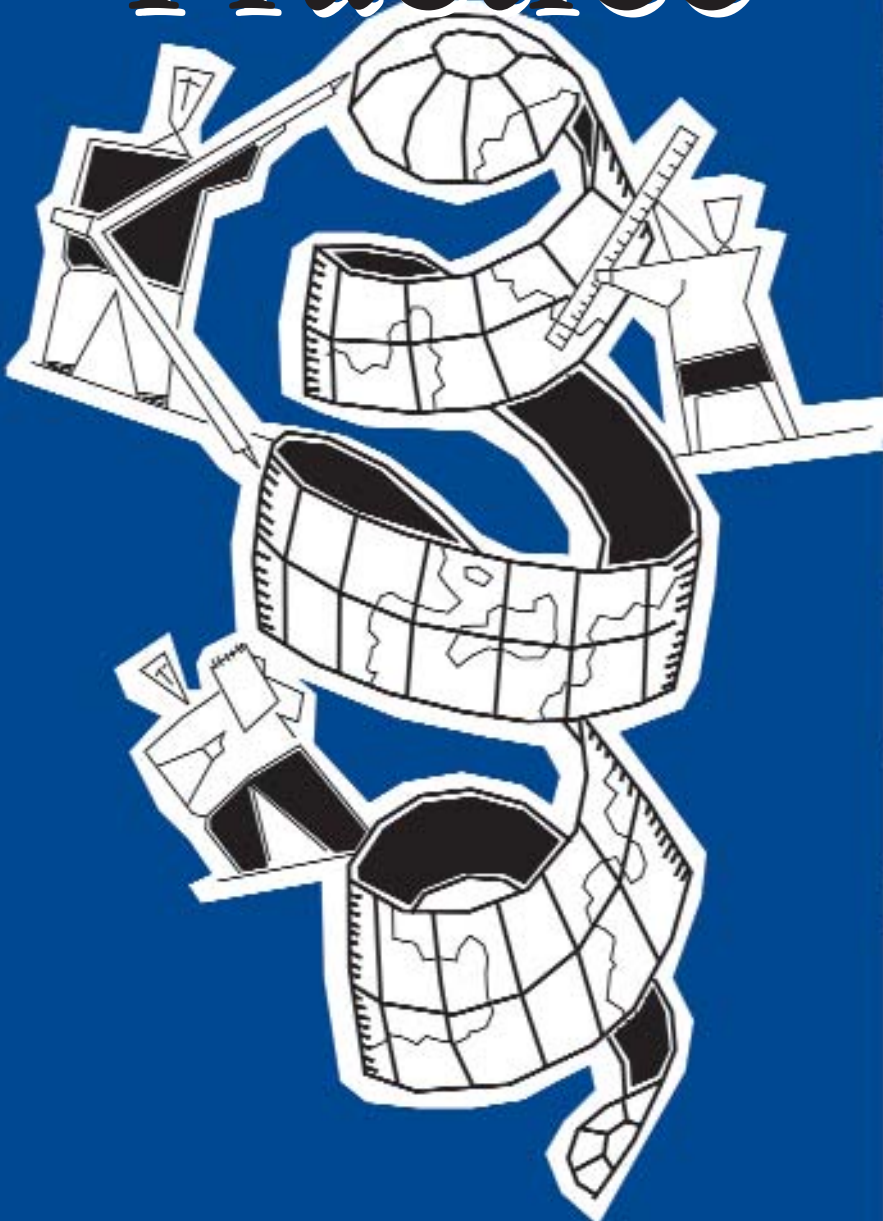


Theory — INTO — Practice



Dramatically Good Geography

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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
FOR GEOGRAPHY TEACHERS
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Introduction

Could a classroom be a rainforest, a waste site, the top of a mountain, a national park and 25 individuals with their own experiences, perspectives, values and beliefs?

The aim of this book is to consider what opportunities exist for using drama strategies in geography classrooms and how such imagined experiences can contribute to key stage 3 students' geographical learning. We explore such questions as:

- How can students be given opportunities thoroughly to explore their own values, beliefs and opinions through geography?
- How can geography help students begin to understand the values and beliefs of others?
- How can geography contribute to students' understanding of complex people-environment relationships in a way that will enable them to develop informed arguments, reassess their values, and critically evaluate their perspectives and those of others?

The literature which explores effective communication in the geography classroom is wide-ranging and includes material on classroom talk (Roberts, 1986; Leat, 2000, Butt, 2001) as well as the use of simulations (Walford, 1996; Joyce *et al.*, 2000). However, little has been written on the use of drama methods to enhance geographical learning. While the QCA Schemes of Work (2000) advocate the use of drama in aspects of teaching and learning, for example Unit 3: People everywhere, Unit 6: World Sport, and Unit 18: The global fashion industry, what is needed is an exploration of the 'Why?' and 'How?' of the use of drama in the geography classroom.

This book draws the experiences of key stage 3 students and Post-graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) students using drama to contribute to learning in geography. Chapters 1 and 2 discuss the nature of creative talking and how it can become part of the geography curriculum. Chapters 3 and 4 explore the practical issues surrounding the use of drama in the classroom and offer suggestions for ways of implementing drama strategies. Chapters 5 and 6 consider the implications of the use of drama for teachers and students, and Chapter 7 considers how to assess geographical understanding as a consequence of drama activities in geography.

It is not our intention to convert geography teachers into drama teachers, but rather to consider the unique contribution drama methods can make to the understanding of geographical concepts.



1: Creative talk in geography



Creativity and being creative is nothing new to geography teachers, it is what they do best. They creatively interpret subject content, ideas, events and experiences so that students of all ages, abilities and interests can learn. Being an effective geography teacher *requires* creativity.

What does creativity in the geography curriculum actually look like? Rawling and Westaway (2003) extract three overlapping themes from the CAPE-UK Project (INFER, 1998) - Expressive, Imaginative and Critical thinking. They identify them as the means through which geography can contribute to creativity, and vice versa (Rawling and Westaway, 2003, p. 5). Durbin offers a slightly different model: the Creativity wheel. Here the role of the teacher is that of a facilitator who advises, encourages and assures, thus ensuring that students are enabled to use their imagination, be original, pursue purpose and make judgements about values (Durbin, 2003, p. 65). Both models advocate that the content-driven geography curriculum can now be put to one side in favour of a curriculum that enables students to explore geographical concepts in a more critical and thoughtful way.

Talking in geography

Communication takes many different forms in busy classrooms - writing, listening, body language, observing and *talking* – but student talk is frequently banished to the margins of learning activities. Classroom talk tends to be dominated by the teacher (Butt, 2000). Yet talking is how most young people communicate most of the time. They talk when considering an idea or an issue, when they explain thoughts and feelings, and when they express concerns and opinions, as well as at other times. Young people in and out of school have a natural tendency to talk: in friendship groups, on the telephone, with their family, and during play. They use talk in a wide variety of social settings and for a range of purposes.

Where students are given the opportunity to talk in the classroom, the talk is often limited and highly controlled. For example, they may answer a series of closed questions, or discuss a particular idea where specific outcomes are required. Such forms of classroom talk can limit the learning process in geography as the opportunity to explore new ideas



is curtailed. Wider social and personal benefits to students are also lost as the opportunity to develop oral skills and self-confidence through purposeful talk is forfeited. Placing limits on talk, while seeming to be an effective form of managing behaviour can often be experienced by students as repressive and de-motivating.

The geography national curriculum is explicit in the expectation that geography should enable students to: 'communicate in ways appropriate to the task and audience' (DfEE/QCA, 1999a, p. 22), but it is only in the non-statutory element relating to key stage 1 that it is referred to directly. The non-statutory guidance for key stage 2 and key stage 3 refers only to 'building on' various aspects of the English curriculum, including 'En1: Speaking and listening' (DfEE/QCA, 1999b, p. 31).

The *Literacy Across the Curriculum* training materials (DfEE/SEU, 2001), for the Key Stage 3 Strategy, provide teachers with ideas and structures for organising group talk in the classroom, but the embedded message about 'talking' is very much to do with students talking, as themselves, in groups. Useful suggestions are made about different types of group structure, the pros and cons of different forms of group organisation, the problems associated with group work and what group talk can do for students. The practice advocated can apply to many different contexts and the explicit advice under the heading 'Golden rules' is that talk can and should be part of classroom events.

What is missing is any direct reference to drama as a means for encouraging exploratory and creative talk. At no point are teachers or students actively invited to step beyond the confines of the classroom into the world of the imagination, to use talk creatively in order to extend understanding.

How can creative talk be part of learning geography?

Leat notes that 'understanding develops through talk as ideas and interpretations are communicated and shared' (1998, p. 160). Based on the work of the National Oracy Project, he goes on to identify the indicators of quality talk in the classroom as being:

- **reciprocity**: where students, through talking in groups, appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of different ideas and thus work towards alternative solutions
- **speculation, making connections and interpreting**: where students start to pose themselves questions and 'ponder' alternatives
- **talking at length**: where students are able to explore their own thinking, justify their own ideas and offer their opinions in more than a few words and not necessarily in response to a teacher-directed question
- **students initiating**: where students, rather than the teacher, initiate discussion on a particular theme, topic or aspect of geography, and the teacher responds
- **teacher questions**: where the teacher dedicates more time to the use of open questions which enable students to speculate, interpret and reflect (Leat, 1998, p. 160).



What Leat is describing is the oral version of extended writing - extended talking. Extended talking affords students the opportunity to talk at length, talk in depth, use a wide range of vocabulary, explore their own ideas and those of others, express opinions, develop arguments and reveal feelings. Extended writing becomes creative writing when students are expected to use imaginative vocabulary and varied linguistic techniques, to explore and exploit language and to 'organise and structure material to convey ideas themes and characters' (DfEE, 2001, p. 37).



Photo: Diane Swift



A helpful way to think about the use of creative talk is in terms of styles of teaching. These styles can be grouped into three categories – closed, framed and negotiated – which describe the relative levels of student and teacher participation in the learning process, known as ‘the participant dimension’ (Figure 1, overleaf) (Roberts, 1996). The model, summarised in Figure 1, has been adapted to focus on creative talk. All three categories have their merits, depending on the context, content and degree of use in the classroom. However, in relation to developing students’ creative talking skills, we are most interested in the ‘negotiated’ category.

Figure 1:

The participant dimension and classroom talk.
After: Barnes *et al.*, 1987.

	Style of teaching and learning		
	Closed	Framed	Negotiated
Content	Teacher led, subject content specific and not negotiable.	Teacher led but based upon an appreciation of students’ perspectives.	Teachers and students contribute to shaping the content. Content becomes negotiable.
Focus	Teacher is subject expert; students have little to contribute.	Teacher is subject expert; students contribute their limited perspectives.	Teacher is facilitator; supports and prompts open-ended talk via key questions, probing and listening. Creative talk encouraged via use of resources, group processes and drama strategies.
Students’ role	Listening. Any student talk is in response to teacher-led closed questions and is therefore limited in scope.	Contributors to more open-ended discussions.	Have responsibility to contribute and participate. Emphasis on listening and talking together creatively.
Key concepts	Teacher communicates knowledge to students.	Teacher shares knowledge with students and builds on their current level of understanding.	Students explore their current level of understanding and, through talking and sharing, deepen understanding of key geographical issues.
Methods	Subject-led exposition by teacher. Use of subject-specific language.	Exposition with discussions. Students given opportunities to contribute ideas, perspectives and opinions.	Group and whole-class talk. Students interrogate and critically evaluate geographical concepts using creative talk. They are responsible for their learning.



It is in the 'negotiated' category that students are encouraged to build on what they know, take a high degree of responsibility for the learning process, and shape and inform the learning outcomes. They are required to explore their own use of language and to use and apply different languages in different contexts. By this we do not necessarily mean modern foreign languages, although this is possible (see Coyle, 1996), but rather the language of others, which identify someone as an individual with particular perspectives, values and beliefs. It gives an opportunity to imagine what it might be like to 'be' someone else, to see the world through someone else's eyes.

Drama, as a vehicle for developing creative talk, enables students to use their imagination, prior knowledge and interests, as well as language, to investigate, enquire into, hypothesise about and explore new geographical ideas. It can lead to their assessment and re-assessment of perspectives (their own and others') while also developing a greater confidence, a sense of responsibility and enhanced self-esteem.

In this book, what is being proposed is that drama can be used as a vehicle for enabling key stage 3 students to develop their creative talking skills.