



snap-tute

essays: building confidence
your four-part guide to essay writing

THE PERFECT DRAMA CLASS



OVERVIEW

Across more than 30 years of running drama classes we have had plenty of time to experiment and learn about what works, and why. Let us save you some time and some angst. Learn these few simple principles and you will quickly be able to run drama classes that last 30 minutes to 2 hours; classes for as few as six people, through to groups of 30 or 40. Manage children as young as six through to adults into their 40s, 50s and older.

LESSON MATERIAL

There is a clear structure that always works.

This cannot be stressed enough. Ignore it at your peril. Test alternatives if you wish. Elsewhere we can unpack just why this approach is so successful, but first, let's look at it. Firstly, the rationale, then two example lesson plans to demonstrate.

A FIVE-STEP STRUCTURE

1. Start of Lesson – two games to energise and build the group.

No matter the length of the class, start with two games. The first always, always starts with the whole group assembled in a circle in the centre of the space. If the class is short – say 30 minutes – these games should combine for a maximum of 10 minutes. Longer classes give you more leeway – but don't overdo it. Students of any age need to learn quickly that your drama classes are not "fillers". That there is as much value and growth in them as any other discipline.

Usually, the first game should be simple to explain and master, there are no winners, no-one goes 'out', and everyone is involved for the whole game. Often best to make this game high energy. As teacher/facilitator, you always try to join in this first game.

The second game should be a little more demanding in some way. It may require more autonomy and risk-taking on the part of individuals. This game should have plenty of energy

but might be of a more controlled and 'in bursts' type. Teacher/facilitator may participate or stand back as a guide and adjudicator.

2. Exercises in pairs, 3s or 4s to build trust and a skill-set.

You divide up the group randomly. *Never* ever allow students to arrange their own groups. Demonstrate a simple activity or challenge and invite them to have a go. Wander around watching, approving, correcting, etc. Where you spot a group doing an excellent job, you can pause the class and invite everyone to watch. Then back to their own attempts.

Follow with a second exercise. It may be an extension of the first, or have a different focus.

Importantly, these exercises are exploratory, have no definitive end-point, and have no audience. Everyone is doing.

3. Preparation of a short performance.

The principle is simple. The variety of ways you fulfil this will depend on all the usual parameters. How old, how many, how experienced, how much time, etc. But even with a young, inexperienced group, the idea of rehearsing something, preparing it to show the group, having that experience of getting up in front of others, and the experience of watching others get up in front of you should become a standard part of your classes.

You set up the task, sending off groups as soon as you have handed them any scripts or other items. You have a clear idea of the amount of time you can allow them to rehearse and workshop. Wander around and encourage, answer their questions, and call out time as a kind of countdown. Finally, you will be clapping your hands and shouting, "Two minutes folks. Make sure that you have a run-through. You're presenting to the class in two minutes."

4. Presentation of short performances.

You must estimate the time you will need for each group to present, plus time for a little commentary from you. If you have five groups to present what you expect to be up to a minute of performance each, gather them all for performance with at least 10 minutes of the class time left. Sounds simple but teachers often misjudge this.

Teacher/facilitator *always* selects who presents first. Ask and ensure that everyone watches each other's performances respectfully and as an audience.

5. Closure.

This can take as little as a minute, and as long as ten minutes. Many factors affect this. Generally, with a young group, with an inexperienced group, you want to keep talking to the group to a minimum. Initially, drama classes need to feel alive with action and fun. Over time, you will build their interest in and willingness to listen and talk about stuff.

That's it. That is the structure which will work for you under any circumstances. Now let's look at two sample lesson plans.

SAMPLE LESSON – BEGINNER GROUP, EARLY IN THE YEAR

1. Start of Lesson – two games to energise and build the group.

Game 1: name calling throwing a ball of socks.

In a standing circle, a student looks at and calls the name of another student. When that student makes eye contact, he/she throws the sock-ball to the named student. Now this student repeats. If they get the hang of this quickly, teacher adds a second ball (and a third, even a fourth). With more than one ball, there is more need for concentration and attention. Teacher is playing and encouraging. Side-coach them to throw **ONLY** when they see eye contact. Once there are several balls in play, this becomes critical. Judge when the game has served to focus the group and include everybody. A great game early in a new year or with a new group. They learn each other's names in a non-threatening way. Say, "We need you to call out the name loud and clear. There are people in the group like me who are just learning everyone's name. Please help us."

Game 2: Piggy in the Middle [seat swapping]

Before the lesson started, you should have placed a ring of chairs in a large circle. As the class arrives, you ask them to stand inside that defined space. So your first game is played standing. Now you ask them to each grab a chair and pull it in a bit to make a tight circle. Teacher can play (recommended especially with a newer group) or step out of the circle to watch and facilitate.

When everyone is seated, you choose one student to stand in the middle of the circle. You then grab and remove their chair and ask the group to tighten up again.

Explain that when you say go, those seated are free to risk swapping seats with another player, while the student in the middle tries to race to a vacated seat, thus leaving a new student stranded and we are set to repeat.

Side-coach the group to work in silence (some groups find this impossible). The seat swaps are meant to be in pairs, but a natural level of confusion and funny mistakes is pretty

common. It is energetic and fun, but should not descend into absolute chaos. As teacher, with an overexcited or inexperienced group, you may need to reset or re-emphasise certain details.

You can add complexity to the game after a few minutes by announcing, “okay, from now on, you are NOT allowed to swap with a person sitting next to you.” This increases the risk taking and the ease for the piggy to steal a seat.

2. Exercises in pairs, 3s or 4s to build trust and a skill-set.

Exercise 1: balance in pairs.

Quickly and randomly (or seemingly randomly – you may have reasons for wanting or avoiding certain pairs) throw the group into pairs. Chairs need to be cleared to the edges of the space. Ask students to take a chair each as they move away into some space.

If there is an even number, grab a pair and demonstrate. If there is an odd number, grab a taller, more confident student and demonstrate with him/her.

A pair stand facing each other, about two steps apart. They hold up their palms facing each other. When they agree, they fall towards each other, meeting in the middle, backs straight, and balancing. Each is supporting the other.

Bring attention to the fact that they are balanced. They could potentially stay like this for an hour. Note straight backs, no bending forwards from the hips. And make the point that it does not matter if one is taller or heavier. There will always be a point where they can meet and balance.

The challenge for the class: try this, and after each successful balance, both of you take a small step back. See how far away from each other you can begin and meet successfully to balance in the middle.

Give a few minutes for them to explore. If you are free, wander around, encourage, correct. Even stop the class for a moment to invite them to see a group doing really well.

If you have the time and the right group, you can stop this after 2 minutes and explain that you now want them to go right back to the first balance, two steps apart, but this time, one of the pair must do the whole sequence eyes closed. This is big on trust and clear communication. And fun!

Exercise 2: Talking Pairs – childhood memory.

Stay in their balance pairs. Ask them to sit on the floor (or grab chairs for adults). Tell them a quick anecdote from your childhood. A time when you broke a bone or injured yourself, or got lost in a store, or some other amusing misadventure. Keep it to a minute. But be descriptive, bring the story to life a little. Ask them to think of a time when they were young,

when they broke a bone or injured themselves; a time when they were very scared, or a time when they got into big trouble for something naughty. Explain that you are going to give them exactly a minute each to tell their partner their story. You'll call start, wind it up, and change over.

After two minutes, depending on the class, available time, size of group, etc. you can either get a couple of people to share their partner's story with the class, or come together as a whole group and ask each student to tell us their partner's story.

3. Preparation of a short performance.

With the group gathered together, explain that you are giving out short scripts. In this example, you throw together groups of 3s and if necessary for the numbers, one or two groups of 4.

Each group gets the same script. (this is useful sometimes, but in other classes it works better for each group to get a unique script).

Here is the script:

A: Hey, what are you two doing?

B: Nothing.

A: What do you mean, nothing?

C: We're not doing anything.

A: I can see what you're doing. Give me that.

B: No. You can't make us.

A: Now!

[they run off]

A: Hey!

Have them printed up and cut or ready to tear up so everyone gets their own copy. For any groups of four, tell them to give the second line for Actor B to Actor D. Then everyone has lines.

Send them off. No big speeches. Tell them they have five minutes (better to rush them) to decide how to stage it, sort out any props, get their lines learnt (always demand “no scripts on stage”).

Now you are free to wander. Answer questions. They are not allowed to add any extra lines. Encourage and side-coach them to be visual, keep asking them “What is not said, but shown? What are your looks to each other? What are your reactions when somebody else speaks?”

Pay attention and stop and watch each group. You might just spot something inappropriate, or something which is going to embarrass somebody. Occasionally a group can misinterpret the task or try way too hard to be clever or different – setting them up to be questioned by the group or feel they failed. Support your students by helping them to succeed at the task.

Announce two minutes (your time calls are completely artificial. It’s all about reading the room and keeping a private eye on time left in the lesson) and say they need to have one or two run-throughs without stopping, without scripts, before they present to the class.

4. Presentation of short performances.

Call time. Assemble them as an audience, facing a performance space. Choose a group to hop up first. You had time as you walked around to spot a group which would be ideal to go first. Quickly remind the class, “No talking or thinking about your own skit while another group is performing. You are audience now. There is plenty to learn watching others perform.”

Work through the short skits. Start and encourage appropriate applause after a skit. Thank them. Invite the next group. When all are done, you should have 5 minutes or so left before the session ends.

It is important to understand how much can be taught during the presentation part of your lessons. If you think about it, much of the session up until this point has been go, go, go, everybody doing. And of course, all of this is valuable and productive in critical ways. But each lesson, you have time you must take, to build with your class a growing, expanding set of ideas and values and understanding around the wonderful world of theatre and performance.

Because these script tasks tend to have a clear aim in my mind, it is easy enough to point out to the group the lessons and illustrative moments from the skits as they are performed. If there is a point to highlight after a group presents their skit, make it straight away. You can even at times asked a group to perform their piece again, so that the class can watch a second time more mindful of the point you want them to notice. You might, for example want to highlight the importance of playing reactions when you don’t have a line. If you see an excellent example of this during one group’s presentation, you may ask the class if they noticed and how they read the meaning of the reactions. If a group has struck gold in this regard, you might talk to it, then invite the group to perform again and ask the class to pay attention to the reaction work coming from actors.

With experienced groups well used to your classes and each other, you can sometimes even direct and tweak a moment in a scene to show the class the potential sometimes in exploring even small alternatives in their rehearsal time. These may relate to staging, to timing, gesture or any number of theatrical elements. It all fall under building a shared language with your group.

5. Closure.

Too often overlooked by teachers. And not just inexperienced ones. If you want the message to grow that your drama classes are not just a bit of fun and nonsense as a break from real learning, then you have to build that conversation. At the end of this early-in-the-year beginners' class, you should settle them, back in a circle, and round off the class like this:

Okay, thank you. We have just a couple of minutes to chat before the bell. I want to thank you, first of all, for all having a go. That's really important in this space. We want to take risks and have some fun and that will happen best when everyone feels they are safe and not being judged and they see others having a go.

If you think about the balancing exercise, or even piggy in the middle, those are fun, but they also ask you to take a risk. I have plenty more games and exercises that ask you to take even bigger risks. And they are great fun. So help me to build that atmosphere in here. Encourage each other, and people will start to encourage you.

I loved your skits. As the year goes on, I'd like to see you perform longer and more dramatic and more comic scenes. Who knows, we might even perform for an outside audience if we feel ready. But for now, as we learn and get our confidence up, it's just for us. And if something doesn't work the way you wanted, it doesn't matter. Just experiments in here.

So well done everyone and thanks once again. I'll see you all on Thursday!

ANALYSIS

Before we move on to a second sample lesson, let us underscore some key elements and principles here. If you are looking for drama games and resources, there is an overwhelming supply on-line, not to mention those you have learnt and those which may be shared amongst colleagues and associates. On this website, we share and talk through dozens we have developed over many joyful years of dynamic drama classes.

The issue is, how do you sift through them all? How do you make any sense of which are best suited where and when?

There are a number of yardsticks you can use to grade and assess the value of individual games and exercises. You will learn over time that there are games, for example, best kept for senior students. There are games best utilised at the beginning of the year or with brand new groups. Others only useful when you have well-established trust.

Similarly, you will start to recognise that your role shifts during a session and across a term or year. At various times, you'll play teacher, umpire, facilitator, director, character, and devil's advocate. Sometimes, you get to just join in a game as yourself! Consider these parameters:

- Are there winners and losers? Is there an endpoint? Do players go out?
- How simple and quick is a game or exercise to explain and master? Will the game/exercise evolve over time?
- What is the focus of the task or game? How obvious or clear is this to the group?
- Do prior skills or knowledge make a difference? Any strategies involved or will any evolve?
- How exposed is any individual?
- Is energy and movement high, moderate, or low?
- Is the game or exercise physical, verbal, mental, or a combination?
- Teacher is in what role? Facilitator, umpire, character, director?
- What is the balance between autonomy and rules?
- How much trust and interdependence are required?
- How repeatable? With variations? Can you build layers of complexity?

ANALYSE THE LESSON PLAN

Now we'll print the lesson, as a lesson plan (TIP: always keep a brief written plan for each drama class on a small card. Over the years these cards become invaluable to track what you have done with a group – even for years; and to dive back and rediscover ideas and games and tasks you have forgotten). Here is some analysis of what is going on with these choices. See if you agree:

Game 1: name calling throwing a ball of socks.

- Extremely simple to explain & master
- No winners
- No-one goes out
- Whole group involved throughout
- Clear single focus which can be expanded
- No skills needed
- No previous experience makes a difference
- Exposure is very low for individuals
- Energy & movement moderate
- Potential to increase energy & challenge
- Teacher as participant
- Balance between autonomy & rules

Game 2: Piggy in the Middle [seat swapping]

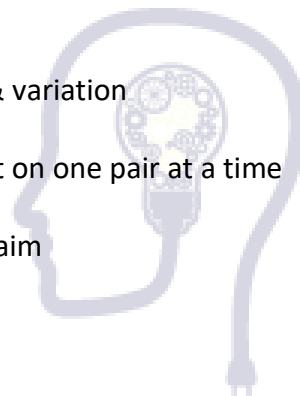
- Simple to explain & involves some group mastery
- No winners and momentary losers
- No outs
- Whole group involved throughout
- Simple multiple focus
- Slight skill needed – judgement, timing
- No previous experience makes a difference
- Exposure for individuals is present but low
- Requires small amount of risk-taking
- Energy & movement moderate to high
- Potential to increase energy & challenge
- Teacher as participant or facilitator
- Balance between autonomy & rules

Exercise 1: Balance in pairs.

- Physical, develops control and confidence
- Low energy, focused, concentration
- Interdependent – success cannot be independent
- Repeatable with extension & variation
- Requires & builds trust
- Everyone is doing – no audience. Exposure is low
- Teacher as participant or facilitator
- Balance between autonomy & goals

Exercise 2: Talking Pairs – childhood memory.

- Verbal – builds confidence & listening skills
- Low energy, focused
- Interdependent
- Repeatable with extension & variation
- Requires & builds trust
- No audience – then spotlight on one pair at a time
- Teacher as facilitator
- High autonomy with simple aim



snap-tute

Short script work:

A: Hey, what are you two doing?

B: Nothing.

A: What do you mean, nothing?

C: Were not doing anything.

A: I Can see what you're doing. Give me that.

B: No. You can't make us.

A: Now!

[they run off]

A: Hey!

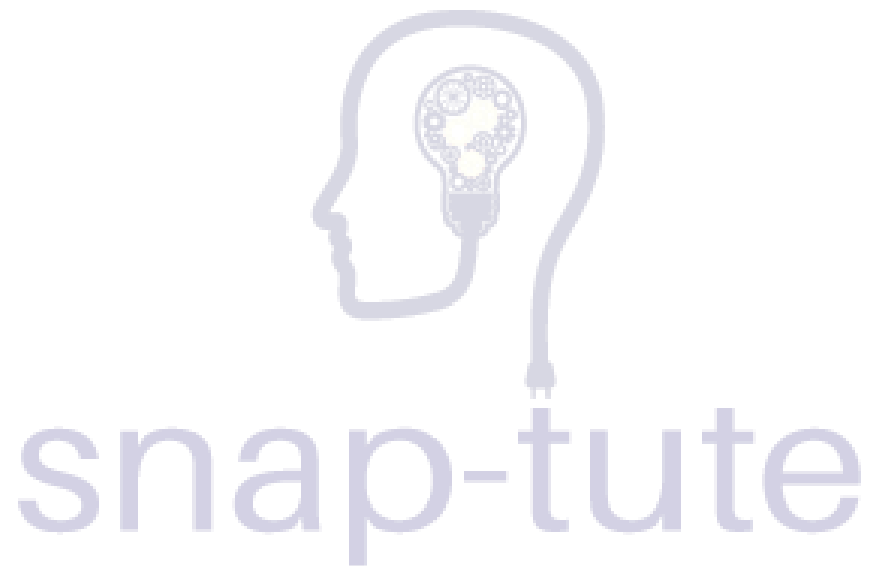
- Physical and verbal
- Moderate energy
- Interdependent – success cannot be individual
- Repeatable with extension & variation
- Requires & builds trust in groups and whole class
- Develops rehearsal-performance skill-set
- Exposure is low during rehearsal stage
- Teacher as facilitator
- Balance between autonomy & goals

Performance.

- Physical and verbal
- Moderate energy
- Interdependent – success cannot be individual
- Repeatable with extension & variation
- Requires & builds trust in groups and whole class
- Develops rehearsal-performance skill-set
- Exposure is moderate
- Teacher as facilitator
- Balance between autonomy & goals

Closure.

- Verbal
- Low energy
- Requires & builds whole class trust & respect
- Develops reflection - analysis skill-set
- Exposure is low
- Teacher as facilitator



Now let's look at the same structure working with a much more advanced, experienced group.

SAMPLE LESSON – MODERATELY EXPERIENCED GROUP, EARLY IN THE YEAR

1. Start of Lesson – two games to energise and build the group.

Game 1: Everybody's IT! [Minefield]

Assemble the group in a circle in the centre of the space. Explain that in a moment, you are going to play the world's most impossible game of tag. A game in which *everybody* is IT at the same time. In a moment, they are to spread out and fill the space. On "GO" anybody can tag anybody else. You can only tag below the knee. If you are tagged, you must stay in the spot you were tagged. You are now a frozen tagger or a *mine*. You cannot move from your spot, but you can tag anyone you can reach. Mines can tag a player anywhere on their body. Mines are also asked to adjudicate as an extra pair of eyes watching the frantic action around the room. It is impossible for the teacher to watch everywhere.

The game will quickly come down to a final two free-runners. They are chasing and dodging each other through a deadly minefield. If the facilitator wishes, they can set a time limit on this showdown. It can get boring for the class to watch two cautious players take minutes to stalk each other. TIP: say "okay, this is the showdown. You have one minute." This forces risk-taking and makes for a fun-filled, energised minute for the whole class. It is wise to add this rule for the showdown: *you cannot move backwards*. A backward step is an immediate loss. When your minute is up, if there is no winner, you simply announce that BOTH players have won.

Game 2: Bang!

Bring class into a standing circle. Teacher moves outside of the circle. Explain that you are going to call out a group-member's name. If your name is called, you need to duck by bobbing down quickly. If you are standing next to a person who bobs down, you have to shoot the person *on the other side of the one bobbing* before they shoot you. You shoot them by pointing your hand like a gun and shouting "bang!" You must point and shoot in the correct direction or it doesn't count.

Facilitator (and the group) adjudicates. If there was a clear winner, the one shot sits in their place and now helps teacher adjudicate. If it is a draw, teacher can call it and both live to shoot again. If the person whose name is called fails to get out the way in time, then they are sacrificed (they now sit in their spot) and the two shooters live to play on.

Players need to stay conscious of who stands left and right of them. And this keeps changing as people go out and sit. Focus on people's names is essential. Where you have two players with the same name, you'll have to assign a nickname or surname at the start of the game. Build tension as facilitator, making them wait in silence for the next call. Sometimes you call so quickly they are not ready, sometimes a tense wait.

Eventually only two remain. This is the showdown. The pair stand back to back in the centre. Group makes space for them to walk away from each other. Explain the rules. *I'll count slowly to five. Take a step on each count. On five, turn and shoot. The group will judge who was fastest.*

Classes almost always want to play again immediately. You can repeat once or twice, time permitting. But save it for future lessons too. There are great ways to increase difficulty and grow the complexity of the game.

2. Exercises in pairs, 3s or 4s to build trust and a skill-set.

Exercise 1: Trust Plank 3s

Throw them into random threes. If two are left over, join them. One group of four can cope as well. Demonstrate one person standing between the two others, fairly close together. Middle person has to close their eyes and trust the other two to slowly rock them onto toes and heels, keeping straight like a plank. Emphasise that those pushing should use the plank's shoulders.

Once basic trust is established, the pair on the outside take a small step back so that the plank will fall momentarily before being caught by the other side and pushed back again.

At each stage, trust needs to be established before progressing to another small step back. The goal is to see how far apart the supporting pair can stand and safely push and catch their trusting classmate. Demonstrate the technique, for catchers, of *bracing* to manage the catching weight by placing one foot BEHIND the other to better support the dropping weight. This makes a big difference.

After giving groups a few minutes to explore, and wandering around the space encouraging and tweaking their efforts, stop them and ask that they swap around. Repeat so all three have been a plank. A group of four just have to work a bit faster. The fourth member can watch and "spot" each time.

Exercise 2: Chatterbox.

Ask same groups of three to grab chairs and sit in a tight triangle. Explain that one of them is going to manage an impossible challenge in a moment. They are going to have two completely different conversations with their two partners at the same time.

Randomly pick who goes first. Say something like, *whoever's name starts with the earliest letter of the alphabet, you're up first.* You can find your own fun ways. Oldest first. Shortest name. Whatever you care to invent.

Before saying “GO”, reinforce the task for those talking. *Ask lots of questions. Force your hot-seat chatterbox to engage with you. Get them to tell you a story or tell you about themselves or what they did on the weekend. Don’t listen to the other conversation. Be selfish. If you are the chatterbox, try to keep both of your partners happy. Are we ready? GO.*

Let the chaos run for a minute or two. Stop them. Reflect for a moment, asking, how did you go? *Hands up if your chatterbox kept a conversation going with you. Very good. It’s really tough isn’t it! Okay, who’s up next? Are you ready? Keep both partners happy. Force your chatterbox to keep your conversation going.*

3. Preparation of a short performance.

Short Script work. Impossible Scripts.

Throw the group into random 4s. Hand out scripts. Explain that the lines on the script make no sense on their own. They must use all lines, in the order they are printed. They cannot add any more lines. Their goal is to present a scene *which makes sense*.

This task works well with *different* scripts, and is also valuable giving all groups *the same script*. It is always fascinating to see how each group interprets the same original lines.

Impossible Script:

- **Fourteen, fifteen, sixteen.**
- **Nice.**
- **Hey!**
- **Can I ask you something?**
- **Look at this.**
- **Unbelievable.**
- **I’m going to have to move this.**
- **Now that’s something you don’t see every day.**
- **Wow!**

Notice that there are no characters assigned. One character might say three lines in a row. The art is to make the action and sounds and reactions around these lines so that it all makes sense. Students with experience will want and need no help. But if you had to inspire a group struggling, suggest they think of locations and scenarios first. Like a group setting up a camping site. Or astronauts on the moon.

Side-coach as you wander around the room. The task forces them to make **action** central, and **reactions** as important as words. Reactions can be grunts, sighs, or just looking up in amazement or frustration. **Time and space between lines** is also important to explore. One line is not necessarily an immediate response to the line before.

4. Presentation of short performances.

An experienced group should be well used to watching each other as a supportive, appreciative audience. But as facilitator, you should always remain guardian of the space as sacred and safe. Do not tolerate inattention, negative reactions or a failure to be supportive. Group culture grows. Nurture it.

Always pick which group goes first. You will learn many reasons to subtly control the order of performances, and during rehearsal, you should be scouting the room and thinking about this order to maximise the presentations and their lessons. With experience, you will develop some strong instincts about the order in which to play back to the group their scenes. There are no hard-and-fast rules but here is some of my familiar logic.

If you spot in rehearsals a group that is going to do a fabulous job, never put them up first. If last is going to be too obvious, then second-last is almost as good. But when you are in the latter stages of a session, it is going to send everyone away feeling good if the last scene or two were strong. You celebrate this as a group.

As you get to know your group, you will know which students crave attention, which are naturally talented and which are shy or lower in confidence. If there is a shot at praising lesser lights, take it. Get the group up early so that their efforts and your praise aren't overshadowed by a stronger performance before them.

Sometimes you will be aware that a group has struggled to polish their performance before time ran out. Always put that group near the end of the presentations, but never last. Giving them time to watch how other groups solved the task, and hearing you identify good examples of key ideas along the way will give them some hints about what to bring out of their performance when their turn comes. By that stage you will be able to say to them and the group that you can see what they were working for and with more time, they would have pulled it off beautifully.

If you are building a safe space, then the group are going to have to accept and be comfortable with the idea that not every presentation will be brilliant – sometimes we are privileged to watch a work in progress. It is good to point out often to groups that it is those willing to risk something not working who tend to grow the most because they continually push themselves beyond what is obvious or comfortable. We grow muscles in the same way.

5. Closure.

When you have created a culture of pursuit and endeavour in your classroom, your students will come to expect and increasingly participate in closure. Expect and encourage this time-slot to increase. 10 minutes should not be unusual eventually. A time for reflection, spotlighting moments when individuals shone or groups stood out. A chance to make explicit how this session plugs into what they have done previously and what is to come. A chance to model for them and encourage them to analyse each other's work and their own.

After this session, you might focus at the end on the take-away lessons from the script-work. Something like this:

Thank you for today. Great to see how far you've come as a group in terms of trusting each other and trusting yourselves in those exercises. As I've said before, that trust and willingness to work together translates into your performance work. And you start to do amazing things together on stage.

Loved the impossible scripts today. What lessons do we take from working on these scripts and from watching others? [here you should gather two or three comments from individuals] Yes, at the end of the day, theatre is visual. An audience is watching and reading into facial expressions, body language, movement, gesture. We look to see the reactions of other characters. None of this is in the script. When you start working with playscripts and famous pieces like Shakespeare, the script is pretty much going to be just the words. And the rest is up to you to create and explore and discover what works best. It's a big part of the fun of working with a script. And it's the real stuff of rehearsal. Rehearsal is a poor word actually. What actors are really doing is exploring and experimenting.

Anyway, that'll do for today. We are going to get seriously into script work this term. I can't wait to see what you guys are capable of. Have a good day.

ANALYSIS

Once again, let's print the lesson, as a lesson plan. Let us analyse what is going on with these choices for a more advanced group:

Game 1: Everybody's IT! [Minefield]

- Extremely simple to explain & master
- Winners and losers
- No-one goes out – new role for losers
- Whole group involved throughout
- Scattered focus becomes clear single focus
- No skills needed – strategies evolve
- No previous experience makes a difference
- Exposure is very low for individuals until the end
- Energy & movement high
- Teacher as facilitator and umpire
- Balance between autonomy & rules

Game 2: Bang!

- More complex to explain & master
- Winners & losers
- Outs – find a role for those 'watching'
- Involvement shifts from playing to supporting
- Clear single focus
- skills needed & strategies devised
- No previous experience makes a difference
- Exposure is moderate to high
- Energy & movement moderate
- Introduces positive Tension in the group
- Teacher in role as the game-master
- Little autonomy – rule driven

Exercise 1: Trust Plank 3s.

- Physical, develops control and confidence
- Low energy, focused, concentration
- Interdependent – success cannot be independent
- Repeatable with extension & variation
- Requires & builds trust
- Everyone is doing – no audience. Exposure is low
- Teacher as participant or facilitator

- Balance between autonomy & goals

Exercise 2: Chatterbox.

- Verbal – builds confidence & listening skills
- Low to moderate energy, focused
- Interdependent
- Repeatable with extension & variation
- Requires & builds trust
- No audience – then spotlight on one pair at a time
- Teacher as facilitator
- High autonomy with simple aim
- Significant level of challenge

Short Script work. Impossible Scripts.

- **Fourteen, fifteen, sixteen.**
- **Nice.**
- **Hey!**
- **Can I ask you something?**
- **Look at this.**
- **Unbelievable.**
- **I'm going to have to move this.**
- **Now that's something you don't see every day.**
- **Wow!**



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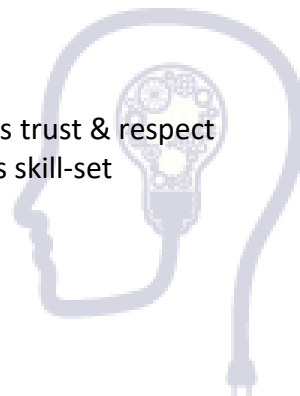
- Physical and verbal
- moderate energy
- Interdependent – success cannot be individual
- Repeatable with extension & variation
- Requires & builds trust in groups and whole class
- Develops rehearsal-performance skill-set
- Exposure is moderate
- Teacher as facilitator
- Balance between autonomy & goals

4. Performance.

- Physical and verbal
- Moderate energy
- Interdependent – success cannot be individual
- Repeatable with extension & variation
- Requires & builds trust in groups and whole class
- Develops rehearsal-performance skill-set
- Exposure is low during rehearsal stage
- Teacher as facilitator
- Balance between autonomy & goals
- Significant level of challenge within set parameters

5. Closure.

- Verbal
- Low energy
- Requires & builds whole class trust & respect
- Develops reflection - analysis skill-set
- Exposure is low
- Teacher as facilitator



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SOME FINAL NOTES & TIPS

1. Taking the roll

In most settings now, a class roll needs to be taken. Experimented yourself, and watched other teachers handle this administrative chore. You will find that those teachers who begin the session ticking off students as they arrive are establishing a dull atmosphere which punishes those who arrive early or on time. It kills energy and wastes time. You have seen our lesson plans. There is plenty of time to mark who is present once exercises are underway. Ideally you want to create a class which students want to come to. Your sessions should start promptly so that any latecomers feel they are missing out. Do this and a lot of other issues will evaporate.

2. Setting expectations and rules

Like roll-taking, you will witness too many times when experienced teachers start a drama class by sitting the group down and spending as much as ten minutes running through rules and expectations. What a way to destroy energy, atmosphere and precious time. Set your expectations on the run, when they are relevant. Reinforce cultural ideas during closure. Reinforce behaviours you want by spotlighting those moments when students demonstrate positive examples. If you have a student who is behaving in a malicious or destructive way, you will get a lot further trying to talk with that student one-on-one after the class or during a lunchtime. The faster your drama classes feel different from most other times in the day for your students, the stronger will their commitment and energy and enthusiasm grow.

3. Energy levels

It is a common mistake made by young teachers. They try sessions that are basically all games and play. Students end up out of control and not actually respecting the session or the spirit of the class. Or the teacher. You may try sessions heavily weighted towards theory, chalk-and-talk, as we once called it. Thinking that senior students or adults need and can handle theoretical classes. They always lack something vital. Sometimes inexperienced teachers have sessions where they run through the plan too quickly and with 20 minutes to spare they go back to games. These sessions feel like fillers. A message you desperately want to avoid. Be strict with yourself. Start by energising and focusing the group. End by refocusing the group, praising and thanking them, and projecting forwards with goals and anticipation. In the middle, you control the energy and focus of the group, like a roller-coaster ride. At times you demand and facilitate their concentration and quieter co-operation. There is a rhythm to a great session. Find it. You'll know it when you do.

4. Goals and hidden goals – pulleys and levers

With any game, exercise or task, there should be clear and overt goals and parameters. This is critical. But as the teacher designing their program, you should also be working with your own set of aims and goals. At the beginning of any year, one of your aims should be to get everyone familiar with each other's names. You will desperately need this too. Building trust, comfort, a sense of group, an expectation of controlled fun, are all central aims that should direct your early choices as you plan first weeks of classes.

Over time, your goals will shift. You might see a need to keep challenging the most capable students while allowing less confident students to continue to grow. You might see a need to strengthen verbal skills. Or grow more physical risk-taking. Often there will be a handful of students who need attention because they are so shy or too attention-seeking. The dynamics of the group are always evolving. It is your job to evaluate this and come up with clever ways to tweak and improve elements.

You will have to sit down at times and ponder over the gender imbalance in a group, challenging differences in experience and natural ability, even age differences in adult groups where participants can range from late teens to 70-year-olds. As the facilitator, the challenges are yours to recognise and solve creatively. Ideally without groups ever feeling aware of the subtle ways you are pulling levers and strings. You will grow proud of your achievements and in this way, your job will never become repetitive. Each group presents new challenges and opportunities. There will always be a gap between what the students think is going on and your goals and aims.

5. Extending and developing games and exercises. (sock-ball to glass)

Another rookie mistake often made is to think that you need to come to every session with new games and exercises. This fairly quickly becomes a tremendous stress as you search books and the internet and pester other teachers for new material. Students begin to expect it too.

Out of necessity, you will learn a valuable lesson which will keep you in good stead for a long career. Almost any game can be extended, tweaked, made more complex and more challenging. And it turns out, this is more fun and more rewarding for the students.

Adding blindfolds to simple trust exercises increases the challenge and excitement and sense of achievement. Adding time limits on tasks turns them into Reality TV-style "cook-offs" and dramatically lifts the excitement levels. A simple task like throwing a ball of socks (Why not a regular ball? Because they bounce and roll away, wasting time and killing the game), changes into something more serious when you bring in a ceramic mug. Students take ten times the care. Over many years experienced drama teachers see barely two or three mugs dropped. One teacher, working with a group he has worked with for several years, famously even plays the game with a glass. The tension and group ownership of the risk is extraordinary. No glass

has been dropped yet! Think on that - they play throw and catch the glass; and it's never dropped.

6. Nobody goes out.

You will search for and collect games and you will find favourites with different groups. You may even have students offer to teach the group games they have played on a camp or elsewhere. But you will learn the hard way if you ignore this advice: do not play games in which players go “out” and have to watch others continue.

Why not? Firstly, it feels bad to be out. Those students lose energy. They are quite possibly individuals who often go out early, or are even targeted by bolder students. So your game is reinforcing a negative pattern and making it harder for you to undo. Secondly, it is boring. Those who are out will chat, distract themselves or others. As facilitator, you suddenly have a separate field of concern and may have to monitor and control those who are out.

Some great games can hold this problem. One solution is to invent a new participatory role once a player is out. This proves highly successful. See Bang! above and Everybody's It. These were originally games students loved, but there were 'outs' and teachers recognised the problem over time. You have the solutions. You will need to create your own solutions when you have a game you want to include in your repertoire which calls for 'outs'.

Some teachers go through a phase where they tell themselves that in a group that has been together a long time, or in an adult group of more maturity, the risks of having “outs” are more or less gone. And so they include games they wouldn't with younger groups. And certainly, they have no behaviour issues. But after a while, you will recognise that the group as a whole loses energy and you will conclude that an absolutely primary goal of the starting games is to bring the whole group together and energise them *together*. This can only be achieved by games which require all of them to participate for the entire time. Teacher too, as much as possible.

7. Teacher chooses groups

It is so easy to fall into allowing students to grab a partner or form their own groups. Even adults will gravitate towards people they know and like. And they *will* ask you, sometimes plead. From day one, you need to make this an absolute non-negotiable. Do it simply and without fuss. Just repeat as often as needed that in your sessions, they will have to get used to working with anyone and everyone. This will automatically *include* times when they happen to work with those they know well or love to work with.

Why? On the down-side, like “outs”, allowing them to choose partners can only reinforce divisions and status groups within the class. These are most often the actions of the more confident group members. Outsiders, newcomers and those with low self-esteem – the very individuals you need to work at building up and melding into the group – are never going to initiate grabbing a partner or forming a group. Do you want to be left with the less confident, less experienced individuals working with each other all the time?

On the up-side, you and your students will quickly discover that they feel more and more comfortable working with any and all of their classmates. On top of this, working outside of their usual peer group forces confident students into uncharted territory and always strengthens their flexibility. Often they will produce results which surprise everyone. At times you will be able to articulate exactly this idea to your strongest students who will come to you in private and object to working with weak students.

You will know that you have hit a milestone when there is no longer an issue in your group regarding who works with whom. This is gold! Most teachers would be envious. Many parents too.

8. Unit, term, semester and year-long trajectories.

Elsewhere we will write about these matters at length. But it should be clear to you that just as a single session has an ideal structure, so too a semester or term, a year, even an intensive six weeks (as directors have with a group of actors rehearsing a play) requires and benefits enormously from a trajectory and shape to content. Without harping on about it, this is no different to a science teacher or history teacher shaping a unit and a course. It is unimaginable that a history teacher spend three sessions on World War 2, then when students next return, they are studying the Industrial Revolution, followed the next session by the Cold War. And yet, there are drama teachers who do the equivalent, making drama some sort of random lottery of play and entertainment. The dreaded filler reputation you will still have to fight, not only as an attitude held by some students and some parents, but among colleagues as well. There are teachers working in schools where PE teachers are asked to run drama classes rather than employ a specialist. One has to ask, “Would they ask English teachers to run maths?” It is doubtful!

So a ten-week unit might focus on script-work. Withing that you might start with basic short scripts and build their appreciation of the need for action and reaction not written in the script; the value and employment of props; basic principles of staging; simple costuming ideas like status and characterisation; and at the end, a significant performance of a scene putting all this learning together. That feels like a ten-week trajectory. One with potentially a very satisfying end-point.

With Year 8s, some teachers develop a semester-long program around mask-work, culminating in stunning performances at school assemblies, parent evenings, even community events. At some schools, Year 10s know famously that there is a spectacular term of Theatresports (improvisation theatre based on many hilarious games, each with its own

parameters and rules). There are students in these schools who know from older siblings or simply being at school assemblies and Theatresports nights the fame of this unit. Often, these students say that it is the reason they take drama as an elective in Year 10. Such units become a part of the school's culture.

On paper, map out your journeys. Set endpoints and goals, both in terms of the group's dynamics and in terms of the skill-set and theatre craft you want to pass on. Build your individual lessons along these trajectory lines. And be willing to adjust as you learn more about the group and see its progression.

There is an old idea that used to be popular among teachers in the 1970s, often seen on office walls as a poster. It simply stated that **all groups** pass through five stages: FORMING – STORMING – NORMING – PERFORMING – TRANSFORMING. It's a great idea. Over the years, it is an idea many teachers and even directors have shared with groups, put it on their walls. You might suggest that all relationships pass through these stages, marriages and families, friendship groups. Unfortunately, many groups give up or disintegrate during the storming phase. A sober challenge to face.

9. Handicapping regular winners

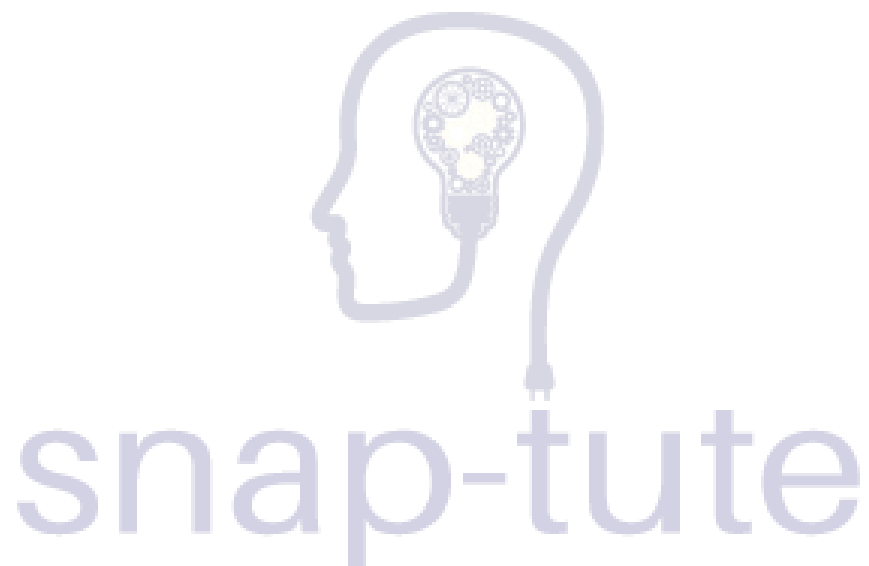
This may sound harsh. But in many groups it can become quickly evident certain individuals are very funny, or naturally talented with games, or just big attention-seekers. Like most things, a lot of teachers' strategies change significantly from their early years. Saying to a student, "No James, you always want to go first," or conspiring in a game to ensure that Lisa doesn't win it for the third time in a row, are just too overt and can damage that student's enthusiasm and the energy he/she brings into your sessions. Are you punishing them for being good?

What you will discover is the power of chatting with such students outside of the class and putting to them that you can see that they are talented or experienced or very confident. And you can propose to them that they stand to grow fastest if you find ways to challenge them within the classes. You can explain that this is not something others in the group needed to know about. It is just your understanding. Such students are so flattered, and so boosted by being recognised rather than punished for being capable, that the results are often transformative.

Now, in a game like Bang! which Lisa was too often winning, you could have her run it so that you can play. Listen to this experienced teacher talk about one memorable case:

One year, in a group where I had been asked to absorb two special-needs students being partially integrated into mainstream classes, I called on my most capable two or three students to help these students, the group and me. I asked them in private to accept the challenge of working more often with the special needs students. I assured them I would not make it every occasion, and I assured them we would talk again after a few lessons to re-evaluate.

What they managed was far and above anything I could have hoped to achieve myself. Some sessions I was astounded by what a group would produce and the positive, creative ways they integrated a challenging group member. All this because I had spoken with these talented individuals and not only asked them to help me, but suggested that the challenges they would face would accelerate their own growth and learning. I was embarrassed by the praise heaped upon me by parents and the principal because deep down, I knew it was my most capable students who had managed a kind of miracle. What I had done was facilitate it.



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