



Education
Public Schools



Virtual Learning

DRAMA

IMPROVISATION AND PLAYBUILDING (PRIMARY)

eClass 2 – Playbuilding

Presented by David Todd



The Arts Unit Virtual Learning

Access to online quality arts education support
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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, TV 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 Vaucluse Public School. In his role at The Arts Unit he produces the videos that appear on the Learning Hub.

Playbuilding

1. Getting Started

Each group of four is given a sentence starter. They are to come up with a one to two minute playbuilt scene based on the character work and based on the stimulus and on the negotiated theme based on the sentence starter:

1. Once upon a time.
2. Wow! That's some heavy rain!
3. Why can't you just listen to me?
4. I remember a time when ...
5. The lift isn't moving! We're stuck!
6. Is this Instagram worthy?
7. What filter do you think I should use?
8. What are you going to tell your mum?

9. Sometimes I just stop and think ...
10. This has really taught me the value of ...

2. Groups Rehearse

Students discuss ideas and suggest dialogue and movement to accompany a negotiated narrative. It is very important that the teacher visits each group to ensure this is happening effectively. Sometimes groups need assistance getting started in this process.

This part of the process involves students physically moving the play around and speaking their lines. This is not designed to be a quiet session; the students are creating!

3. Groups Present

The groups present their workshopped performance in the performance space.

Facilitator holds discussion after each scene about what worked and what didn't. Students as audience are also encouraged to offer feedback. The performers are given suggestions to modify their piece.

Depending on the size and time limitations of your playbuilding activity, the teacher can replay the scene and make changes to the piece whilst it's being performed. This ensures those suggestions are more accurately rehearsed.

4. Scene Amendments Rehearsed

Students take the feedback on board and rehearse the changes in their piece. This gives the students more of an opportunity to become familiar with the scene, their characters, the dynamics between characters and gain a greater grasp of their lines and movement.

5. Performance of Final Piece

If the workshop is a short course such as this one, this will be the final performance. If the play is to have a longer life, this would be another step in the process to devising a short play. Either the scene the students created could be expanded on or joined with some of the other scenes.

If a playbuilt performance is being designed for a drama festival or a school assembly, the teacher would completely take over the reins of directing the piece using all the ideas initially conceived by the students.

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.

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>