Planning Process Drama
- Key Questions Explored

You can see in the diagram that each of the planning principles can be presented in terms of a series of questions that the teacher must answer. So, we are going to revisit each of the principles and, this time, explore the questions for each.

1 theme/learning area ***'What do I want the children to learn about? With which area of human experience do I wish the children to engage?'***

Just as with every other curriculum area or subject, it is essential from the beginning of the planning process for the teacher to identify precisely what her learning objectives for the class are. Teachers need to clearly identify what precisely they wish pupils to gain from each lesson so that they can make informed decisions about how best to plan for that learning to take place. Moreover, because process drama is always concerned with matters of human significance, the teacher will also need to define the theme or learning area in terms of the human dimension within it.

2 context ***'Which particular circumstances will be created by the drama to explore the theme?***

The answer to the first question will often be in a broad, abstract or conceptual form. However, in order for the children to engage with the theme, the teacher needs to present it in a concrete form and within a defined framework made up of a carefully selected place, time and situation in which the action of the drama can unfold. An appropriately chosen dramatic context will offer the circumstances in which pupils have the opportunity to thoroughly explore the theme in a meaningful way.

3 roles ***'Who are the children and I going to be in the drama?***

The fundamental activity in drama is taking on a role - imagining that you are someone else and exploring a situation through that person's eyes. Having selected a dramatic context - the circumstances of the drama - the teacher will now need to 'people' it by deciding upon the roles - the people - that the children are going to become in the drama. She will need to ensure that those she chooses are found in the time and place of the context and will have an appropriate 'reason' for engaging with the theme. Because teacher-in-role is a fundamental aspect of process drama, the teacher will also have to decide on which role she is going to take in the drama.

4 frame ***'Which viewpoint will the roles have in order to create tension in the drama? How distanced will the roles need to be?***

Process drama is, essentially, a verbal genre and so creating the climate in which meaningful talk can be generated is a key element of planning. In process drama it is the point of view that the role has about what is happening in the drama that is critical in generating this climate. It gives the participants something to talk about. Frame provides the dramatic tension necessary to drive the drama forward. There is a second aspect of frame that is concerned with 'protecting into the experience'. Often in drama we want participants to engage with sensitive or demanding material or with situations that are beyond their own immediate experience. In circumstances like these we need to find a framework that will enable participation safely. Application of the second aspect of frame allows this to happen.

5 sign ***'What artefacts, personal items and so on will I need to bring significance to the event?***

When planning a process drama, we deliberately set out to create an exciting, stimulating learning experience for our pupils that will engage them on a number of levels. We do this, however, with a clear learning outcome in mind, and so need to ensure that it the midst of such an experience, the pupils' attention is directed to the heart of the learning. One of the key ways this happens is through the use of signs. These are things such as artefacts and personal items - documents, images, music and three-dimensional objects for instance - which bring significance to the drama, direct the children's attention and help them to explore actively the precise focus of the lesson.

6 strategies ***'Which ways of working will I use? In which combination? For what purpose?***

There are many different ways of creating the drama, of making it happen, moving it forward, deepening it and enabling reflection on what has happened in it. Strategies are not drama in themselves but are the building blocks with which to create a drama. An informed choice of strategies, by the teacher who recognises their different qualities, will provide children with the opportunity to learn about the art form and will also provide them with the means to explore and present the content of the drama and to reflect upon it.

Adapted from "Planning Process Drama", Pamela Bowell & Brian Heap published by David Fulton Publishers, which gives a complete practical guide to planning process drama work.

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