

MAKING A DRAMA OUT OF EARLY YEARS



**WRITTEN BY MARION WALKER:
 AN OUTSTANDING CHILDMINDER AT
 SOAR CHILDCARE AND AREA LEAD
 AND MENTOR FOR THE EXPERTS
 AND MENTORS SCHEME**

DRAMATIC EMOTIONS: ENHANCING PSED THROUGH PUPPETRY

"I had it first!" "It's mine, give it back!" These are familiar phrases I often hear in my childcare setting as children navigate the complex world of sharing and building positive relationships. Over the years, I've discovered that drama and puppetry can be incredibly effective tools in helping children remember and practice the social skills we model every day.



Meet Dopey Donkey - he's not just a puppet, but an integral member of our setting. He's a friend, a confidante, and a playful companion all rolled into one. The children adore him, especially when he's nibbling on their socks or trying to give them silly kisses. But Dopey Donkey is more than just a source of laughter. He's not perfect. He forgets to share, sometimes shouts, gets angry, or leaves a mess behind. He even struggles with using the equipment properly. To the children, he's real. They love the opportunity to correct him, reinforcing valuable skills like empathy, following directions and safety.



With his unique voice and mannerisms, Dopey Donkey becomes more than just a toy - he's a valued member of our community. We nurture and teach him as we learn together. These interactions bring a joyful learning experience, supported by [the Education Endowment Foundation's \(EEF\) research](#), which shows that role play and puppetry can significantly enhance self-regulation and empathy in children. Dopey Donkey offers a platform for reviewing and teaching positive behaviours without putting any child who might be struggling emotionally in the spotlight.

A DRAMATIC VOICE: ENHANCING COMMUNICATION THROUGH ROLE PLAY

"If we do that, we might squish the frog. We have to be gentle." "Don't touch the web, or the spider will get us!"

Today, we're not in the playroom; we've ventured into the deepest, darkest jungle. Armed with a simple map, we navigate this new terrain, encountering different sounds and creatures. As we act out how we feel about the temperature or the thick foliage, I introduce new vocabulary, giving it further meaning through our shared experience.

We use problem-solving skills to rescue a frog trapped in a giant spider's web, encouraging the children to practice using new words and problem-solving language.

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We explore terms like “slither,” “sidewinding,” and “serpentine” as we pretend to be snakes rescuing eggs from a fallen nest. Dramatic experiences like these engage the children, providing an immersive way to learn new vocabulary and develop communication skills.

[The EEF highlights](#) that language-rich environments, such as those created through drama activities, play a crucial role in supporting language development. Through dramatic play, children ask questions, explain ideas and interpret language, building confidence and proficiency in their communication. Starting small with acting out vocabulary from a shared story can evolve into full-on role play, gradually expanding their language skills.



DRAMA IN ACTION: BOOSTING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY THROUGH DRAMA

“I can’t. It’s too scary,” was a phrase I frequently heard from one of the children whenever she encountered the challenge of crossing the balance beam. Although she wanted to succeed, she often hesitated. To help her overcome this, we created a dramatic scenario that provided the encouragement she needed to achieve her self-set goal. In our story, the children were tasked with completing a series of actions to rescue a trapped baby otter.

To reach the stranded animal, they had to climb a rope ladder, cross a log over a waterfall, jump over rocks and move a log to free the otter. The excitement of the mission and her desire to save the otter gave her the motivation she needed, and with newfound confidence, she successfully crossed the beam.



We consistently incorporate drama into our play to give meaning to our physical activities. From large motor actions, like leaping over stones to cross a river, to fine motor skills, such as using tweezers to collect samples from an alien planet, we create opportunities for children to practise and refine their abilities. Role-play provides an engaging, playful context that encourages repeated skill practice.



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Drama not only motivates children to move and express themselves physically, but also supports the development of coordination and balance, all while keeping them engaged and active. [The EEF emphasises](#) that pretend play and the addition of creativity to movement are key to promoting physical activity.



THE POWER OF DRAMA IN EARLY YEARS SETTINGS

The benefits of using drama in early years settings are far-reaching. From improving language and communication skills to promoting emotional, social, and cognitive development, drama plays a vital role in fostering a well-rounded educational experience. Research from the Education Endowment Foundation underscores the importance of drama as a tool for supporting development across the prime areas of learning.

By incorporating drama into early childhood education, we provide children with invaluable opportunities for growth, helping them become confident, well-rounded learners. So, it's time to embrace the dramatic arts in our early years settings, ensuring our children are equipped for success, both now and in the future.



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