Chapter 8

# Drama, social justice education and education for sustainable development

## Theory in action

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### Introduction

The neoliberal shift in education, characterised by values and language of the marketplace, presents a significant challenge to social justice education (SJE), education for sustainable development (ESD) and the arts. Educational policy and decision-making have become increasingly infused and driven by the logic of profit, and disciplines that have a purchase in the marketplace are valued more highly (Ball, 2016). It seems that the dominant, marketised view of education is becoming accepted as the norm. Writing in an Australian context, Keddie (2016) asserts that students in today's classrooms are students of the market, crafting their identities and making sense of their educational and employment experiences and choices within the context of neoliberal imperatives. Gallagher (2016) concurs, noting how students have begun to internalise robust neoliberal messages that emphasise individualism, usefulness and competition. Keddie (2016) refers to the anxiety experienced by high achievers, those "succeeding" in such a climate, highlighting the very real connections between a neoliberal education system and children's wellbeing. Eliasson (2016) spotlights this drift towards individualism and argues that one of the greatest challenges today is that people feel untouched by issues affecting humankind and fail to feel connected to a greater *we*. A need, therefore, for critical, relational pedagogies such as drama, which require human interaction, co-operation, communication, imagination, experimentation and critical reflection, becomes apparent. Rather than accepting the neoliberal shift, we consider drama a critical, relational pedagogy, that because of its promotion of interdependence and connectedness, presents a timely counter-narrative.

It is important at the outset to explain our use of the term "drama". We draw on Heathcote (1991), Bolton (1984) and O'Neill (1995), important contributors to a rich history of thinking and research in drama in the education context. We are particularly inspired by Davis (2014) and his understanding of "Process Drama" in which he considers it both an art form, which draws on key components of theatre, and a collaborative endeavour which spotlights social issues for collective consideration by teachers and children. Cognisant of the already complex nomenclature associated with the field (Process Drama, Drama-in-Education, Educational Drama, Drama Pedagogy, Applied Theatre and more) we have adopted the overarching term "drama" throughout the chapter to describe an approach which encompasses many nuanced strands of the work of these important theorists.

In this chapter, we explore synergies between drama, SJE and ESD. Although the dominant theory addressed in this chapter focuses on drama and SJE, aspects of ESD are also addressed, particularly in the second exemplar which explores the topic of forced migration and associated sustainability issues. First, we provide a theoretical framework for drama and SJE which also encompasses ESD tenets. We proceed to outline a number of characteristics of drama which find resonance with SJE and ESD and thereby provide a clear rationale for drama as a context to explore issues of social justice and sustainable development. Emanating from this strong, theoretical foundation, we finish by sharing practical dramas for use in the classroom. The lower primary drama aims to challenge heteronormativity, the assumption that everyone is heterosexual and that heterosexuality is superior. This drama celebrates difference by representing and exploring family diversity. The upper primary drama focuses on forced migration, challenging the influence of populist, anti-immigrant discourses by humanising migrants and exploring their experiences. Issues of sustainability underpinning migration, especially the impact of violence on human settlement, form part of that exploration.

## Theoretical framework: a pedagogy of relational possibility

In this section, we consider how intertwining strands from Simon's (1992) theory of pedagogy which he calls "a pedagogy of possibility" and "relational pedagogy" (Biesta, 2010; Bingham & Sidorkin, 2010; Buber, 1937; Noddings, 2005) can provide a robust theoretical foundation for drama and SJE, with strong connections to ESD. Cognisant of Gore's (2015) criticism of critical theories that lack applicability and distance teachers, we intend to draw on theoretical principles that will help teachers to translate their core beliefs and commitments to social justice into practice.

Simon's (1992) pedagogy of possibility follows the work of the renowned social justice scholar, educator and activist, Paulo Freire. It operates in the space between how things are and how they could be. Simon (1987) sees pedagogy as disruptive, political practice which requires teaching and learning that is "linked to the goal of educating students to take risks, to struggle with ongoing relations of power [and] to critically appropriate forms of knowledge that exist outside their immediate experience" (p. 375). Reflecting SJE and ESD tenets, envisioning a world which is "not yet" is central to realising a pedagogy of possibility, pointing to the "hope" that is foremost in Simon's writing (1992, p. 56). The kind of hope to which Simon refers is not, "a passive yearning for ultimate peace and resolution" (p. 4) but rather a recognition of human agency for social transformation, a key feature of SJE and ESD. Gallagher (2016) offers a theory for drama and social justice and suggests that in order to imagine social justice in all its complex dimensions, we need to "vigorously exercise our capacity to imagine otherwise" (p. 60). Translating this to classroom practice, teachers are invited to present opportunities for children to critique the social world as it is but crucially to create alternative visions for how it could be. As Gallagher (2016) argues, if students are to understand themselves and others differently, they need pedagogical practices that generate this kind of imagination. Simon (1992) refers to "filling in the gaps" (p. 61) rather than accepting handed-down historical accounts. He asks teachers and students to take an inward turn and critique their own embeddedness in the histories, memories and social relations which are the foundation of our understanding of the social world.

Relational pedagogy focuses on the relational dimension in education – the idea that learning happens in and through relationships (Hinsdale, 2016). It foregrounds our interconnectivity as human beings. This finds resonance with Simon's pedagogy of possibility which he sees as a "responsive and vigilant practice of responsive attendance to others" (Mishra Tarc, 2014, p. 56). Recent interest in relational pedagogy is often credited to Noddings (2005), who emphasises the need for teachers to establish relations of care with students. Foundations of relational pedagogy can be traced to Buber (1937), who proposed that humans have two ways of relating to one another either as "I–It" or "I–Thou". These concepts are relevant to teaching generally and especially to SJE and ESD. When we relate to one another as "I–Thou", there is mutual respect, recognition of humanity and our relationship is characterised by dialogue. In "I–It" relationships, one party objectifies the other, failing to respect their humanity. Buber (1937) argues that it is our choice to "thin" or "thicken" the distance by entering into an "I–Thou" relation with an "other" or withdrawing into an "I–It" mode of existence (Scott, 2014). Hutchinson (2010) argues for intimacy among strangers, recognising the paradoxical nature of such an idea. She suggests that the more opportunities we take "to gain glimpses into one another's lives" (p. 82), the less likely we are to be afraid, judgemental or dismissive of one another.

In the context of SJE and ESD, how we view and relate to others is centrally important. While Hutchinson (2010) argues that we can take glimpses into one another's lives, we must remain mindful of the reductiveness and potential harm in assuming we can fully know the other. Biesta (2010) suggests that it is the gap between teacher and student that makes "communication and hence education possible" (p. 13). He emphasises that coming to know another completely is impossible and therefore asks teachers to exercise caution about trying to "close the gap" (p. 12). The relationship between teacher and child should therefore be characterised by openness, and willingness to be called into question by the other. Todd (2003) emphasises learning *from* rather than *about* the other respecting the space between. To learn *about* is reductive, linking to Buber's notion (1937) of "I–It" whereas to learn *from* links to the idea of responsively attending to another.

Bringing these theories together demands that in our drama work we honour the humanity of those we encounter whilst acknowledging the ultimate unknowability of the other. It asks that we retell and fill in the gaps in familiar stories, that we are reflexive in our practice, acknowledge our own biases and prejudices, look to how we are embedded in stories we tell, encourage telling and challenging of personal stories and that we glimpse into the lives of others and learn *from* them rather than *about* them.

## Connecting SJE and ESD with the teaching of drama

In this section, we present four statements that highlight how characteristic features of drama might assist a questioning, reflective drama practitioner to awaken in themselves and the children that they teach the kind of criticality conducive to SJE and ESD.

### *Drama is a collective, relational endeavour*

Gallagher (2016) has identified a clear turn away from the collective in the present climate arguing that under neoliberalism, thinking about the collective is not only unfashionable but an affront to individual freedom. The notion of working as a collective is firmly rooted in the drama, social justice and sustainable development traditions. Heathcote (1983)

proffered an image of a crucible for teaching and learning, referring to the way in which the wisdom of the group can be stirred around to create new understandings. She emphasised "we" over "I", cooperation over competition. The "we" element includes the idea of children working together but also refers to the teacher as a collaborator and co-creator of drama work. This challenges traditional power relationships between teachers and children and gives children the space to exercise greater power and agency. McDonagh and Finneran (2017) highlight that the "co" element in "co-creator" is an attitude or stance that the teacher adopts, the teacher's way of being. Being a co-creator sends a message to the children about classroom culture, expectations and possibilities within the child–teacher relationship. McDonagh and Finneran (2017) argue that co-creation "depends greatly on the active involvement of teachers, their valuing of a creative learning environment, and their ability to enliven both egalitarian and creative behaviours in their teaching" (p. 171). Co-creating drama, therefore, is a deeply relational way of working. Through the necessary negotiations in co-creation, participants become aware of their interdependence. Discussing the concepts of love, care and solidarity in the context of equality and social justice, Baker, Lynch, Cantillon and Walsh (2009) describe how relationships built on mutual concern and support can work together to eliminate injustice. Drama provides opportunities for teachers and children to build caring, respectful relationships with one another as they co-create, care for and develop solidarity with those they encounter through fiction. Noddings (2005) defines caring as seeing others' realities "as a possibility for ourselves", and much drama work has this as its central aim.

Beane (1997), writing about education for democracy, advises to begin planning with questions children have about themselves and their world. Themes that inform drama and social justice and sustainable development pedagogy often emerge in this way. Lessons follow an enquiry approach whereby questions are explored at an ever-increasing level of depth. Where themes are somewhat removed from children's experiences, often the first step in drama is to explore related lived experiences, providing a point of entry. For example, in our drama about forced migration, we begin with an embodied exploration of the meaning of "home" before exploring the reasons someone might be forced to leave home.

### *Drama invites exploration of the particular, offers space to reflect and to imagine possibilities*

In a world that moves at an accelerated pace, drama, through its focus on the particular, invites us to notice and connect with important issues that could otherwise pass us by. Heathcote (1991) argues that the arts offer particularisation of something to bring it to our attention, and refers to how drama involves thinking "from within a dilemma instead of talking about the dilemma" (p. 119). In planning drama work that speaks to issues of social justice and sustainable development, we select stimuli that are rich in detail and explore tensions that challenge participants' assumptions. By doing so, we invite participants to believe in the fiction, to relate to the characters and crucially to move beyond superficial treatment of issues. Through exploration of the lived experiences of one character in a specific situation, connection with the broader social issue is possible. The ultimate aim is to create opportunities for greater depth of engagement which affords possibilities for shifts in attitudes and understanding.

A central feature of drama is the ability for participants to be both involved in the action and reflecting on it – simultaneously being both actor and spectator. This straddling of two worlds, the real and imagined, presents powerful opportunities for shifts in understanding. Many drama theorists use Bolton's (1984, 1992) interpretation of Boal's term "metaxis" to describe this ability for participants to occupy two worlds at once. Freebody and Finneran (2016) suggest that metaxis enables participants to "physically and emotionally explore controversial and personal issues in drama whilst maintaining distance" (p. 13). Metaxis allows participants to achieve distance by having one foot in both the real and imagined worlds, empowering them to examine their place in both. In the drama that we present for lower primary, children encounter the theme of family diversity in role as zookeepers and as themselves. Being in role as zookeepers affords safety and distance to consider different family types whilst simultaneously considering the theme in the real world. Gallagher (2016) refers to the "mental leaps" we make when creating or making imagined worlds and argues that "activation of our interior landscape is perhaps one of the only means left to us to imagine ourselves out of the narrow cul-de-sacs of our self-interested political world" (p. 50). Through activating our imagination in drama, that is engaging with ideas of "what if", we have opportunities to address the "not yet" to which Simon (1992) refers. The power of drama from a social justice perspective therefore lies in its ability to isolate particular moments or events for contemplation, to position us as the people within those moments facing the dilemmas first-hand, whilst simultaneously retaining awareness of our actual lives. From that unique position, we can activate our imagination and envisage a different social reality.

### *Drama enables democratic relationships and affords opportunities for participation and agency*

A distinguishing feature of drama is the positioning of the teacher as co-player in the imaginary world and co-creator of the work, thereby challenging traditional power relations. To become a co-player involves taking a risk contrasting with the current dominant desire to make education predictable, secure and risk-free (Biesta, 2016). Biesta suggests that without risk "education itself disappears and social reproduction, insertion into existing orders of being, doing, and thinking, takes over" (p. 140). Teacher-in-role, a drama device developed by Heathcote, whereby the teacher adopts a role in the fiction, has been found to be a powerful means to create more democratic classrooms (Kana & Aitken, 2007). Teachers sometimes assign themselves a lower status role within the fiction which creates power dynamics that might be difficult to achieve in the actual world. This change in dynamics enables dialogic communication (Piazzoli & Kennedy, 2014). Dialogue, as Papatheodorou and Moyles (2009) describe, "implies reciprocal and multi-voiced exchanges of ideas that direct the path of learning" (p. 10). In drama, it is common for next steps in the fiction to be negotiated between the teacher and the children, highlighting the culture of dialogic interaction that drama affords. It would be simplistic, however, to think that the unequal power dynamic in the child–teacher relationship could ever be fully transcended. Perhaps what can be achieved is that teachers heighten their awareness of power relations in learning and reflect on their ability to create a classroom culture conducive to participation and agency.

Agency can be understood as an individual's or a group's feeling that they are participating in a collective action and making a difference rather than feeling that things are just happening to them (Kumpulainen et al., 2010). A central aspect of agency is one's

ability to imagine potential future trajectories of action (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Participation in drama can provide a context for testing out future trajectories within the safety of a fiction. In our drama for lower primary, for example, the children as zookeepers consider what to do with an abandoned egg. There is an expectation that they are capable of resolving the issue, so through this positioning and through experimentation with possibilities, they may begin to see themselves as agentic.

### *Drama creates opportunities to feel deeply and to be moved in body and mind*

The power of drama to address our embodiedness and to engage the emotions distinguishes it from other disciplines. Drama in a social justice and sustainable development context examines and challenges participants' comfortably held beliefs and assumptions about the world, resulting in experiences that "provoke, unsettle, and generate a critical response" (Bundy, Dunn & Stinson, 2016, p. 40). We knowingly bring participants into a space where emotional demands are made. Therefore, as Bolton (1984) argues, it is not that we protect participants "*from*" emotion but, rather, we protect them "*into*" emotion (p. 128). This protection is made possible through using a fiction, a story, a lens through which difficult issues can be gradually introduced.

Participants in drama retain the knowledge that they are straddling two worlds, the real and imagined, but the emotional experience arising out of the drama is nonetheless real (Bolton, 1984). If our ultimate intention is to raise consciousness, then aesthetic experiences that have the power to generate emotional responses and to move us are crucial. We use the word "move" deliberately to remind us of the importance of drawing on the knowledge contained in the body. In our second drama, we explore elements of forced migration through the body – crouching, carrying, hiding and so on. Through artistic engagement with physical actions, participants can come to know the experience of fleeing through the body. In reconnecting with our embodied selves, potential for SJE and ESD is awakened.

## Conclusion

Drawing on strands from pedagogy of possibility (Simon, 1992) and relational pedagogy (Biesta, 2010; Bingham & Sidorkin, 2010; Buber, 1937; Noddings, 2005), this chapter positioned drama as a rich context for the exploration of SJE and ESD themes. We highlighted some characteristic features of drama that align with key tenets of SJE and ESD: its emphasis on relationships; its focus on the collective; and its celebration of the particular. We explored drama's unique capacity to enable participants to simultaneously engage in, and reflect on, real and imagined worlds which offers opportunities for rich, meaningful dialogue about central topics in SJE and ESD. Finally, the notion of drama as an art form that works through the body and that makes emotional demands of participants was considered. We argued that the embodied nature of drama affords the possibility to foreground the human side of some of the current crises that we face in the world. To translate these theoretical concepts into practice, we now present two practical sample dramas. We hope that engagement with these dramas will provide a space for teachers and children to explore SJE and ESD issues in context and offer a scaffold to co-create new dramas about other related topics.

## Exemplars

**Theme:** Family diversity
**Age group:** 4–7 years
**Stimulus:***And Tango Makes Three* by Peter Parnell and Justin Richardson, illustrated by Henry Cole (2005)

Central Park Zoo explores family diversity by positioning a same-sex penguin couple called Roy and Silo as the story's main protagonists. This drama aims to challenge heteronormativity and celebrate diversity. Heteronormativity, which can lead to heterosexism, can contribute to a hostile and stigmatising environment in schools for sexual and gender minority students, making them feel unsafe, ostracised and unable to express freely their sexual orientation or gender identity (Mayock, Bryan, Carr & Kitching, 2009). Mayock et al. found that the greater the support, inclusion and equality for LGBTQ+ people, the less they are affected by minority stress caused by experiences of bullying, stigmatisation, discrimination, social exclusion and harassment (2009). Teachers play a critical role in ensuring inclusive learning environments for their children and in upholding the "communal responsibility for fostering social justice within the communities in which we live and teach" (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2009, p. 158). In this drama, the children take on roles as penguin keepers. An abandoned egg is discovered in the penguin house and discussions about family diversity emerge in the process because one of the options is for the egg to be placed in the care of Roy and Silo, who have built a nest. The aim of the drama is not for the children to decide to place the egg with Roy and Silo, rather to open up a conversation about family diversity. In doing so, it presents opportunities to explore non-normative family units and to challenge the idea that heterosexuality is a superior sexual identity.

**Theme:** Forced migration
**Age group:** 8–12 years
**Stimulus:** Appropriate excerpts from the poem *Home* by Warsan Shire (2009)

The current climate has seen mass migration and displacement due to war, famine, climate change, economic crises and persecution. Berry, Garcia-Blanco and Moore (2015) discuss how "dominant mainstream discourses surrounding immigration have been framed negatively, epitomised by hostility and suspicion towards migrants, asylum seekers and refugees" (pp. 14–15), and the power this has to influence public attitudes. The upper primary drama aims to proactively approach and challenge these negative racialised discourses which directly influence children's relationships with each other and their understanding of difference, injustice, racism and xenophobia. The drama also examines social justice and sustainable development concepts such as solidarity and responsibility for and with others, and begins to foster a classroom culture where these concepts can be discussed openly and respectfully. Children build a rapport with a relatable character, Amira, which helps to foster empathy and understanding. This drama is a useful context for ESD since it enables the development of important skills outlined by the United National Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2019) including critical thinking, collaborative decision-making and empathy skills, while empowering children to become "global citizens" who engage and assume active roles both locally and globally from within and outside the drama.

The children are required to make informed decisions and take responsible actions while respecting cultural diversity, inspiring them "to face and to resolve global challenges and ultimately to become proactive contributors to creating a more just, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure and sustainable world" (UNESCO, 2019, para. 5).

The second exemplar uses excerpts from Warsan Shire's poem, *Home*, to explore this theme (Shire, 2009). This poem contains highly sensitive content in relation to both language and sexual violence. Teachers are advised to use *only* lines 1–34 when exploring this poem with their children. In the drama, the children take on the role of "Amira" who is living in an area of conflict and faces the difficult decision to have to leave her beloved home.

*Exemplar 8.1* What makes a family?

*Central Park Zoo*

**Enquiry question:** what makes a family?

| Drama episode | Drama approach/strategy |
|---|---|
| **Introduction**<br>Read *And Tango Makes Three* (pp. 1–4) and examine the illustrations. Question the children about families walking around the zoo, the penguins and the penguin keeper, Mr Gramzay. The illustrations might inspire a conversation about different types of families, including LGBTQ+ headed families.<br>Children in role as zookeepers in the penguin house follow the penguins' actions and develop a sequence of movements, e.g. bow to each other, swim together, walk side by side, bow to each other, swim together … | **Storytelling**<br>**Movement sequence** |
| **Q:** What ways could your school environment be more inclusive in its representations of families and in the language used about families? How could children be empowered to use words such as lesbian and gay in a factual and positive way and to report misuse of this language? | **Consideration for the teacher** |
| **Mapping the zoo**<br>Draw a large map of the zoo and ask children to mark different areas of the zoo and discuss animals that belong there, and the families that visit. | **Collective map of the zoo** |
| **Meeting the zookeepers**<br>TiR as Mr Gramzay. CiR as trainee zookeepers. Mr Gramzay welcomes the trainee zookeepers and tells them what is expected of them. Mr Gramzay shows different parts of the zoo, talks about feeding times and tells the trainee zookeepers that some mother penguins have laid an egg.<br>Children begin to play in role as trainee zookeepers. Mr Gramzay (TiR) checks on the trainee zookeeper's progress, points out things they may have missed, asks for help with certain jobs, praises them for good ideas, asks them what they have noticed. Mr Gramzay hands out the buckets at lunchtime and makes comments on the penguins as they grab the fish. "Watch Silo as I throw this fish in the air, good catch Silo! Silo is a chinstrap penguin; can you see the black line of feathers under his beak? Look at Roy beside him bowing to him, he has feathers under his beak too, those two are always together. Here catch Roy! Where is Betty? She loves to search for her own food, did you hide some in that pool over there? Porkey's chasing her, they are the Gentoo penguins, the fastest swimmers." | **Teacher in Role (TiR) and Children in Role (CiR)**<br>**Dramatic play** |

(*Continued*)

**Working in the office**
CiR as the trainee zookeepers. Mr Gramzay brings them back together for a meeting and asks them what they have been doing. He takes notes on his clipboard and praises their good work, congratulates them on their training and declares that they are now qualified zookeepers.

**Dramatic play**
**Meeting**

**Problem in the penguin house**
The zookeepers help Mr Gramzay feed the penguins. As they work, Mr Gramzay includes information about Roy and Silo. "Do you notice some of the penguins have built their nests? Some of the mother penguins have laid an egg. Do you notice that Nipper and Squawk take turns keeping the egg warm? Why do you think they take turns? I cannot see Roy and Silo. They must be swimming together. Another zookeeper said she heard them singing to each other yesterday. Oh, there they are. It looks like they are building a nest. Look they have put a large rock on the centre, it looks like they are pretending it is an egg."
Mr Gramzay calls a meeting. He is very worried because an egg has been found abandoned. "One of the penguins laid two eggs and they can't keep both eggs warm. What will we do? Most of the other penguins are already sitting on eggs." Listen to the children's ideas and try a couple of them out. One of the children may mention Roy and Silo. If not, Mr Gramzay could pose the idea of Roy and Silo taking care of the egg because they already have a nest. "Can two boy/male penguins take care of an egg? Will they be able to take care of the baby penguin? [Take suggestions and challenge stereotypes where appropriate.] Is there any advice we might offer for how to take care of an egg?"
"The zookeepers watched all the penguins very carefully. Roy and Silo were taking care of their egg in one nest and Betty and Porkey were minding their egg in another nest. All the penguin couples were busy taking care of their eggs. All the eggs were nice and warm."

**Narration**
**Meeting**
**Narration**

Think of questions which challenge the idea that a family must have a mum and dad and open up conversations about different types of families.

**Consideration for the teacher**

**Hatching time**
"It was quiet in the penguin house. It was after suppertime and the penguins were sitting on their nests. Suddenly, they heard a sound which seemed to be coming from inside the eggs. The penguins called back 'Squawk squawk'. Suddenly a hole appeared in the egg's shell and then came a loud 'CRAAAAAACK!' Out came little baby penguins from each of the eggs with fuzzy white feathers and little black beaks."
**Q:** What happened after the eggs hatched? The children make a circle, and each adds one sentence to the story. "The zookeepers were building a wall in the penguin house …"

**Narration**
**Shared storytelling**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Little girl lost**<br>A little girl was found alone near the Sea Lion Pool and is terribly upset. "What should we do? What questions will we ask her? How will we talk to her if she is upset?" CiR as zookeepers ask the child (TiR) questions to help find out who she is.<br>Brief for TiR: Sarah came to the zoo with her mom, her mamma and her baby brother. The last time she remembers being with them was near the Grizzly Bears. Sarah knows her mamma's number and she knows her address. The zookeepers have to figure out the best way to reunite her with her family. | **Hotseating** |
| **Family fun**<br>Mr Gramzay announces that the post room is very busy today. Lots of happy families have sent thank you letters and photos from their recent trip to the zoo. What different types of families sent photos in? Can we recreate those photos? Finally, Mr Gramzay calls a meeting to thank the zookeepers for their care of the penguins. | **Still images – groups of three** |
| **Sharing with others**<br>During assembly, the children could perform an extended version of the shared storytelling strategy to tell the story.<br>The photos (still images above) and messages "received" (writing) could be photographed and shared on the school website so that the wider school community is involved. | **Shared storytelling**<br>**Still images and recording of written messages** |
| **Q:** Are there ways in which family diversity can be represented in other curricular areas? | **Consideration for the teacher** |

*Exemplar 8.2* What is it like to be forced to leave home?

*Home*

**Enquiry question:** What is it like to be forced to leave home?

Consider the personal experiences of the children in your class before approaching this topic which deals with forced migration.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Drama episode** | **Drama approach/ strategy** |
| **Exploring children's perceptions of home**<br>Children in small groups create still images and add descriptive sentences starting with "Home is …". Teacher photographs the images (these are revisited at the end of the drama). | **Imaging and captioning** |
| **Introducing the pretext**<br>Teacher asks the children to listen to selected excerpts, lines 1–34, "no one leaves home unless […] pitied" from the poem *Home* by Warsan Shire (2009).<br>Children select slips of paper featuring lines from the poem and walk around the space. On a signal, they deliver their line to another child, then another and so on. In small groups, children use their lines to create a short choral reading – they play with how lines are incorporated and explore simple gestures to accompany lines.<br>Using lines from *Home*, create images that portray the situation. Each group shares their still image while the teacher interweaves the lines "Home is …" to accompany each image. | **Choral reading of poem**<br>**Still images**<br>**Performance carousel** |

(*Continued*)

**Meeting Amira** — **CiR and TiR**

This scene takes place in an United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) designated safe place.* CiR as UN observers. TiR as Amira, who feels forced to flee her home because of war. She is clutching text messages from her brother, maps and personal belongings. She is torn between the decision to leave and seek refuge somewhere safer or stay with her father at home.
Brief for TiR: Amira's mother was fatally injured when caught in crossfire at the beginning of the conflict. Her father, a former baker, works with the civil defence helping innocent civilians and cannot leave. Amira has an older brother who has already fled and is in a temporary, but safe, place. He has sent her messages with advice on seeking refuge, e.g.:

- wait for a van to pick you up to bring you to the coast;
- travel by boat and make your way to the border.

Brief for CiR: Children should be familiar with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. They are trying to find out as much accurate information as they can from Amira about what is happening.

* Information on the work of the UNHCR can be found here: www.unhcr.org/what-we-do.html?gclid=EAIaIQobChMI1cz2ofqS6wIVxrTtCh3u_w3UEAAYASABEgJwt_D_BwE&gclsrc=aw.ds

**Amira's hometown then and now** — **Group sculpture and Thought-tracking Still Iimages with reflection**

**Q:** What happened in Amira's hometown? Children create a group image that portrays events that Amira has mentioned, or they invent their own. Each child enters the space and takes up a role and a stance. When the group sculpture is complete, children finish the statement I see/hear/feel … when they are tapped by the teacher.
Exploration of four years ago, one week ago, now – children imagine other moments in Amira's life. Bring these images to life and try to demonstrate how the external unrest is affecting her life.
Questions for those observing images: What strikes you? What is your interpretation of the image?
Questions to ask of the person in role: "What do you do/intend to do? Why? What is at stake here for you? How does this capture what you think life should or should not be?" (Davis, 2014, p. 74).

**Building Amira's community** — **Gossip circle**

In pairs, children go into role as different people in the community describing rumours, they have heard, e.g. civil unrest, protests, arrests, resistance, food and water shortages, services closing.

**Creating Amira's home** — **Paper placement TiR**

Use masking tape to create a treasured room in Amira's house. Using white paper, draw objects around the room. Use red paper to represent important objects. Some of these may be a reason Amira has to leave, e.g. badge symbolising membership of a group.
Teacher enters the room as Amira and interacts with the items/space. After a minute, an air raid siren interrupts Amira's thoughts and actions. Frightened, Amira cowers in the doorway of the room.

**The conflict escalates**

**Short improvised scenes**
**Guided imagery**

Children in groups create a series of "stories" for Instagram (no longer than 15 seconds) highlighting how Amira's hometown has changed since the conflict began.
"Amira is sitting under the doorframe of her bedroom listening to the bombardment. She hears another explosion. This one is close. She can feel the impact under her legs. She is thinking about her father out there helping others and her friend Ela who lives just one street away. The lights cut out; she checks her phone battery. She starts to fill buckets of water from the tap in case the water supply is cut. She realises it is 5am, the beginning of 'safe hour'. All is quiet so she walks down the stairs of her apartment building. She climbs over the sandbags piled high outside the door. The dust and smoke in the air chokes her throat and her eyes tear up. She holds a wet cloth up to her nose and mouth. She passes the garden where she and her neighbours have been growing vegetables, it is still intact. There is rubble everywhere and she can see where the mortar shells and rockets have hit. Her stomach starts to tense as she nears Ela's street. She hesitates and then turns the corner. She is met with utter destruction. She strains to see her friend's building. Half of it is destroyed. Is that the inside of Ela's sitting room she can see?"

**Leaving home**

**Teacher narration**
**Graffiti wall**
**Embodied exploration**

Teacher narrates that following a night of serious bombardment Amira has had no choice but to leave her hometown and follow her brother's instructions on how to escape.
When Amira (CiR) reaches the outskirts of the town all is quiet. Behind her is the wall that surrounds her city. On that wall, Amira leaves behind a message to a loved one.
"Amira waits for the pick-up at the corner of the designated meeting point. A van pulls up and the back opens up. Inside there are many people squeezed together. The van is headed for the coast. Amira asks no questions and climbs inside."
Explore some of the physical, embodied elements of forced migration accompanied by music. Children in pairs choose three movements and create a sequence of repeated movement, e.g. crouching, hiding, lifting. Each pair shares their sequence of three with the class and on a second sharing, these movements are mirrored by the whole class.

**The new place***

**Children responding in action**
**Small group improvisation**
**Reflection**

*Children are invited to choose the next course of action for Amira. Does she stay by the coast or risk taking a boat to follow her brother?
A. If the children made the decision that she stay by the coast, the children create scenes of Amira now in a refugee camp.
B. If the children chose that she got the boat, the children create scenes of Amira in a centre for asylum seekers.
Some scenes can include the challenges encountered reflecting the injustices such as racism that migrants and refugees often face upon arrival in a new place. Other scenes may feature moments that seem promising. TiR as Amira could be used here to discuss factors affecting Amira if they do not arise from improvisations, e.g. difficulty understanding new language, missing family and friends, difficulties keeping in touch with loved ones, lack of food, discrimination and racism.
Having explored Amira's situation, children and teachers decide on a mode of reflecting on the experience, e.g. through painting, movement, writing, drama, poetry. Invite the children to create two pieces: (1) How things are; (2) How things could be.
**Q:** "Looking back at our images of home from the beginning of the drama, what strikes you?"

(*Continued*)

| Call to action | |
|---|---|
| Children devise a performance piece selecting key moments from the drama. This may be presented to peers, the school community or filmed for the school website to highlight the complexity of forced migration. | **Devised theatre** |
| Develop some questions around the theme to frame a post-performance discussion.<br>Possible threads:<br>How does Amira's story make you feel?<br>How are immigrants (e.g. people seeking asylum or those with refugee status) depicted in the media?<br>Should people be allowed to resettle in another country?<br>Moral responsibility: Do peaceful countries have a responsibility to help people like Amira? | **Consideration for the teacher** |

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