to present the bizarre plant as a weed that is a threat to the neighbourhood and needs to be removed. In doing this, she also decided that, rather than willingly handing over the plant, in the re-imagined version Mrs McGinty would refuse to comply, fearing that her newfound popularity would be lost. These two decisions are inspired because not only do they set up opportunities for the children to take the role of botanists investigating the difference between plants and weeds, but they also have the potential to create both tension of the task and tension of relationships—two key tensions needed to drive the children's play forward.

Step 3: Introducing the re-imagined ideas to the group

A teacher who completes a re-imagining process, without the children's input, must determine how the new ideas will be conveyed to the children so that a shared understanding can be achieved. Indeed, even if the children themselves have been involved in the process, some additional scaffolding and planning may be needed. In this case study, the teacher-in-role strategy was used, with the teacher initially adopting the role of the Captain of the Royal Botanical Flying Scouts and, later, that of Mrs McGinty herself, in order to outline and engage the children with the re-imagined aspects of the text. These roles also serve to provide models for the children's role-taking and a shared vocabulary for use within the play.

The first of these roles, the Captain of the Royal Botanical Flying Scouts, supported the collaborative process of creating the hot air balloon and botany laboratory. It also provided the children with useful register (i.e. tone of language) and vocabulary models. Here the teacher as chief botanist was able to introduce a whole range of ideas, including critical ones relating to the everyday work of botanists and more particularly, the fictitious balloon journeys of the flying scouts as they search from the air for weeds capable of doing damage.

By contrast, the second role (Mrs McGinty) had an entirely different purpose, being more related to the teacher's goals than the children's. It was employed to provide opportunities for the children to express their understanding of the difference between weeds and plants, as well as to give the experience a human dimension.

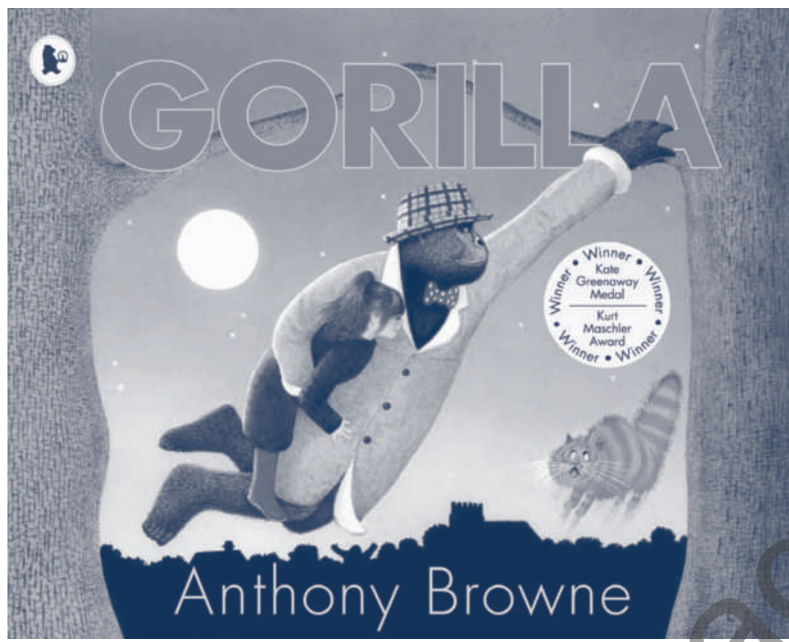
Sample pages

Applying these steps to another text

In order to better appreciate these steps and the principles themselves, it is useful to see how these might work within the context of another narrative text: the picture book *Gorilla* by Anthony Browne (2000). Below is an outlining of the five Ws of the original story.

What's happening?	Hannah is fascinated by gorillas and longs to go to the zoo to see one. Her father promises to take her but is always too busy. One night the toy gorilla in her room comes to life and takes her on a grand adventure, including a visit to the zoo and the cinema.

Dunn, J. & Stinson, M. (2012). Dramatic play and the drama in the early years: Re-imagining the approach. In Susan Wright (Ed.), *Children, meaning-making and the arts* (2nd ed., pp. 115–134). Melbourne, VIC: Pearson Australia.



Gorilla *by Anthony Browne*

Source: Copyright © 1983 Anthony Browne. From Gorilla *by Anthony Browne. Reproduced by permission of Walker Books Australia on behalf of Walker Books Ltd, London SE11 5HJ.*

Sample pages

Who is it happening to?	Hannah, her father and her toy gorilla.
When is it happening?	Now.
Where is it happening?	At Hannah's house, the zoo, the cinema.
What's at stake?	Hannah's happiness.

Interestingly, this structure appears to sit outside at least two of the guidelines for the selection of texts outlined above: it does not include or imply a group of people and it does not obviously relate to an occupation of any kind. However, its rich visuals and intriguing characters are able to capture children's attention, and it clearly offers opportunities for its readers to wonder.

In terms of the steps above, then, discussions with the children may determine that what most engaged them within the original story was the notion that toys might come to life. In this case, it would be essential for the teacher to ensure that within the re-imagined version, this aspect is maintained and becomes central to the developing play. Alternatively, the children may suggest that what excited them most about the story was the visit to the zoo, and the chance to be guided on such a visit by one of the animals themselves. Popular culture films may fuel this kind of response, such as *Madagascar*, where the animals in the New York City Zoo are humanised and plan an escape. In this case, the play opportunities collaboratively planned by the teacher and children may inspire the children to create a zoo, complete with zookeepers, ticket collectors, veterinarians, zoo visitors and a range of interesting animals.

In both scenarios, play responses drawn from this narrative text might be generated by re-imagining the 'What's happening?' dimension of the five Ws, with these changes inevitably altering one or more of the 'What's at stake?' , 'Who?' , 'When?' and 'Where?' ones as well. For example, if the children are mostly excited by the idea of toys in their bedroom coming to life, then a shift in the 'Where?' and 'When?' might see the focus move to a drama about the *next* night when even more toys come to life. Alternatively, the zoo-based focus might result in a play experience

Dunn, J. & Stinson, M. (2012). Dramatic play and the drama in the early years: Re-imagining the approach. In Susan Wright (Ed.), *Children, meaning-making and the arts* (2nd ed., pp. 115–134). Melbourne, VIC: Pearson Australia.

where it is the 'Who?' aspect that has been manipulated, with the gorilla himself taking the children on a visit to the zoo.

In the first example, that of the toys coming to life, support from drama strategies such as teacher-in-role may not be necessary, for the re-imagining discussion is likely, by itself, to generate a great deal of excitement and ideas for play revolving around a bedroom full of toys that come to life. In addition, this idea requires little scaffolding or support in order to achieve a shared understanding—the type of play most likely to emerge would be projected play rather than embodied personal play. Slade (1958, p. 3) was the first to use these two terms, suggesting that personal play is 'obvious drama; the whole person or self is used', while projected play is 'drama in which the whole mind is used, but the body is not used so fully'. In this case, the children may be engaged in play that is focused on manipulating the toys to enact their ideas.

This re-imagined narrative also offers the teacher opportunities to extend the children's learning and engagement by encouraging the use of digital media to capture and record their projected play ideas (see for example the images below). Further narrative development is made possible as the children informally share their images and play ideas with each other, either in hard copy format or through the use of a digital whiteboard. New story ideas will emerge through this process, with the children potentially drawing from a bank of toy images created by their peers.

By contrast, the re-imagined story involving a visit to the zoo accompanied by an animal host (the gorilla) would most likely need to be supported through the use of drama strategies, including teacher-in-role. The teacher might adopt the role of the chief zookeeper who is worried that each

Sample pages

Hannah's toys come to life

Dunn, J. & Stinson, M. (2012). Dramatic play and the drama in the early years: Re-imagining the approach. In Susan Wright (Ed.), *Children, meaning-making and the arts* (2nd ed., pp. 115–134). Melbourne, VIC: Pearson Australia.

evening it appears that different animals are escaping and that children have entered the zoo after it has been closed. In this case, the children may opt to explore this newly shared idea by creating a zoo play space, with each one contributing toys from home to create the zoo itself. Either way, new play ideas will have been created and the children's interest in the original story would be extended and developed through play.

Documenting the learning

Documenting learning and assessing student progress are certainly challenges for the early childhood teacher. In the imaginative and practical work described above, this may seem an especially complicated task given the dynamic and ephemeral nature of play and drama. However, documentation of individual children's progress my be achieved relatively easily if the teacher is clear about specific aspects of learning in drama *and* has clearly articulated criteria to assist in making judgments about the learning.

In the case study at the beginning of this chapter, observation would probably be the most effective approach to assessment, possibly coupled with some focused analysis made possible through video-recording of play sessions. However, a word of caution in relation to video is needed, as children's play and drama can be negatively impacted if the use of the camera is too overt. In addition, a teacher's life is busy enough without having to spend hours poring over video footage of the day's learning in order to understand and evaluate children's participation and progress. For this reason, records such as checklists and observation notes are a useful alternative.

Within the context of learning in, about and through dramatic play, the teacher may seek to identify if children are able to:

- adopt a role that aligns with the current play space
- play and accept a range of roles that accord with different contexts
- choose or create clothing or objects to signal those roles
- co-operate with peers in the development of existing narrative directions, or
- (for the more capable players) create new narrative directions that are rich in possibilities.

For the teacher-structured portions of the work, different criteria would be needed, with the checklist or observations instead seeking to determine if individuals are able to:

- accept the teacher's role
- interact in conversations with teacher and peers while in role, and
- listen attentively and take turns within whole-group role-play situations.

Documentation of student progress can be recorded in checklists or observational notes, as mentioned above, but may also include photographs taken by teachers/supervisors in the normal course of the day. Children may also draw or paint themselves and their peers playing or in role, and these reflective and self-generated artworks can provide useful additional documentation. Cameras controlled by the children themselves also provide opportunities for document–ation, and the images and sequences gathered will offer the teacher rich and intriguing insights that would not be possible had an adult been managing the filming process.

Sample pages

Dunn, J. & Stinson, M. (2012). Dramatic play and the drama in the early years: Re-imagining the approach. In Susan Wright (Ed.), *Children, meaning-making and the arts* (2nd ed., pp. 115–134). Melbourne, VIC: Pearson Australia.

Conclusion

Like water on a trampoline that can be sent in an almost endless number of directions as the result of one short, sharp bounce, the adult involved in children's dramatic learning can, with sensitive and artistic engagement, create opportunities that diversify and enrich children's learning. Without the jump (the adult involvement), the water may stagnate or evaporate. Knowing *when* and *how* to bounce is, however, crucial.

In this chapter we have outlined a set of principles that adults working with children might consider in order to provide opportunities for children to become creators of dramatic action. These principles highlight the importance of adult involvement in children's dramatic learning, with a foundational understanding of drama itself being deemed to be critical. Underpinning this involvement should be an understanding of drama as an art form, combined with knowledge of the steps required to both generate and support play and drama experiences. Aim to build drama and dramatic play experiences on the children's interests, while not allowing yourself to be too narrowly confined by these interests. Also, strive to ensure that, at all stages in the work, the children themselves maintain their position as active co-constructors of drama and dramatic play experiences.

The potential role that narrative can play in children's dramatic lives will involve the re-imagining of existing texts. This re-imagining process not only generates rich opportunities for play, but also builds children's narrative competence. By analysing narratives and exploring alternative versions of them, children's narrative comprehension skills can be developed. Then, as play texts are spontaneously developed, the narrative production skills that are generated will provide an exciting learning journey for all participants—the children as well as the teacher.

Sample pages

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Consider the types of roles that you adopt as a co-player within children's dramatic play. What status do you normally adopt? Which of the playwright functions do you apply? How does your involvement support the children? How could your involvement be enhanced?
2. Identify a picture book, film or story that you have used with children or that you think might engage children. What are its existing five Ws? How might these five Ws be re-imagined in order to make this story more appropriate as the basis for dramatic play or drama? What role or roles might be needed to create a shared understanding of the new ideas?
3. Consider how you might record and document student learning. Devise three recording instruments that you can keep in individual student portfolios.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Hall, N. & Robinson, A. (2003). *Exploring writing and play in the early years* (2nd ed.). London, UK: David Fulton.

Johnson, J., Christie, J. & Wardle, F. (2005). *Play, development and early education*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Marsh, J. & Hallett, E. (Eds.) (2008). *Desirable literacies—Approaches to language and literacy in the early years* (2nd ed.). London, UK: Sage.

O'Toole, J. & Dunn, J. (2001). *Pretending to learn*: *Helping children learn through drama.* Frenchs Forest, NSW: Pearson Education.

Dunn, J. & Stinson, M. (2012). Dramatic play and the drama in the early years: Re-imagining the approach. In Susan Wright (Ed.), *Children, meaning-making and the arts* (2nd ed., pp. 115–134). Melbourne, VIC: Pearson Australia.