



Using Drama in Archives education

Slides from the workshop
PowerPoint presentation

Why use drama in education?

It's fun

It immerses the learner in the subject

It reaches the parts that other educational techniques don't reach

It's the natural language of children

It engages multiple faculties and learning styles at once

People learn most efficiently through interaction and cooperation

It's fun

Educational drama is not usually:

Acting out

Doing a show or a play

Rehearsing a role

Educational Drama is usually:

A set of processes or techniques

Educational drama also known as Process Drama

Students can become distanced from their learning by the requirement to treat everything as information to be processed and memorised.

Process drama enables students to bypass the filters they have created to process educational work at the purely analytical level because it requires activity, spontaneity and role-play.

Drama invites students to interact with knowledge in a physical way.

Today we'll explore three techniques in process drama:

Mantle of the Expert

Still Images

Role On The Wall

Role On The Wall

The Role on The Wall drama technique can be used to summarise information about a person or character in a drama, and to record changes in our understanding of the person or their situation as time goes on and information comes to light.

Role On The Wall technique

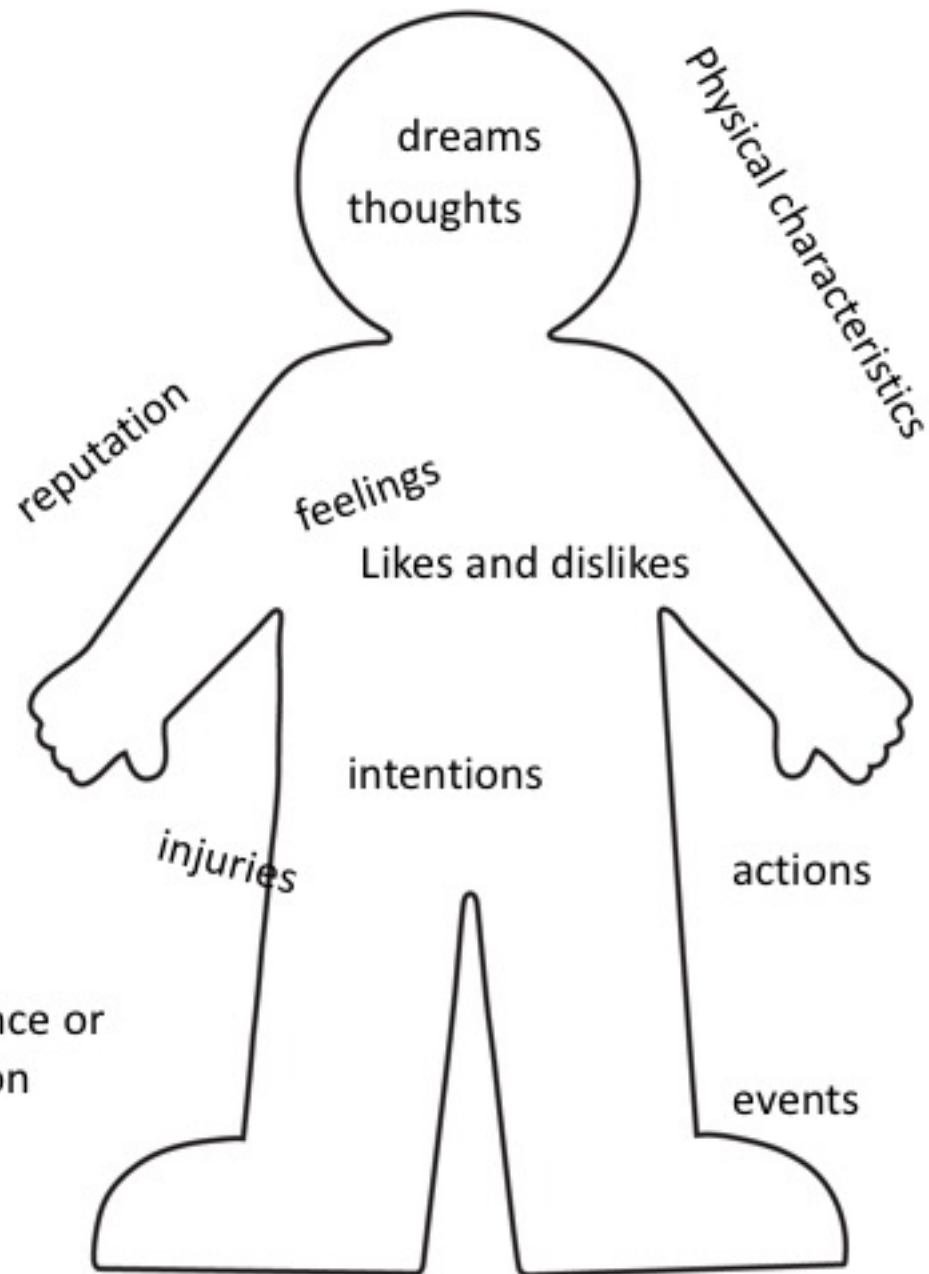
This technique enables participants to record information and impressions of a character they are studying. The information can change over time as we learn more, and the recorded information allows us to trace the changes in our understanding of the character.

Draw the outline of a body on a large sheet of paper and pin or stick it to the wall. This can be done by carefully drawing around one of the participants or by using a generic outline.

Participants then write words or phrases describing the character they are studying. Descriptions can also be written on post-it notes and stuck on. Include factual info such as physical appearance, age, gender, location and occupation, and subjective ideas such as likes/dislikes, friends/enemies, attitudes, motivations, secrets and dreams.

This technique can be carried out as a group activity or by individuals writing about their own character.

Role on
the
Wall



Outward
appearance or
expression

The Climbing Boy project, National Records of Scotland

This education project for upper primary school students uses 1840 court records and witness statements related to the trial of a chimney sweep after the death of a 'climbing boy' in a Glasgow chimney.

The Role On The Wall technique is used by students to record information about the boy before and after his death, as they gather it from the different statements they read.

“That John O’Neill was aged between 8 & 9 and had been about 16 months in his employment. That the boy was under agreement to him for three years as arranged between Black and the boy’s mother, Mrs O’Neill who lived somewhere about the High Street of Glasgow.

Declares that the terms of the agreement were that Black was to provide the boy with clothes, bed, board and schooling and to pay the mother One Pound a year.

Declares that the terms on which he employs his Journeymen are that he supplies them with climbing boys and the Journeymen are bound to pay Black one half of the sums earned in the sweeping of chimneys.”

*(from statement by Thomson Black, from the *Climbing Boy* project produced by National Records of Scotland)*

That McManus was then sent up the vent, and he had not gone up many feet when he called out 'Thomson, Thomson I've got him - he's dead'. And he descended with the body on his shoulders.

That O'Neil was quite dead, and when the Declarant put his hand upon his heart and the lower part of his body he felt the same quite cold.

That there was no foam or blood about the boy's mouth – but the top of his head about his hair was all wet as it had been a very wet stormy day, and the Declarant's impression was that the rain had caused the wetness. And his clothes also were very wet.

(from statement by Rodger Kayes, from the *Climbing Boy* project produced by National Records of Scotland)

Still Images and Freeze Frames

Still images and **freeze frames** are both a form of tableau created by a group of students.

With freeze-frame, the action in a play or scene is frozen, as in a photograph or video frame.

Still images, on the other hand, require individuals or groups to invent body-shapes or postures and to arrange the picture, rather than freeze existing action.

Groups can be asked to tell a story through a series of prepared still-images, like illustrations in a book..

The purpose of still image is for us to enter into the story. We embody elements of the story, either characters or objects, or even symbols of ideas, thoughts, feelings, themes.

Bringing It Home project, Borders Heritage Hub

This World War One project uses still images to explore the stories of young men from Hawick who left to fight in Gallipoli in early 1915.

Each student took the identity of a man from the records and groups created still 'photographs' of the newly recruited soldiers on parade, posing with family members or having their portraits taken before departure to Gallipoli.

In this way the students embody the individuals who left for war, follow their experiences through letters, reports, medical records and diaries, and sometimes experience a sharp sense of loss when they learn the fate of their chosen soldier, many of whom died in July 1915.

Mantle Of The Expert

“The Mantle Of The Expert is a student-centered dramatic-inquiry-based approach to teaching and learning.

It was invented and developed by Professor Dorothy Heathcote at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne in the 1980s.

This approach inverts the typical teacher-to-student model of teaching by allowing the students to dictate their learning and educational process through creative drama.

Mantle of the expert re-frames the teacher and student in fictional roles in which the students are “endowed” as experts in a specific field.”

From Wikipedia entry on Mantle Of The Expert

“Mantle of the Expert involves the creation of a fictional world where students assume the roles of experts in a designated field.

Mantle of the Expert is based on the premise that treating children as responsible experts increases their engagement and confidence.

They can perceive a real purpose for learning and discovering together in an interactive and proactive way.

Mantle of the Expert encourages creativity, improves teamwork, communication skills, critical thought and decision-making.”

From David Farmer, Drama Resource website

The power of this technique in Archives education work is that it disrupts the student-teacher roles, which can be magnified where you are an expert witness showing students around your world. For students this can be disempowering and they assume the role of passive recipients.

By asking them to step into a role of 'expert', even for a short time, they engage their imaginations, take responsibility and become aware of themselves as active participants in a process rather than bystanders.

There is a small library of literature on Mantle of the Expert, hundreds of websites explaining how it works in different contexts and it's a technique worthy of a workshop on its own.

It begins with you adopting a role which invites the students to respond also in role.

In drama education this is called *offer and response*.

An *offer* can be a question, a statement, an action. In our case my offer was to take the role of a lowly sergeant who was out of his depth and asking for advice from a group of senior police officers. Your response was to give me the advice I sought. As long as I stayed in role, you stayed in role as well.

Sometimes it can take a few seconds or minutes for your audience to figure out what game you're playing, and staying in role whilst gently supplying more clues will usually bring them on board eventually.

A symbol of the role is important, whether you are holding an object, wearing something like a hat or jacket, standing or sitting in a particular place or in a particular way, it is a way of entering and exiting the role-play.

Children naturally role-play, and understand this process better than most adults, so it takes practice.

It can be an edgy technique to use because you don't know what direction students might take, but it is surprisingly effective.

The short descriptions in these slides cannot teach you how to use these techniques but they may inspire you to find out more or attend a course to try them for yourself.

Drama is a powerful learning tool and it requires practice to use it effectively.

Many of us are reluctant to try drama techniques, maybe because they involve unpredictable results and a certain level of personal confidence to undertake with students.

For those who try it, drama can offer a rich experience of archives learning, tapping into the very elements that make archives fascinating for so many of us; characters, stories and places that come alive when we embody them and explore the possibilities contained within them in an imaginative way.