



Course Notes

DRAMA

IMPROVISATION AND PLAYBUILDING (PRIMARY)

eClass 1 – Warm Ups and Activities

Presented by David Todd



The Arts Unit Virtual Learning

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Introduction

This eClass utilises the skills of experienced primary drama teacher David Todd, to teach students how to build their improvisational and playbuilding skills through various activities. Incorporating video and progressive questioning to clarify pedagogy, this module supports teachers to understand both improvisational concepts and best practice in educational instruction.

Professional Standards Addressed

- 6.4.2 – Participate in learning to update knowledge and practice, targeted to professional needs and school and/or system priorities.
- 6.4.4 – Undertake professional learning programs designed to address identified student learning needs.

David Todd Biography

David Todd is a primary school teacher who has worked for 16 years across the NSW Department of Education and the Northern Territory Department of Education.

His classroom teaching has a strong emphasis on drama and film and at the number of schools he has worked at he has been a strong advocate for the arts, directing whole school musicals, plays, drama ensembles and establishing film festivals.

Beyond the classroom, David has performed on stage, television and film. He has worked on NSW Department of Education events such as Create East, State Drama Festival, Sydney Region Drama Festival, Primary Drama Camp and Primary Play Day as both a director and tutor.

David's current role is as the Digital Content Producer at The Arts Unit which was a secondment from his substantive role as Assistant Principal at Vacluse Public School. In his role at The Arts Unit he produces the videos that appear on the Learning Hub.

Warm Ups and Activities

1. Warm Up Stretch

Teacher leads students in a silent, full body stretch.

Students reach to the sky. Then they relax their wrists, their elbows, their shoulders and their necks. Then they roll down through their back vertebrae by vertebrae whilst looking at the ground.

Once students have rolled down. They are to bend their knees slightly and allow their arms to dangle with their hands centimetres from the ground.

Students then are led in a swaying motion from side to side. The intensity increases until they are asked to stop. Their hands and arms need to slow down on their own.

Teacher then leads students in a swaying motion backwards and forwards. The students are to rock on the toes and balls of their feet. The intensity increases and stops as per the activity above.

Students then rolls slowly back up through their backs with their head the last body part to roll up.

2. Name Game – Zombies

The purpose of the game ‘Zombies’ is to familiarise the students with each other, to utilise movement freely in the space and to use character to enjoy the role play.

Teacher runs students through the rules using some volunteers to demonstrate how to play the zombie game.

Rules

All students are to **walk** only in the space in any direction they please.

No student is allowed to stop walking; this is an activity of perpetual motion.

One student selected by the teacher is the hunter. Their status is denoted by one outstretched arm which they use to tag the other participants. The hunter’s only objective is to tag any opponent who is within reach.

The ways to avoid the hunter for all participants are as follows:

- Walk away (you can’t run).
- Call out the name of another participant if being targeted. (That participant then replaces the hunter.)

Students who talk (except for calling names when targeted), stop walking or run, are deemed to be captured.

When a student is tagged or called captured by the teacher the protocol is that they are to let out a death scream and fall to their knees (The more dramatic the better) Then they are to rise with two outstretched arms as a zombie. Their character replaces the hunter and has one opportunity to turn another participant into a zombie. If they fail, they sit out and are eliminated.

The winners of this game are the final two participants who don’t get eliminated.

3. Diddly Dee

‘Diddly Dee’ is a vocal warm up that focuses on pronunciation, diction, rhythm, timing and observation.

Students are to form a circle and the teacher is to teach them the tongue twister ‘diddly dee diddly dee diddly diddly diddly dee’ using call and response and repetition.

Once familiar with the tongue twister the teacher leads a repeated rendition around the circle with each student saying either diddly or dee in the correct sequence. The teacher is to

clap a rhythm and the students must land their word on the beat. One time around the circle for a practice run is appropriate here.

The teacher then runs an elimination game where students must land the correct word on the beat to remain in the game. Each time a participant is eliminated, the next participant will restart the tongue twister.

The teacher may increase the tempo of the beat as the students become more adept at the game.

The winner/s are the last few students who remain.

4. The Gift

'The Gift' is an improvisational activity that focuses on one-to-one interactions and accepting improvisational offers. To reject an offer from another actor is called 'blocking.' This halts the momentum of an improvisational scene.

Students are to form a circle. The teacher starts of the activity by modelling how 'The Gift' works.

The first participant (the gifter) walks across to another participant (the receiver) in the circle. The gifter approaches them holding an imaginary object. The gifter then gifts the object to the nominated scene partner (the receiver) and describes it using both language and actions. The more vivid and imaginative the language the more engaging the scene.

The receiver of the gift needs to interact with the gifter, accepting the idea of the gift and thereby selling it to the audience that this is a legitimate transaction. Good prompts for primary aged drama students in this activity are:

- I love this gift because it reminds me of ...
- I'm going to use this for ...
- How did you know I loved ...?

The receiver is to thank the gifter, then place the gift respectfully on the ground and pick up the next gift that they are to pass to a new receiver. The former gifter is then to return to their place in the circle.

When the student gives and receives a gift they are to sit down to denote that they have participated in their turn.

5. Sit Stand Look

'Sit Stand Look' is an improvisational movement activity where actors get to explore their characters in a physical way and not necessarily a verbal one. The key to this activity is the interaction with the other characters and staying true to your individual characterisation to sell the story to an audience.

For this exercise students are given stage three appropriate stimulus materials, either in pairs or individually, depending on the size of the group.

Stimulus materials are attached as images at the end of this document.

Students are given two minutes to discuss their stimulus with their partner/study on their own. They are to decide on a character to tell the story of what the stimulus means to them. The character could be featured in the stimulus or inspired by it.

Teacher then describes how 'Sit, Stand, Look' works.

On the performance space place six chairs in a row, then select three pairs or six individuals to sit in them. Their task, once the activity has started, is to either sit, stand or look (in any direction). At the start, there is to be no speaking or walking. The challenge is to tell a story and create a character using these limited tools. Students and chairs are added by the teacher throughout the activity.

The following are the stages in the activity. The idea is to build the scene to a cacophony of activity where characters become more developed.

1. Mute – just sit, stand, look (on chairs).
2. Movement – along lines (chairs added, students added).
3. Verbs added.
4. Pairs to leave the space with another pair.

At the completion of the task the pairs are to pair with another pair that they either connected with or clashed with.

6. Stimulus Materials – Group Discussion

With students in ten groups of four (one or two groups of five is fine), discuss the ideas they were presenting using movement. Specifically:

- How was the idea presented to the audience?
- What ideas/characters worked and could be developed further?

Quality Teaching Links

Examples of ways this resource embeds the Quality Teaching Framework are highlighted below.

Domain	Element	Example
Intellectual Quality	Problematic Knowledge	The students are given the opportunity during 'Sit, Stand, Look' to create and develop an alternate perspective with their character. Then they have an opportunity to relate to and create relationships, both positive and negative, with other characters.
	Metalanguage	Tutor highlights, explains and demonstrates improvisational terms. As needed, rephrases and contextualizes, for example, offer and blocking.
Significance	Inclusivity	The tasks involve all students regardless of skill level or background. They all have an equal opportunity to participate. They also have the opportunity to collaborate with their peers, for example, 'Sit, Stand, Look' characters.
	Narrative	Tutor encourages the students to create a gift narrative that they can enthusiastically animate with their language and physicality, for example, 'Be original, be funny, don't be inappropriate'.
Quality Learning Environment	Social Support	Tutor provides positive feedback to students at the completion of the task. Clear respect between teacher and students, for example, thanking students for being a respectful audience.
	Engagement	Students are fully engaged with the short activities that require verbal and physical participation, for example, video shows students attentively listening and participating.

Primary Improvisational Drama Glossary

The following terms are used within this resource, accompanied by some good ways to introduce these terms to students.

Term	Contextual meaning	Student language
Offer	To make an offer in drama is to present an idea or plot point to another character in an improvisational context.	'Making an offer' means presenting an idea in improvisation.
Blocking	To stand in front of another actor or significant prop/set.	When you stand in front of someone on stage.
	To refuse an offer an actor presents in an improvisational task.	Refusing/rejecting an offer.
	'Blocking a scene' – positioning actors when rehearsing a scene for the first time.	'Blocking a scene' is a director placing actors in position.
Improvisation	Creating a plot sequence and/or character interaction 'on the spot'. An improvisation can be spoken, mimed, performed with mask, puppet, etc.	Making up a story and character 'on the spot'.
Stimulus	A starting point for a play building session to devise a scene. A stimulus can be an actual object, food, picture, word/s or a song, etc.	A picture, object or words that inspire an idea for a scene.
Body language	Using facial expressions, gestures or whole-body movement to communicate with the other actors and audience.	Telling a story with your body and movement and not necessarily words.
Playbuilding	Creating a short play using a stimulus material or central idea and then collaborating within a group context to compose improvised dialogue and design movement to accompany the story.	Making up your own play in a group. Generally based on a stimulus material or central theme.

Stimulus Examples from the eClass

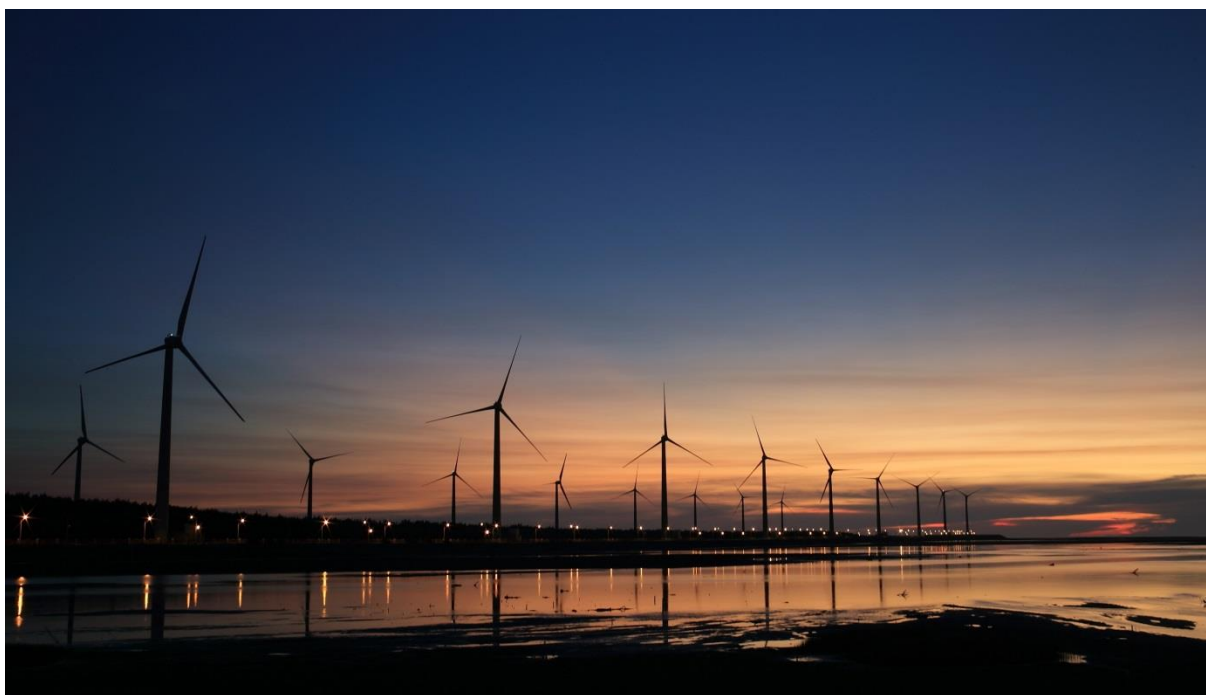


Image 1: Many windmills on the water



Image 2: When life gives you lemons, make lemonade



Image 3: Love is love

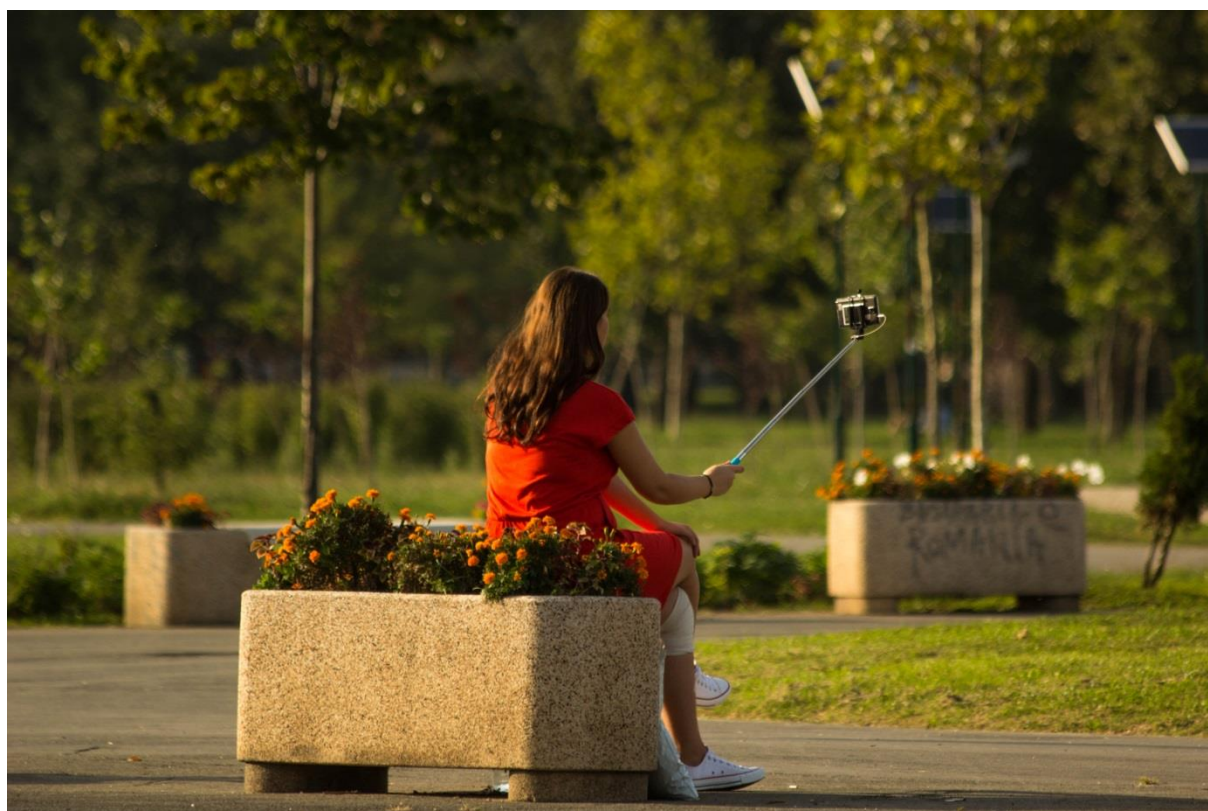


Image 4: Girl taking picture with selfie stick



Image 5: The internet is forever, proceed with caution



Image 6: Global warming



Image 7: Public transport



Image 8: Electronic devices



Image 9: Planting a tree



Image 10: Trying your best

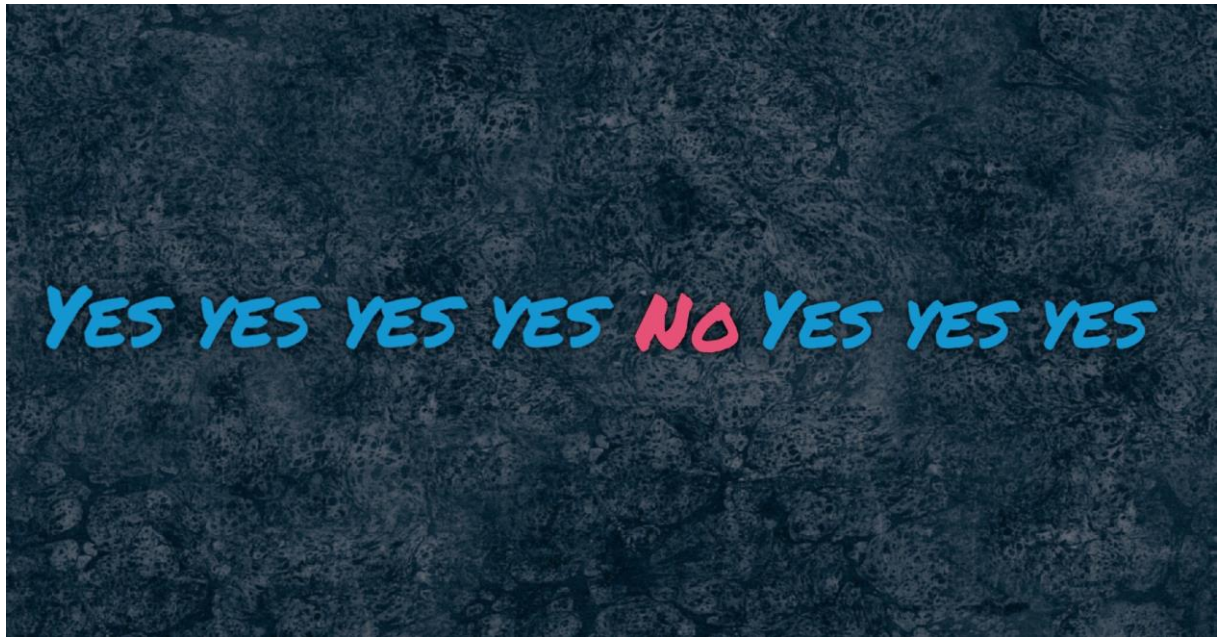


Image 11: Peer pressure



Image 12: Fitness



Image 13: Cultural inclusion



Image 14: Paying attention at school

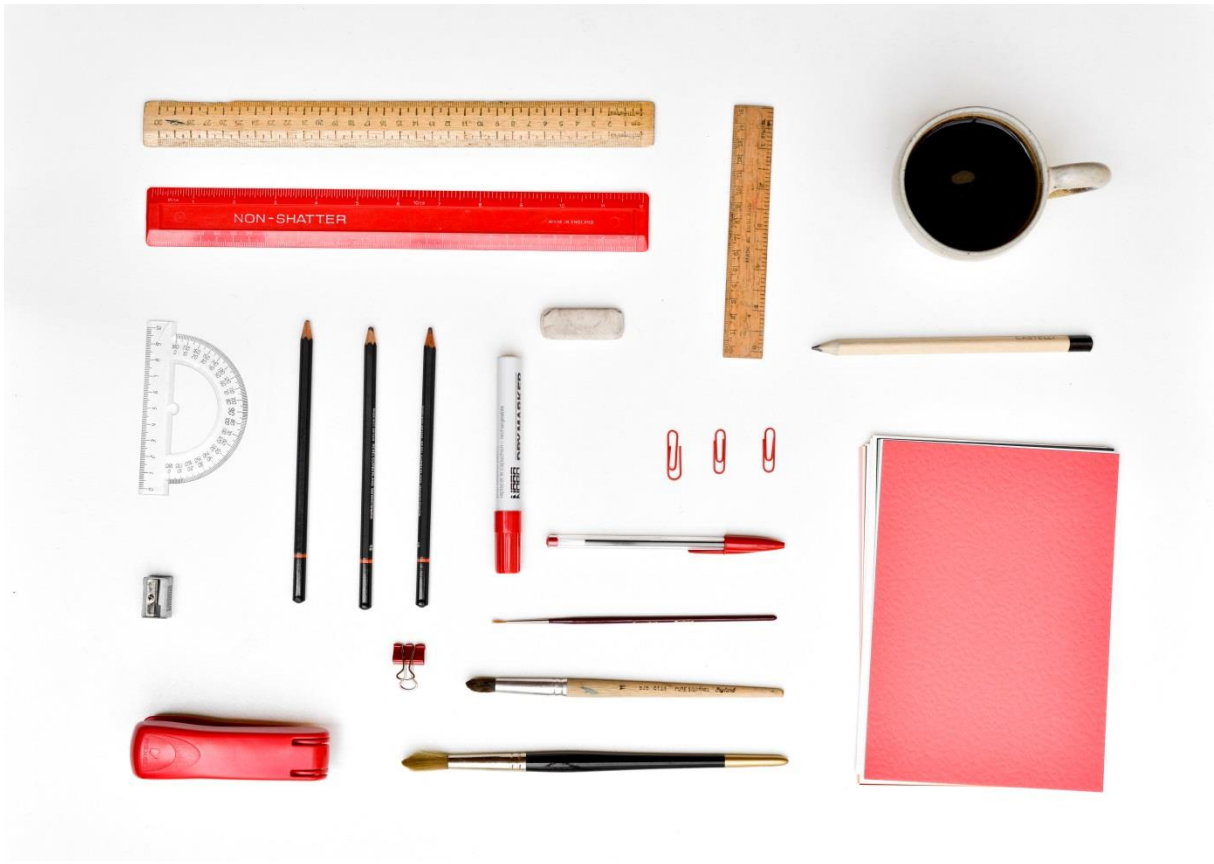


Image 15: Being organised



Image 16: Politician



Image 17: Refugees



Image 18: Sportsmanship



Image 19: Campground woman



Image 20: Fireman on rescue mission



Image 21: Photographic filter lens

About The Arts Unit Virtual Learning

Teacher professional learning can be completed online, is New South Wales Education Standards Authority (NESA) approved, and counts towards the required 50 hours of registered professional learning for NSW Department of Education teachers. Courses are also available on our [Learning Hub](#)¹ and can be used towards teacher identified hours in professional learning plans.

Content ranges from introductory lessons to advanced skill building. With both Australian and international industry professional partnerships, and The Arts Unit's experienced practitioners, content is delivered by experts in their fields and accompanied by useful classroom resources.

eClasses are practical lessons to take straight into the classroom, eModules reflect and analyse teaching practice, eClips are interviews and mini documentaries and eResources are a multidimensional tool that provides an in-depth insight into the creative process and can be used to create whole units of work.

The Arts Unit's rich and diverse virtual excursions are available for registration through Distance and Rural Technologies (DART) connections and our exciting live streamed events can be accessed via The Arts Unit's [Facebook](#)² page and [YouTube Live](#)³ channel.

So, register on The Arts Unit [Learning Hub](#) to browse and enjoy the quality virtual learning content. You will be notified through the Hub as new NESA approved, registered courses are available on MyPL.

For further information:

- go to The Arts Unit [Learning Hub](#)
- email Carolyn Hammer at virtual.learning.theartsunit@det.nsw.edu.au

¹ The Arts Unit Learning Hub – <https://learninghub.artsunit.nsw.edu.au>

² Facebook – <https://www.facebook.com/artsunit>

³ YouTube Live – <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCXVtXxh4cqSQs8EigBSDd2Q>