

5.11 Process Drama: Pedagogy of the Pause

Pedagogy of the Pause - Meaning in the Making

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Why?

Drama allows children to use their lived experiences and multiple ways of knowing for purposes of constructing and exploring text worlds. *Process Drama* is not meant to be a 'final' interpretation of a story, but rather as an ongoing interpretation of a story always *in the making* - "continuously evolving through our understanding of the world and our own bodies' experiences of and participation in that world" (Ellsworth, 2005, p.1). Process drama affords students the opportunity to critically ponder their own and others' lived experience as they struggle with the moral and ethical dilemmas presented within the story. As students moved their bodies to express experiences and represent ideas, they use their imagination to explore possible physical, social, cultural, economic and moral landscapes. In this strategy students explore a single story to learn about the variety of forms which process drama can take.

Who?

Use with students from kindergarten to high school who seem to be having difficulty comprehending what they are reading, who seem to be detached from what they are reading, or who seem to be having difficult imagining themselves in text.

Materials:

1. Handout (see Figure 1) *Glossary of Drama Forms*.
2. Choose a picture book that is engaging. (If the language and illustrations pique your interest and resonates emotionally with you, then the text offers potential for in depth

inquiry.) *The Teddy Bear* (McPhail, 2002) was chosen as a read aloud for this invitation because of its potential to bring the tensions of the "human condition" (arising out of a child's ordinary life circumstances) into focused exploration in relationship to students' own life experiences (see the **For More Information** section of this strategy lessons for a brief annotation of this book).

3. Sticky notes can be used to mark places in the story where you wish to pause and invited listeners to explore different dramatic forms.
4. Drawing, painting, and writing materials need to be available for students to share their life experiences and on which they can record decisions made.
5. Photocopies need to be made of selected story illustrations. Overhead transparencies or computer-scans of selected story illustrations (with accompanying projector and screen) could also be used.
6. Mural paper, a marker and masking tape are needed to record ideas on a body-sized outline of a character.
7. A few props are needed to support the teacher's role playing:
 - (a) two hats (one hat for playing the role of the mother or father in the story – depending on which of these characters the teacher wishes to play, and one hat for the bearded man in the story);
 - (b) a large overcoat for playing the role of the bearded man in the story (the coat needs to fit the teacher).

How?

Part I – Preparation for Engagement

- I. Invite students to think about an object of their own which they care very much about - something that gives them joy. Offer students a choice in the way they wish to describe this personal object; for example, they may choose to describe their object by talking about it with a friend, by drawing it, by painting it, or by writing a description about it, and so forth. Invite students to briefly share their spoken/drawn/painted/written creations. The purpose of this opening experience is to create space for students to find an immediate personal connection to the text world (which might lead, for instance, to their developing empathy for the little boy in the story who loses his beloved teddy bear). As well, this opening experience is designed to support students in making experiential connections among themselves through chosen modes of expression that enable them to find their own strengths and experience success.
2. Next, invite students to participate in an initial drama experience – as a way of introducing them to drama as an alternative way of making and sharing meaning. Invite them to become a statue – a still figure – pretending to hold the special object they have just talked/drawn/painted/written about. Ask them, "What would it look like to be holding something so precious?" This initial drama experience sets the stage for the drama to come and serves as an opportunity for the teacher to assess where students are in terms of this new way of handling themselves.
3. Once any wanderings students have about participating in the drama have been addressed to their satisfaction, ask each student if he/she is willing to "give drama a try"; willing participation is a necessary first step to drama engagement. Experience suggests that if students choose to "sit out" and observe this first time, their reluctance to actively participate rarely persists beyond a single session.

Part II -Connecting to the Text

1. Introduce *The Teddy Bear* (McPhail, 2002) making a connection to students' exploration of objects that are dear to them, for example: "Just like all of you, the little boy in this story has a very special object – a teddy bear – which he loves very much and who loves him too. The boy and his teddy bear go everywhere together. ..."
2. Display the front cover of the book. The book may simply be held up for all to see or the image of the cover illustration may be projected on a screen using an overhead transparency or computer-scanned image. Provide time for students to view the illustration closely and to comment on their observations. Encourage students to notice everything they can and to describe what images they see and the relationships among these images. Open-ended questions - such as "Why are the boy and teddy bear in the centre of the illustration?" - may help students think more deeply about the selected images, the relationships among images and the overall design. This initial experience demonstrates a deep reading of a visual text. Encourage students to consider the subtleties and nuances of the illustration; for example, "Why do you think the artist who designed this cover chose these particular colors?"
3. This viewing of the front cover illustration is now connected to the students' own life experiences. The following experience is designed to bring the environment of the story to life. The cover illustration depicts a park. Students draw upon what they know of "a park," as they begin to build the world of the text. Ask students to form small groups of three or four. Give each group approximately 5 minutes (a little longer may be required, especially this first time) to create a Tableau – a meaningful, still picture using their faces, body positions, posture, gestures, space between themselves, and so forth – to

depict their experiences of what they *do* or what they have observed others *do* in a park. Focusing on the *actions* that take place in the environment invites readers to take a step back from the specifics of the story and to see the setting in three dimensions.

4. Once all of the groups are ready, have one group at a time presents its tableau to the rest of the class. The class claps each presenting group into its still-body composition and the group "freezes" for approximately 15 seconds. During this "frozen" time, invite the other students into conversation about what they see in the tableau. Have them read the tableau as a visual text. What are the characters doing? Can you tell who they are? How old are they? Are they related? How are they feeling? Slow down the viewing experience and take the students deeper into each tableau, inviting them to observe detail and nuance. The tableaux groups can be brought back into "frozen" position any number of times if the other students need to observe them again or if they have more to say about them.
5. After all the tableaux have been presented and discussed, ask students to revisit the front cover illustration of *The Teddy Bear* (McPhail, 2002). Invite them to think again about what else they notice now that they have had time to contemplate their own and others' experiences in a park and have focused their attention on "reading" visual details.

Part III -Locally, Co-Creating the Text World

- I. Read aloud the title and author/illustrator's name and begin reading the story: "The teddy bear has a good home, a warm and cozy place to sleep, many friends, and someone who loved him." Continue reading aloud for the next several pages and pause after reading the line: "By the time he was missed, and a search begun, it was too late-he was not to be found."

2. The beauty of a picture book is that the illustrations create the potential for making meaning beyond the print. The narrative told in the nine images accompanying the print (on the pages from the beginning of the story to where the read aloud is paused) present details not mentioned in the words of the text.
3. In pairs or small groups, ask students to select a photocopy of one of the nine illustrations. Group members take on the Mantle of the Expert: they are invited to "become" the illustrator, David McPhail, and to use his "artist's eyes" and "illustrator's imagination" to discuss the meanings created in the details of the images.
4. Each group guides the class in a deep reading of their particular illustration.
5. Because the final, ninth illustration, includes all of the characters who have appeared in the story to this point – the boy, his parents, the two people cafe employees, and the teddy bear – the "illustrator group" that focused on this illustration is invited to transpose their linguistic interpretation of the illustration into a three-dimensional tableau. Invite the members of this group to embody the story characters' feelings and thoughts, drawing upon their earlier experience with tableau. In role as characters in the story, tell group members that they will also have an opportunity, later in the drama, to speak the minds of the characters they are portraying in the tableau.
6. Give the tableau group members approximately 5 minutes to figure out how they will represent their individual character's thoughts and feelings as well as the complexity of the relationships among the characters. During this time, project the same illustration this group is working with onto a screen or to provide photocopies of the illustration for the rest of the students in the class so that they too can read, trouble, question, and discuss this illustration.

7. The tableau group moves into position and "freezes". Again, invite the class to describe what they observe and where they observe it.
8. Following this tableau discussion, using **Tapping In**- move among the tableau group members, placing a hand on one and then another participant's shoulder - as an invitation to that character to speak his/her feelings and thoughts. Once a tableau character has been "tapped in," she/he "unfreezes" and voices what she/he has been expressing visually/physically.
9. Invite the class to ask any of the "in role" characters a question; for example, "the boy" might be asked about his feelings when he lost the teddy bear or his "mother and father" might be asked what they were feeling when the boy discovered his teddy bear was gone, and so forth.
10. Depending on the depth of the class conversation about the tableau, "think aloud" – asking new questions or making comments about remarks students have made. In response, class or tableau group members may wish to "talk back" to your wanderings.
11. Continue the read aloud resumes from: "The teddy bear was unhappy and afraid." Pause again after the teddy bear declares: "My little boy has rescued me!"
12. This passage is rich in sensory images. Give students a few minutes to imagine this setting in response to a question such as: "What might the teddy bear be hearing, smelling and seeing?"
13. Ask students form themselves into small groups to plan (for about 5 minutes) and then present a **Soundscape** – an orchestrated "sound picture," evoking the auditory atmosphere of this moment in the story. Group members contribute their spoken words,

sounds, rhythms and so forth, as an auditory representation of the teddy bear's perceptions of its surroundings.

14. Begin the read aloud again: "But the hands that held him did not belong to the little boy." Pause at: "Night came on, and the man made his way home."
15. Deeply reading one of the illustrations (by holding up the book up or projecting the illustration on a screen) from the just completed read aloud passage (of the bearded man and the teddy bear lying together in a dumpster at night), invite students to draw upon the sensory experience they just had in preparing their soundscapes, but this time invite them to offer their ideas about what the teddy bear might be smelling or seeing in this new setting.
16. Ask the students if they could help you become the "bearded man" in the story, by helping you on with "the man's overcoat". Invite students to help you move further into **Teacher in Role** by telling the bearded man where and how to sit, and so forth. This collaborative process eases you into role and helps the children understand what is going on. You are now in a position to learn about and facilitate the students' understanding of the bearded man.
17. Once you are in role, invite the students to slip into role again themselves –pretending to be the little boy. And, adding one further drama form, open yourself to **Hot Seating** – responding in character (as the bearded man), to the students' (as the little boy) questions about the bearded man. For example, the students may decide to question the legitimacy of the bearded man's possession of the boy's teddy bear, or they may wish to probe the nature of the bearded man's relationship with the bear, and so forth. "In role" and "hot seating" drama forms create space for the students to ask questions which they may *need*

to ask about the issues of the story world - homelessness, poverty, and so forth.

Importantly, these drama forms also create space for the teacher to learn about and facilitate students' understandings - without having to move into a more didactic, "telling" mode of teaching. As you listen to and respond to students' questions, you are also involved in ongoing "assessment for" future teaching.

18. Continue the read aloud from: "That night, for the first time since the teddy bear came into his life, the little boy went to bed without him." The next pause takes place after: "Best of all, the bear still felt loved."
19. This read aloud passage could be interpreted as showing how the boy and teddy bear have gradually adapted to their separate lives. Divide the class into groups of three students each. Invite one member of the group to act as the "sculptor". The other two students agree to be **Sculpted** (as if they are made of clay) into tableau figures representing the boy and the teddy bear at the time of their *initial* separation (earlier in the story). With little talking, and with mutual respect shown for both the artistry of the sculptor and the vulnerability of the "boy" and "teddy bear" who give themselves over to the sculptor, the sculptor molds the other two group members into body positions and relationship representing her/his perceptions of these two characters' emotions at this earlier point in the story.
20. Once the boy and the teddy bear are sculpted into "still" positions (this should take about 3-5 minutes), the sculptors are invited to participate in a gallery walk - "reading" and discussing the sculptures, but this time wearing the "mantle of expert sculptors".
21. Within each small group, the members then exchange roles. A new sculptor steps forward and molds the other two group members into the boy and the teddy bear in the current,

emotional environment of the story (at the point where the read aloud has just paused, and where the boy and the teddy bear appear to have adjusted to their separation). The same gallery walk, with the same visual reading and sculptors' expert conversation, follows the sculpting process with these new sculptures.

22. Invite two, voluntary, small groups - one representing each of the two different periods in the story (when the boy and teddy bear are first separated and later when they appear to have adapted to living apart) –to recreate their sculptures on opposite sides of the classroom, with space for the rest of the class to sit between them.
23. Using **Role on the Wall** –a body-sized, paper outline of the boy (one outline for each of the two sculptures) posted on the walls behind each of the sculptures –use a marker to record the words or phrases students brainstorm to represent the boy's thoughts and feelings at these two different moments along the story's plot line.
24. Drawing from these "role on the wall" outlines, invite volunteers to narrate the story events that have happened in the space/time between the two sculptures.
25. Resume the read aloud with: "The winter came to an end." Continue reading the next few pages, as the story builds to a climax: "Standing in front of the bench, he cried out, 'My bear! My bear! Where is my bear?'" Pause.
26. "In role," and once again in the "hot seat," alternate between playing two different characters. Use two different hats to identify which character you are at that moment. One hat represents the character of the boy's mother or father (the teacher's choice) and a different hat represents the character of the bearded man.
27. Guide the students, who are also in role (again pretending to be the boy) to ask questions they have for either of the two characters you are playing (either the "mother or father" as

one character) or "the bearded man" (as the other character) – at the height of the tension the boy is experiencing at the story's climax. In role as the boy, students might be guided to ask his mother or father: "Why are you hurrying me toward the park exit?" or he might want to ask the bearded man: "This is my bear, where did you get it?" or "You screamed so loudly, is this bear *that* important to you?" While you facilitate students' in role questions, these questions should be the students' *real* questions.

28. Read only the next line in the story before pausing the story again: "The traffic light turned green. The sign blinked WALK."
29. The symbols in this passage – the green, traffic light and blinking WALK sign (along with the boy's parents hurrying him along on a previous page) – could be interpreted as a "chorus of permission" for the boy to leave the park with "his" teddy bear. Conversely, the wail of the bearded man (on the previous page) as he searches for "his" missing bear, could be interpreted as a symbol that "gets in the way" of the boy's blissful park exit with the teddy bear. As the tension builds in the story world, the teacher asks: "What will the boy decide to do?"
30. To help students think deeply about the moral complexity of the boy's decision, invite them again to be in role as the boy and to take 5 minutes to **Draw and/or Write in Role** what decision they would make (as the boy) in the same emotional/moral context. Students are also asked to explore as consciously as possible the factors that contribute to their decision.
31. Ask students to then identify one image or one phrase they think was most influential in their deciding what to do. When you "tap in" – by placing your hand on the student's

shoulder – that student comments on this selected image or reads the selected phrase from her/his writing. You then "tap" the next student and so on.

32. Before you resume the read aloud, have the class form a **Conscience Circle**. Ask for a volunteer to be in role as the boy. As "the boy" walks in one direction around the inside of the circle, the students he passes offer their moral reflections on the choices they believe he should make.
33. Begin reading from: "But instead of crossing the street, the little boy ran back into the park." Read to the end of the story: "Then, with his mother and father beside him, he walked back to the corner to wait for the light to change."
34. As partners, invite students to talk about their own locally, constructed decision and to consider their own decisions in relationship to the "boy's" text world decision.
35. Thank students for their participation in the drama. Invite them to offer their reflective comments about this experience.

Idea Sheet:

As a finale to this drama, open up conversational space for the whole class to explore their decision making in relationship to the decisions which the boy made. Open-ended questions which might be asked include: "Did the boy's decision change the way you felt about the decision that you had made before you heard the ending of the story?" "How would you have ended the story?" "What do you think about the different decisions we made as a class?" "What do you think about the different reasons we drew upon?" "Is there one 'right' decision?"

Adapted from Miller, C. & Saxton, J. (2004). Into the story: Language in action through drama. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann

Annotation:

McPhail, D. (2002). *The teddy bear*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.

Left behind at a diner, a small boy's beloved bear is accidentally thrown out: "He lay squashed in a dark, smelly place, and even though he had a fine fur coat he was beginning to get a chill." Rescued from the trash by a homeless man, the bear, like the boy, is lonely at first, but eventually both adjust ("The bear still felt loved"). At the park one day the bear is left briefly on a bench, where he is spotted by none other than his original owner. Delighted to be reunited with his old friend, the boy nevertheless notices the homeless man's despair and willingly gives him the bear.

For More Information:

Ellsworth, E. (2005). *Places of /earning: Media, architecture, pedagogy*. New York: Taylor & Francis Group.