

OPEN THEATRE COMPANY - THEATRE SESSIONS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

There are three key features of the theatre practice that are the basis of the development of the work in schools:

1. Developing our non-verbal interaction/communication skills through exploring ways of **developing dialogue** in the following ways:
 - through responding together with music
 - through copying each other physically
 - through use of simple props
 - through eye contact
 - through touch
 - through facial and body gesture
 - through sound
 - through emotion
2. Using the power of theatre – which is essentially about creating the unreal and the imaginary – to enhance our understanding of the real, and of ourselves and others. The theatre practice has three interlinked stages: playing, pretending and performing (see below). All three of these stages are used to develop interaction/communication in differing ways.
3. Using the energy and involvement of the group (including the adults) to help us in the above. In many ways the theatre practice can be compared with intensive interaction but the most significant difference is that it takes place within a group not on a one-to-one basis, and is therefore potentially more powerful.

Weekly Sessions

The work always develops in response to the particular individuals in the group and at a pace that suits the group. A journey begins to develop within the sessions, which moves from playing to pretending and on to performing, although in many ways all three are present throughout the work. Although each particular journey will vary considerably, the focus for the work is always the same: the development of creative and personal and social skills that support learning across the curriculum. These include confidence, verbal and non-verbal communication skills, social cognition, curiosity, empathy, imagination, literacy and narrative skills, social interaction and creativity.

Each weekly session develops in response the work developed in the previous session, a new stimulus or activity is included or the work from the previous session is repeated to encourage a deeper and more meaningful connection. Simple themes for the work can be used to help guide the journey – these can emerge from the work or be added in if appropriate. A final sharing of the work is often used to mark the end of a project.

Playing, pretending and performing

Playing is happening when a child

- creates in 'languages' beyond verbal : *e.g. through physical movement, through objects, through music and sound, through facial expression*
- creates dialogue, interaction and communication with others with these languages
- explores imaginatively the possibilities of what to do with the real, concrete and present
- develops and enjoys a sequence of activities (first steps of narrative)

Pretending happens when a child

- creates involvement, engagement and connection with 'other realities' using the non-verbal languages: *e.g. pretending to be another person, to be somewhere else, that one thing is something else, miming, conjuring up feelings, creating narrative*
- explores imaginatively the possibilities of what to do with the 'unreal'
- creates connections and dialogue with others in these imaginary worlds
- extends a sequences of activities through exploring possibilities

Performing happens when a child

- develops awareness and acceptance that others are watching/witnessing him as he pretends
- develops understanding that he is communicating through his pretence to others
- is able to repeat his pretending

Playing, pretending and performing happen best and are most effective in an atmosphere that is: fun, pleasurable, joyful, free, spontaneous, playfulness, not logical, safe, secure, non-judgemental, attentive and authentic

The Power of Interaction

Underlying the theatre practice is a very simple premise:

1. We all develop as human beings through interaction with others, if we limit the means of interaction/communication we limit the development
2. We rely far too much on words as our primary means of interaction, and lack awareness of other means
3. We all need to develop understanding and skills in a wide range of non-verbal interaction methods to facilitate development in all of us, but particularly those with learning disabilities