

Kiwi Kids Can Fly: Making Connections with Devised Drama, the Key Competencies in the New Zealand Curriculum and Classroom Practice

Posted by [Webmaster](#) on 09/11/09
Filed Under: [Home](#) » [E-Journals](#) » [New Zealand Journal of Research in Performing Arts and Education: Nga Mahi a Rehia](#) » [Volume 1](#) » **Kiwi Kids Can Fly: Making Connections with Devised Drama, the Key Competencies in the New Zealand Curriculum and Classroom Practice**



Introduction

In 2006/7 I undertook a major arts-informed research project titled *Proud To Be Kiwi*. This project had two major phases. The first was the exploration of scaffolds suitable to be used within a classroom programme and the second was the creation of a major devised theatre work for performance. It is the first phase that I am focusing on in this article.

The research was undertaken at [Westburn Primary School](#), New Zealand. Westburn School is situated in the heart of the north west region of the city of Christchurch. It is a state primary school with a [decile rating](#) of 9 (Ministry of Education, New Zealand). The school is a full primary which includes year one to eight students (ages 5 to 13 years). At present there are 461 children enrolled and 18 teachers. There are 18 classes with a 1:17 ratio in the year 1 classes and an average ratio of 1:28 in the rest of the school.

The purpose of this project was to explore devised theatre within the school's classroom programme and allow the children to share their research findings using creativity through theatre. In many New Zealand classrooms today, children enjoy acting from a published play especially out of the New Zealand Ministry of Education [School Journal](#) magazine. It is distributed free to all schools in New Zealand as well as to schools in the South Pacific and Papua New Guinea. Depending on the teacher's focus the children perform with varying degrees of success.

In contrast to the authored play, devising gives the voice back to the children. Through linking classroom topics and devising, they have the opportunity to synthesize their ideas into new ways of looking at themselves and others. The focus shifts from performing an existing play, to the children creating their own plays about themselves and their world. Kiwis, in the literal world, cannot fly, but in the children's imaginative world they can. There are no limitations.

"Kiwi Kids Can Fly" is about empowering the children to use their own voice and creativity to create theatre and by doing so learn more about themselves and the world they live in. Drawing on the research I undertook at Westburn Primary School and the literature on devising drama, this article makes connections between devised drama, classroom programmes, and the key competencies in the New Zealand Curriculum.

What Is Devised Theatre?

Before launching into an account of the research I undertook, I need to establish what I mean by devised theatre. In the New Zealand 2000 Arts Curriculum the definition of devised drama is "drama that is developed for performance without originating from a script" (Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 48). I take this a step further to incorporate more than just drama. When devising I may include dance, song, puppetry, choral speaking and poetry; the possibilities are endless and each group will use what they want, to get their message across. There have been many times when the children have chosen to include a dance or song and it is allowing for this freedom to break the boundaries of the drama curriculum and move into aspects of Dance and Sound Arts (Music) that allows the freedom of voice for the children.

I also believe devising theatre is about a collaborative process of creating a play or work around an idea, theme or message. The process is a very important part of the work as it is this that helps create the product. Alison Oddey summarises this well, "Devising is a process of making theatre that enables a group of performers to be physically and practically creative in the sharing and shaping of an original product that directly emanates from assembling, editing, and re-shaping individuals' contradictory experiences of the world" (Oddey, 1994, p. 1). Devising gives ownership of the work to the group as they shape it into a product.

The terminology for devising varies from country to country and from director to director. In the New Zealand Curriculum it is known as devised drama. Errol Bray (1991), in Australia, uses the term “playbuilding” to describe the same process. He states “the term playbuilding is used to describe the creative process of assembling a dramatic performance or presentation from the building blocks of drama and theatre, through improvisation, discussion and rehearsal” (Bray, 1991, p. i). Within the literature on devising there are also the terms “playmaking” and “creative drama” (McCaslin, 2000). Devising, playbuilding and playmaking all represent a rich and dynamic process of making a play in a cooperative environment from no prewritten script.

Research Methodology

The purpose of phase one of the research at Westburn Primary School was to explore the integration of devised drama within the classroom programme. The question driving this process was: “What scaffold will be helpful for children and teachers when devising within their classroom programme?” Teachers often comment to me that they cannot fit drama into their classroom programme and are often too frightened to do so. Yet, by making links between classroom subjects or units of work (say for example from technology, science, social studies or health) and drama, the possibilities of what can be done, becomes an exciting learning adventure.

To achieve this, the focus became twofold. Firstly, it was about using the children’s imagination, creativity and research, to develop a meaningful context for sharing. To make it contextual we explored the topic being covered by the classroom teachers at that time. Table 1 below shows the topics being studied by each of the classes involved.

Year	Topic
Year 3 and 4 (aged 6-9 years)	Social Studies Unit “Life on an Island”
Year 7 and 8 (aged 11-13 years)	Science Unit “Flight”

Table 1: Topics

Secondly, from my research perspective, I was interested in what methodology would empower the students and teachers to gain success in the process and the product. To do this, we explored methods and strategies, used by other educators, directors and myself. We applied these strategies, modified them, and created new ones of our own.

I worked with two mixed ability Year 3 classes, two mixed ability Year 4 classes and one high ability Year 8 class. Each class had approximately 22- 27 children. I also worked with a smaller Year 7/8 class of 16 children with reading and writing difficulties.

Each class had four one hour sessions with me over three weeks. I worked in a variety of spaces from a spare classroom, a multi purpose room and the staff room. Each group then performed to their own class on the final (fourth) session.

Making Connections

Putting Theory into Practice

In a very busy curriculum there is much interest in integrating topics where possible. There is also a big focus on inquiry learning which integrates well with the key competencies. Devising fits into this model easily. Devising allows for integration of many subjects and disciplines including technology, social sciences, music, dance, and visual art. It is an interdisciplinary art form. It is the chosen topic, the group and the purpose of the production which will influence the use of other disciplines in the product.

So what does this mean for the classroom teacher? The following is taken from the research I did at Westburn Primary School and is an example of one scaffold that could be used within a classroom context. The following is a very brief summary of the steps. It is not the only way and should be viewed as a starting point. Each time I devised, the process varied according to the topic, the participants, the time, space and the outcome.

1. Establish the Ground Rules

I asked each class what rules we would need so the drama could develop in a safe environment. Figure 2 “Setting the Rules” is an example taken from a Year 7/8 class

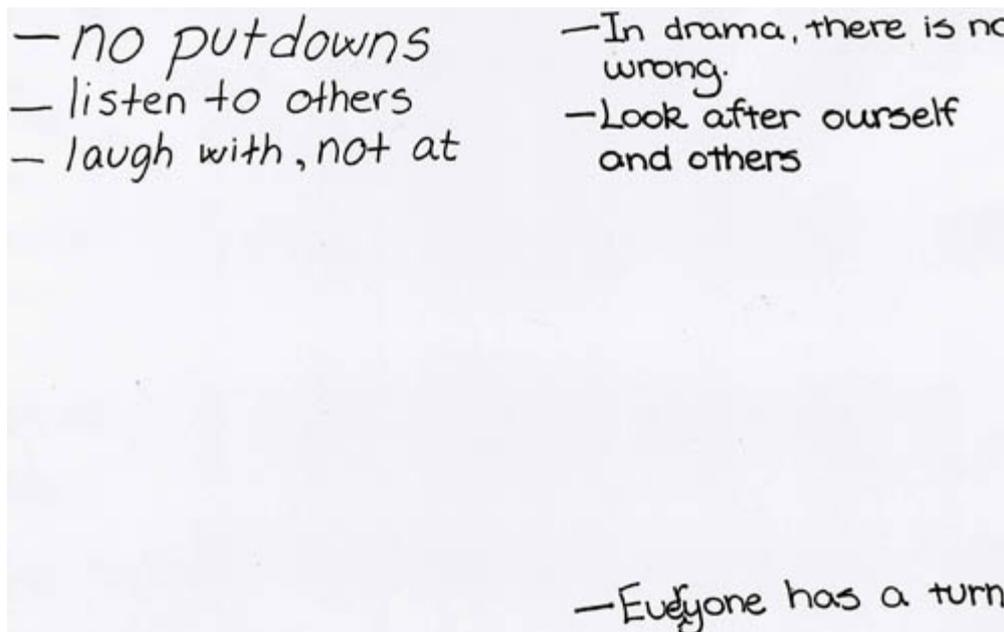


Figure 2: “Setting the Rules”

The students recorded their discussion of what were considered to be the important ground rules. I also added my own views to the discussion. I found it useful to have my say at this stage as well as the students. This gave a voice to my views as well as theirs and helped to create a collective identity.

2. Developing a Cohesive Group

I found it worthwhile to give time to developing group rapport. This is vital before starting the creative phase of devising (Oddey, 1994; Spolin, 1999; Kerrigan, 2000).

Playing purposeful drama games helps this development of group rapport.



Figure 3: Machines

In Figure 3, the group of year 3 children is creating a machine within a very short time frame. The group was created randomly and after a few turns the groups were changed again, so the children had time to develop rapport with as many class members as possible.

3. Choose a stimuli appropriate to the topic

With the year 7/8 class we started by brainstorming what they knew already.

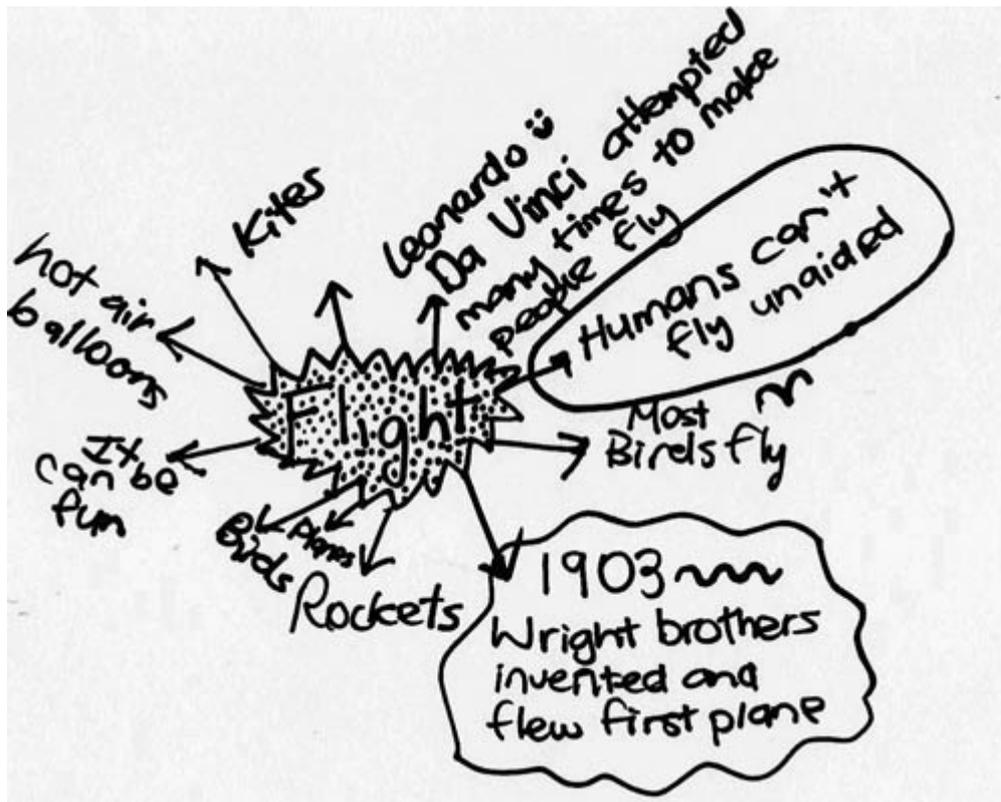


Figure 4: Brainstorming the Topic

Figure 4 shows the record of the brainstorm done by a group of Year 7/8 students around their science topic “Flight”. With the Year 3 class we had a rusty key found on a beach. The children had to brainstorm:

- who might own it
- how it became lost
- and how the owner might get it back?

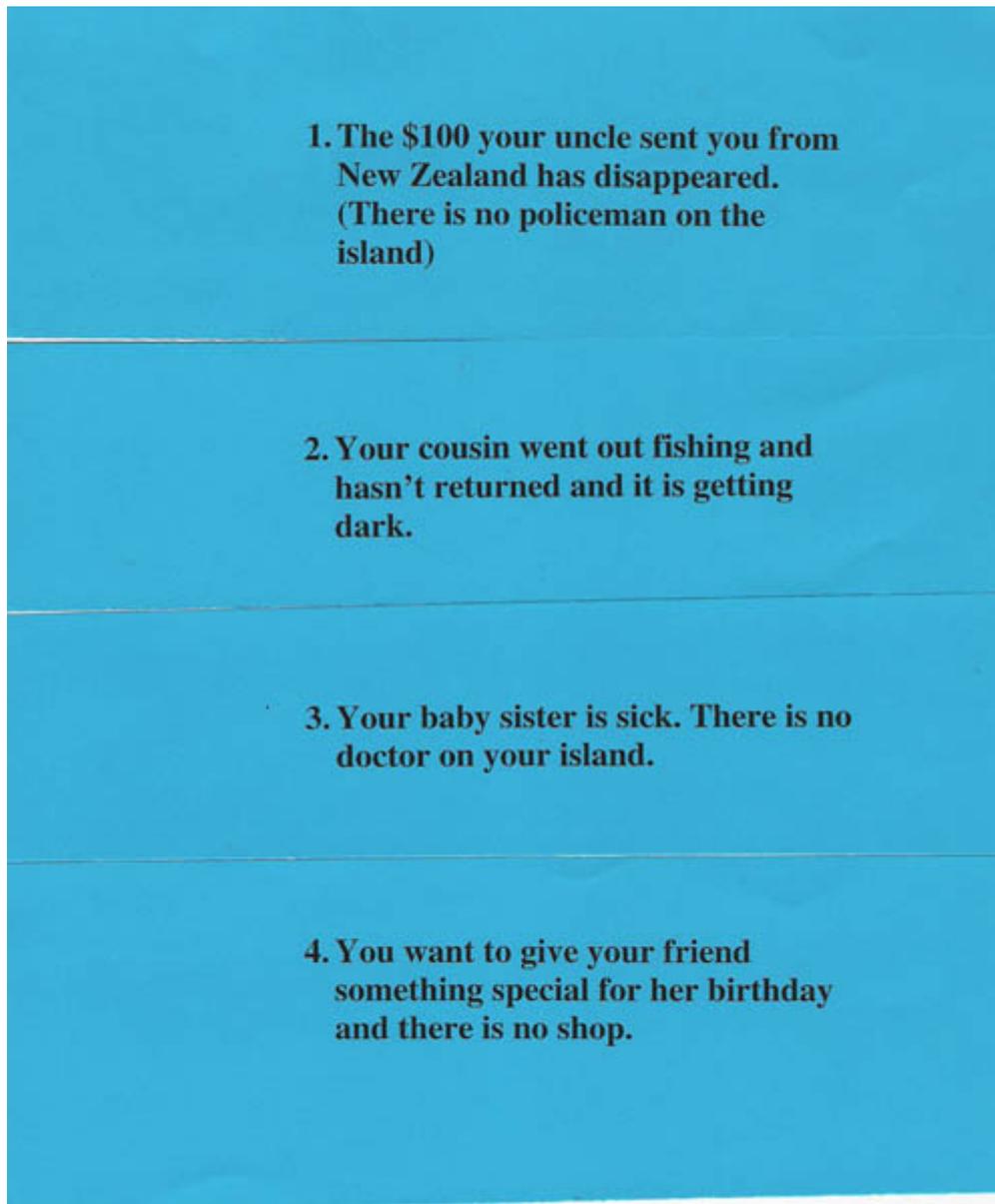


Figure 5: Problem Solving Cards

The Year 4 classes were given problem solving cards for their pre-text.

4. Research

We researched the topic by looking for information from books, the internet, interviewing experts and through improvisation. The groups established what they needed to find out and where they would look for this.



Figure 6: Researching on the Internet

In Figure 6 the children are researching their topic “Flight” on the internet.



Figure 7: Researching Through Improvisation

Figure 7 shows a group of Year 3 children researching how the “key” got lost through improvisations.



Figure 8: Researching in the library

Figure 8 shows a Year 7/8 group researching “Flight” in the school library.

5. Deciding on the Drama Elements

When using the drama elements I asked the children to record their ideas in a format that suited them. It took many forms including the following from figures 9-12.

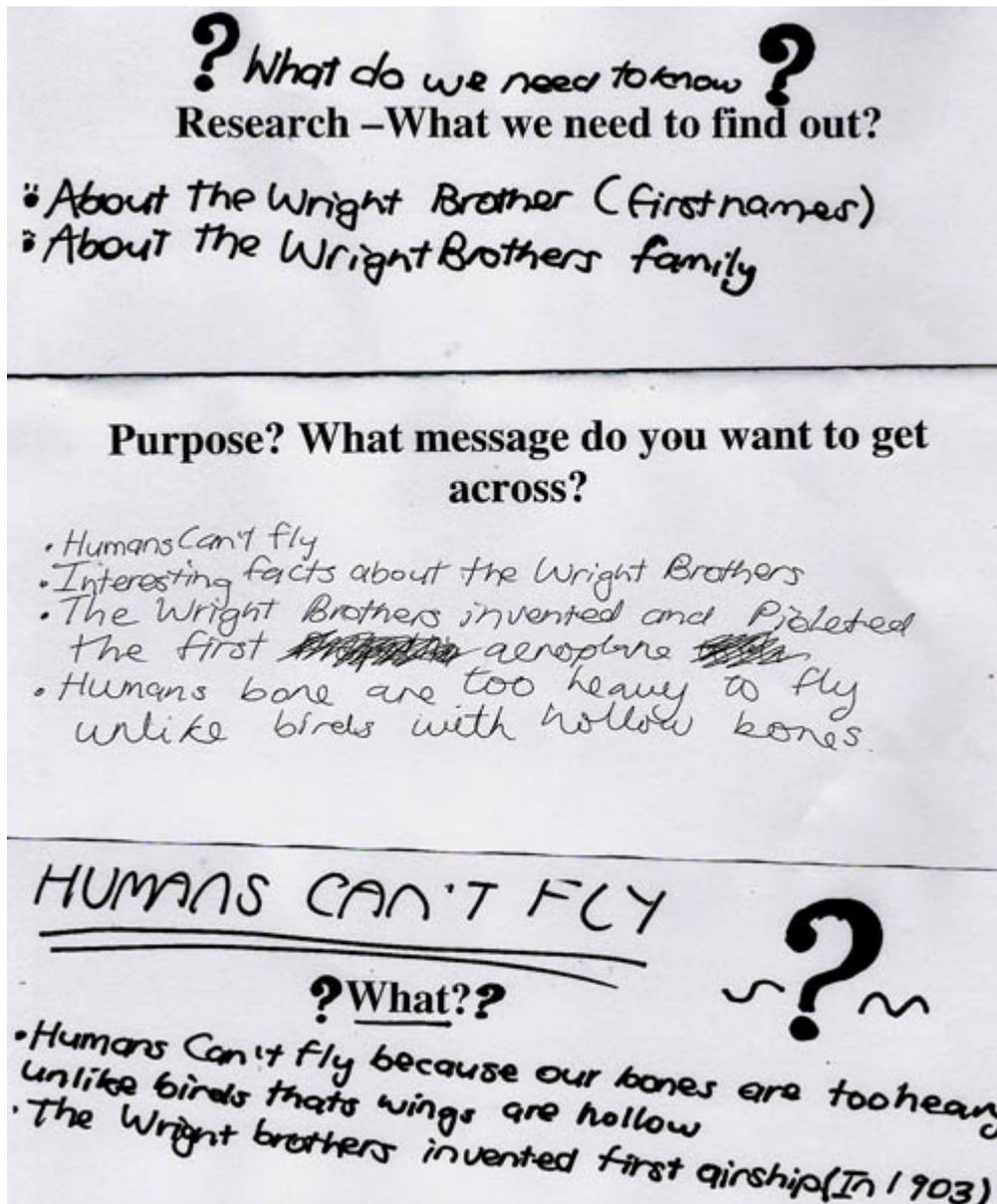


Figure 9: Recording the Elements 1

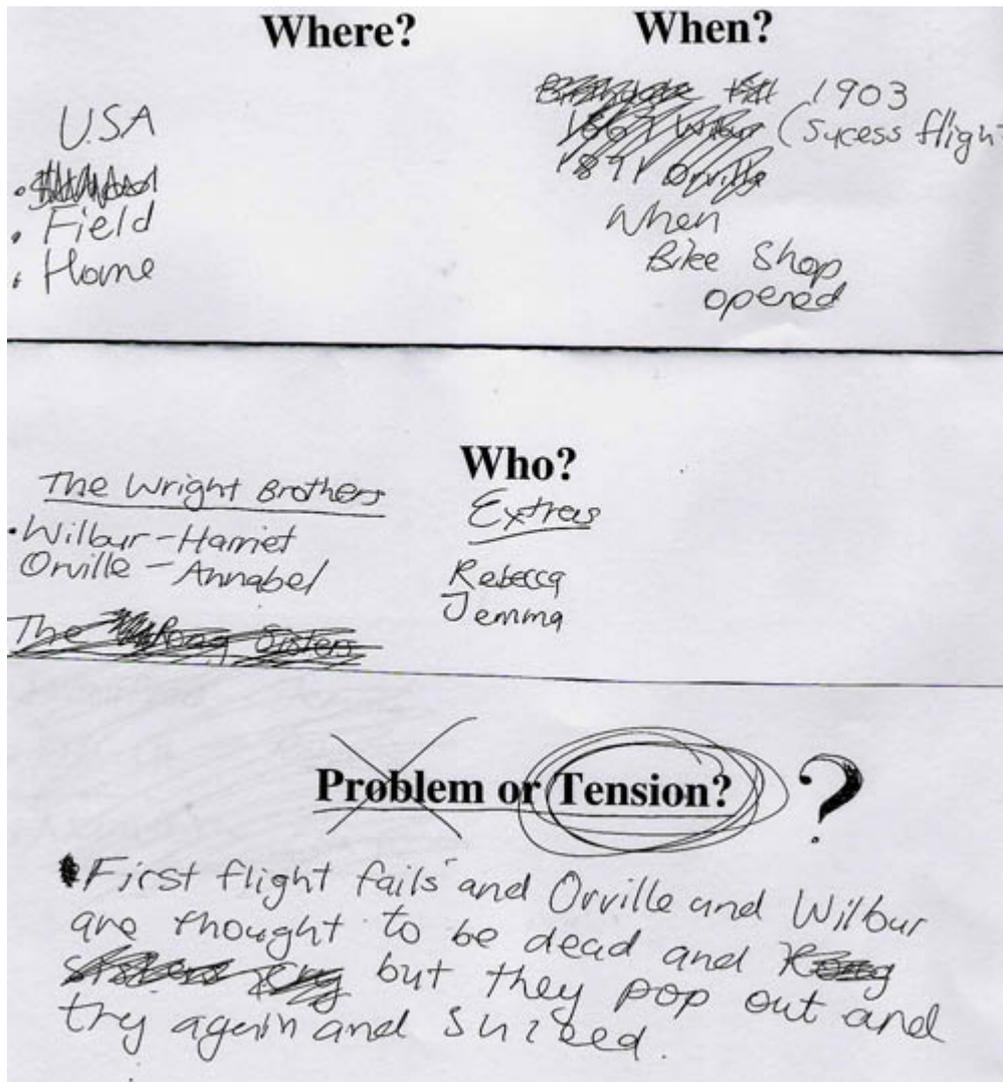


Figure 10: Recording the Elements 2

	message of the drama
Who?	Role: Characters
Where?	Space: Setting
When?	Time
What?	Tension
How 1? How 2?	Action

Table 2: Interpreting the Drama Elements

6. Developing Role

Once the drama elements were established, each participant needed to take on one of the roles and develop their character profile.

I asked the children to name each of the roles, and give two describing words to help each person with their chosen character. This was very effective as it empowered the children to create and develop the character. The conventions of [Hot seating and Role on the Wall](#) (Ministry of Education, 2000) were also used to develop depth of knowledge about their characters

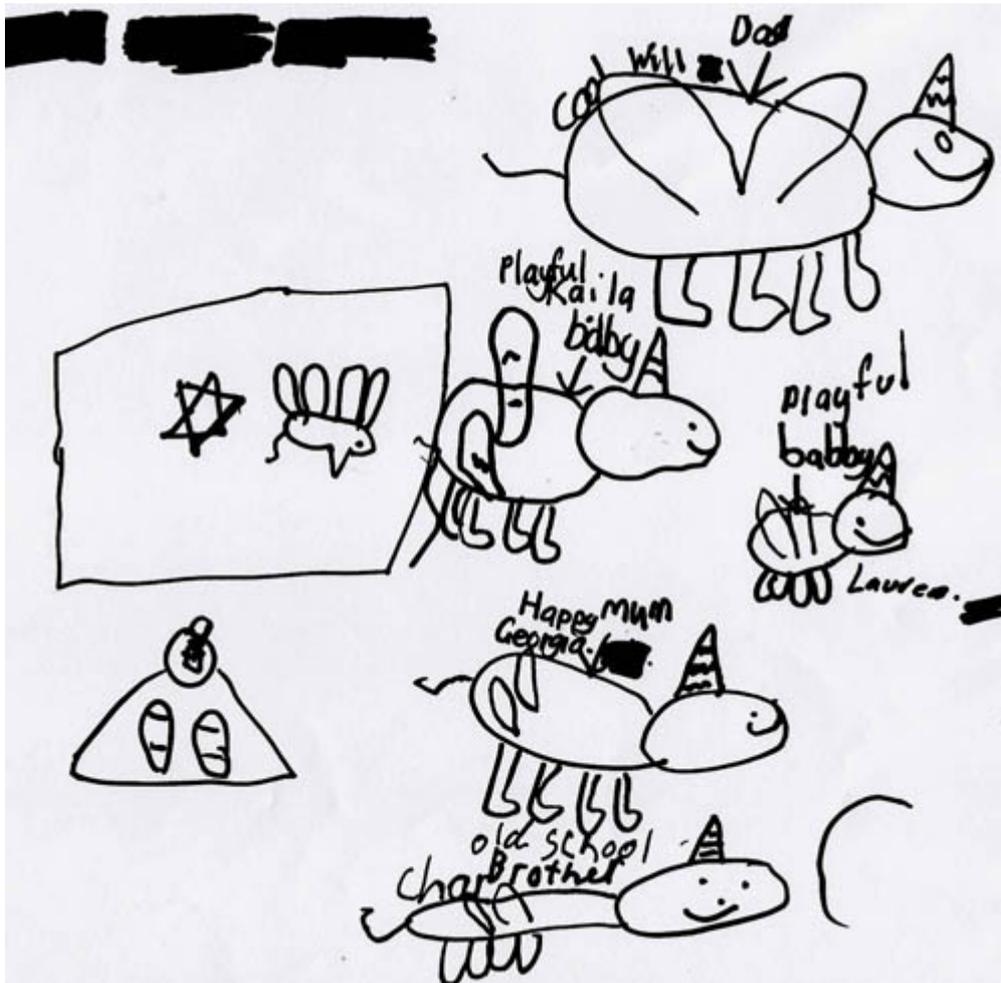


Figure 13: Year 3: Developing Role

Figure 13 shows the work of a Year 3 group and their two describing words. This group also wanted to record their roles in pictorial form.

7. Dividing the play into 3 or 4 separate scenes and storyboarding

With the younger ones (Year 3; aged 6 and 7years), I asked for each scene to develop along the following lines:

Scene 1: Who owns the key?
 Scene 2: What happens to the key?
 Scene 3: How does the key get found?

With the year 4 and 7/8 classes I asked for:

Scene 1: Establish the setting, characters, place, time
 Scene 2: Introduce the tension (the what?)
 Scene 3: Develop the tension and reaction
 Scene 4: Resolve the crisis

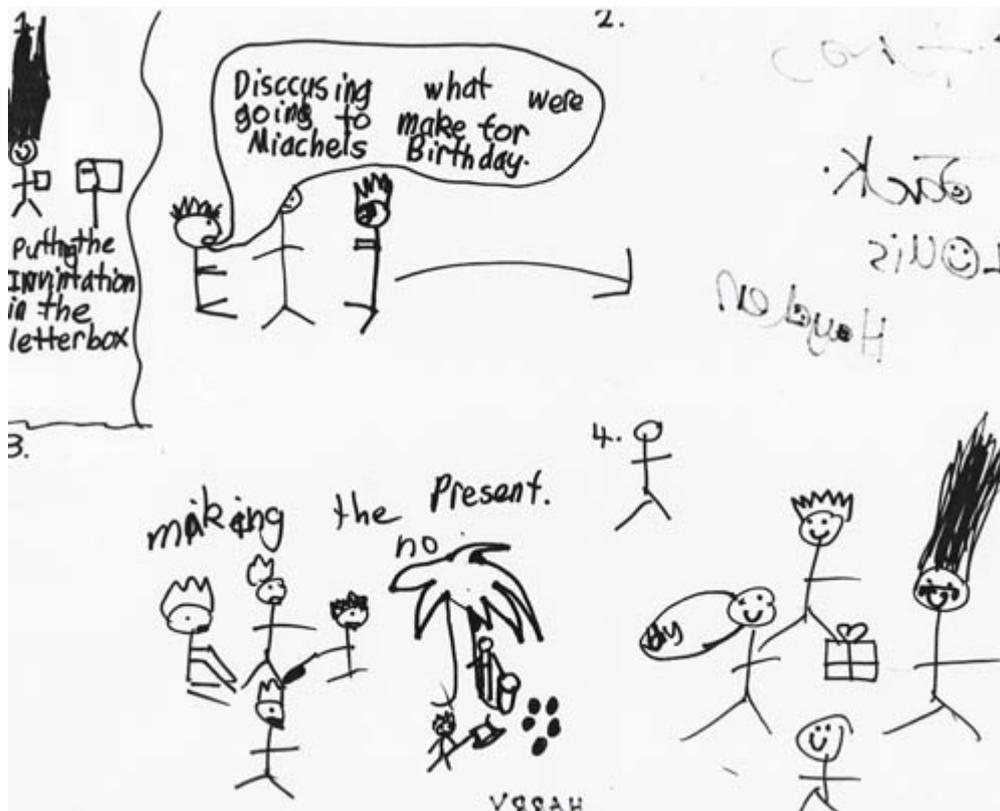


Figure 14: Year 4: Scene/Storyboarding

Figure 14 is an example of the Year 4 class breaking down the problem solving card given and storyboarding the scenes.

8. Create Freeze Frames (a still photograph) for the beginning of each scene



Scene 2: The problem starts

This is our
Freeze Frame





Figure 15: Storyboarding the Freeze Frames (Year 3)

I asked the children to create a Freeze Frame that would begin each scene. This was helpful in establishing the detail of the focus or purpose of each scene. When I ran out of time to go any further I found this to be a good place to stop the process and present back to the class. I have, in the past, taken photographs of these freeze frames and each group has written captions for them as a permanent record of their work. This links well with the classroom literacy programme and [The New Zealand Curriculum](#).

An important aspect of children's writing in the New Zealand Curriculum is to motivate the learners which will lead them into meaningful writing. "Such activities help young learners to make sense of their world by taking part in, sharing and discussing authentic experiences and (usually) going on to contribute to or construct a written text about them" (Ministry of Education, 2003, p.102).

9. Presenting their Freeze Frames

From here the children could improvise their scenes, refine them and present the scenes to the class or chosen audience. This does not have to be a major formal performance. I have found endowing each character with one item of clothing (easily put on without having to leave the room), or one simple prop, a useful method of helping the children feel it is a performance and for getting into role. It does not have to be full costumes or a formal stage with lights to meet the performance outcome.

The children in this study shared back to their own class. Some devised works had three short scenes of approximately 30 seconds each, while others had four scenes and were about two minutes in length. The product depended on the time given to the creations and the topic chosen.

I made many discoveries in this part of the research which to justify the sharing of, involves more space than is available here and is not the focus of this article.

Making Connections

Why Devised Theatre with Children?

Linking to the Key Competencies

In 2006, the Ministry of Education (New Zealand) published a [draft curriculum](#) which moved away from skills based learning to key competencies focusing on life long learners. The [curriculum](#) has a vision of life long learners who are confident, connected and actively involved. To achieve this vision it has identified [five key competencies](#). The identified key competencies are: thinking, using language, symbols, and texts, managing self, relating to others and participating and contributing. Learners are encouraged to develop these competencies in ever increasingly more complex social contexts and to use them to meet other goals. “Distinctions have been made in the literature between the idea that learning is about a learner acquiring items of knowledge or skill, and the idea that learning is about the interactions between an intentional learner and an educational context” (Carr, 2006, p. 1). This belief is about life long learning for all ages, from the young child through to the independent adult.

With the new [New Zealand Curriculum](#)(2007), it is timely to look at drama and the implications for our classrooms and in particular the place of devising. “Playbuilding deals simultaneously with the physical, intellectual, social and creative skills of the group” (Bray, 1991, p.i). Devising drama builds confidence and self esteem. Yet it does not have to stop there. It is very demanding. It can demand creativity, vision, analysis, clarity and synthesis of research and experiences. It can be collaborative, and those participating need to have integrity. It builds team work and cooperation (Lamden, 2000; Oddey, 1994; Bray 1991).

The very act of working together, the unity of purpose through which you move towards a performance, is so rare. If I ask ‘What have you valued most?’ they’ll say ‘I’ve learnt diplomacy, compromise, getting my own way, to be sensitive, to be generous, to deal with people, to organize, to manage to work to a real deadline’ (Lamden, 2000, p.8).

Looking at the five key competencies in the New Zealand Curriculum (2007) it becomes clear that the devising process fits into a curriculum context where its function becomes much more than just creating a play for performance. These competencies are more complex than just learning a skill. They are about interactions in context that become more increasingly complex and wide ranging (Carr, 2006).

1. Managing Self

Managing self involves setting personal goals, self motivation, and setting high standards. It is about becoming increasingly more “enterprising, resourceful, reliable and resilient” (Hipkins, 2006, p. 33). Within the realm of devising the participants are required to do all these. By each participant setting their own goals and standards they bring to their group a stronger and more motivated focus. This in turn helps the group focus as all members are expected to be fully involved throughout the process.

The children take ownership of the devising and the content of the product to succeed (Horn, 1993). “You are in a position to control your own learning, and have freedom to produce a piece of theatre for an audience about a topic that concerns you” (Lamden, 2000, p. 2). Also, by exploring what matters there is a “discovery of self and others” (Lamden, 2000, p. 7).



Figure 16: Headquarters of the Westpac Rescue Helicopter

These Year7/8 boys (Figure 16) had to work hard to take responsibility for their own development of character while also sharing and offering ideas to their group. When one member was struggling he would have to listen to his peers and increase his own skill and knowledge of the content.

2. Relating To Others

In the devising process participants need to have a collective creativity. To do this, there needs to be a group identity and an effective working relationship.

To succeed, participants will need to be active listeners, offer ideas, share their expertise and knowledge, and respect others views and beliefs. “Listening is a crucial component. Participants in playbuilding must be ready to listen to another’s ideas, consider them, and if

agreed by all, developed as part of the play” (Tarlington & Michaels, 1995, p. 12). They will need to be able to negotiate, resolve conflict, take risks and take responsibility within the group. The process will demand all participants to be active not just a few. Horn agrees stating “by owning their work, students were better able to communicate and share their concerns, problems, and challenges with others” (Horn, 1993, p. 13).

With a diverse range of people in New Zealand ([New Zealand's diverse culture](#)), there are opportunities to explore and make sense of culture and social contexts. “Participants make sense of themselves within their own cultural and social context, investigating, integrating, and transforming their personal experiences, dreams, research, improvisation and experimentation” (Oddey, 1994, p. 1). The participants have opportunities to experiment with alternative views and ways of belonging which are perceived to be non threatening, through the development of characters and through the improvisations.



Figure 17: Flock of Birds Being Invaded

This Year7/8 group (Figure 17) had to work hard to communicate clearly to each other. Two students had English as a second language and one had a hearing impairment, yet their common goal continually drove them forward with their imaginative ideas and new knowledge. The performance goal helped develop the individuals into a group. Each member began to listen to each other and offer ideas. When an offer was rejected by the group it was not received negatively as they became more involved in their common goal. There was a role for each member and so all were participating. The group began to join their ideas into their group's idea and so a group creativity developed.

3. Participating and Contributing

Participating and contributing, is no doubt evident in the devising process. There are diverse opportunities for participation within the process. Kerrigan states, devising “builds rapport, stimulates creativity, fosters safety, allows risk taking, encourages spontaneity, releases aggression and awakens us to the moment” (Kerrigan, 2001, p. 6). All these aspects link closely to the key competencies. For the devising process to be successful the participants need to be actively involved. The participants have opportunities to contribute in their area of expertise and also to develop new areas. Learners are given a wide variety of contexts with a diverse range of people (Hipkins, 2006).

Participating and contributing in devising also widens the children’s opportunities to explore new skills and experiences that they may have chosen not to do so in other circumstances (Morrison & Stinson, 1995). The experiences can take many forms ranging from playing games, improvisation, research, interviewing, reading, writing, recording, creating, decision making and reflecting. “Working in devised theatre will be one of the most creative experiences they will have as a performer” (Bicat & Baldwin, 2002, p. 46).

In Figure 18, the children have improvised their scenes and are now recording their findings. All the members of the group are contributing as each one has a role in the play and their views are needed in the reflections.



Figure 18: Recording the Improvisations Year 7/8

4. Thinking

Thinking is about using creative, critical, metacognitive and reflective processes to make sense of an idea or topic and to question these to develop further experiences and new ideas (Hipkins, 2006). “The thinking process requires rigorous thinking on the part of all group

members. It ensures that participants think of verbal, visual, and movement aspects of a play” (Tarlington & Michaels, 1995, p. 12). Devising builds on an idea and tests the hypothesis. It develops critical thinking and problem solving and drives the questioning inquiry; it requires “these things in order to succeed within the collaborative structure” (Horn, 1993, p. 10).

“Worthwhile theatre extends our perceptions of ourselves, others and the possibilities of the world we live in. It enriches us and nourishes us and moves us on” (Lamden, 2000, p. 1). Participants can begin to look at the world through different eyes and see different perspectives.

Creativity is an important part of thinking that is often overlooked. It is in this area that devising can enhance the school programme. In devising, the process is as important as the product. The end product is only one aspect of what devising theatre can offer. There is also much creativity through the process “Creativity as process may be manifest in a new way of seeing, a different point of view, on original idea, or a new relationship” (McCaslin, 2006, p. 24).



Figure 19: Using Improvisation to Develop Creative Ideas.

The children in Figure 19 are working through their improvisations. They are offering ideas, refining their attempts and making decisions about what works and what doesn't. As a team they collaboratively build their scene from their explorations.

5. Using Language, Symbols and Text

Using Language, Symbols and Text is also used throughout the process, from the research stage where the participants use a variety of methods to gain knowledge, through to the performance where they have the opportunity to share their research findings through theatre. The key is the sharing.

During the process there are also opportunities to record their creations as they develop the script, developing and choosing appropriate symbols to do so. Figures 3, 13, 14 and 15 all show examples of this. Each group was given a blank sheet and asked to record their decisions and progress in a way that they would understand.

Making Connections

The Fundamental Principles of Devised Theatre

1. The Process to Product

According to Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling, “at the core of all devising or collaborative creation is a *process* of generating performance, although there is an enormous variety of devising processes used” (Heddon & Milling, 2006, p. 3) This process varies from group to group, as David Parmenter states, “the devising process has differed much from company to company and cannot be discussed as if there were one definitive method or as if the process were not always in a state of change” (Parmenter, 1993, p. 53). When embracing the devising process it has to be accepted that there is a huge range of processes and models which can evolve within each context. Therefore, to limit the devising process to one set method is to become guilty of killing the original purpose of using the approach in first place. Whether it is a professional company demanding society to look at current issues, or a school encouraging the children to develop their creativity through dramatic performance, the range of possible processes and models is infinite. As Oddey states, “it is the very nature and eclecticism of the devising experience that makes it impossible to articulate any one single theory of how theatre is devised, when every professional company or group works in a unique way with different intentions, interests, and concerns” (Oddey, 1994, p. 2). It evolves according to the relationship of each group of participants, their cultural context, their age and experience and most importantly their purpose.

2. The Unique Process

“What identifies and defines devised theatre as a separate form worthy of consideration is the uniqueness of process and product for every group concerned” (Oddey, 1994, p. 2). This unique process is the fundamental principle at the core of devising theatre. Each participant is part of a group collaboration, drawing on their own expertise, experiences and knowledge to create a play. The theme, context and purpose all influence the collaborative process and it is therefore unique to that particular group and moment in time. The process can never be

repeated exactly the same as the human factor will always influence the devising, as does the theme and context.

The process is based on cooperation and interaction (Oddey, 1994). It is through the action of 'doing' that a collaborative process is realized and developed. The members of the group will often draw on their expert knowledge, skill and creativity to work towards the common goal (the performance). Each person brings to the group their own interests and concerns and these will influence both the process and the product. Creativity is a driving force in this unique process. "Creativity as process may be manifest in a new way of seeing, a different point of view, an original idea, or a new relationship between ideas. Inventiveness and adaptation are often included in the thinking of those who believe creativity to be a way of working" (McCaslin, 2000, p. 24). The individuals draw on their own imagination and creativity as they work together to develop a group voice. It is this collective creativity which develops a unique moment that cannot be replicated by another group. The participants have opportunities to see things in new and different ways to their own experiences and these discoveries will often influence the product. As Bray claims, "Playbuilding is a dynamic and interactive process that draws out individual creativity very intensely while also developing strong group co-operation and commitment" (Bray, 1991, p. i). This collective creativity will influence the content of the product as well as how they portray or deliver it. "There is a freedom of possibilities for all those involved to discover; an emphasis on a way of working that supports intuition, spontaneity, and an accumulation of ideas" (Oddey, 1994, p. 1). The freedom exists to develop the work in any direction. It becomes the responsibility of the group to make the choices as there is no playwright.

Making Connections

From Practice to Theory: Factors Dependent upon Devising

Successful devising is dependent upon the people who make up the group, the method used and the director. It is these factors which when brought together create a unique setting for each new devising process.

1. The Participants

The individual group members are a key factor to the nature, manner and outcome of the creative devising process. "Devising is dependent on people, their life experiences and motivation, why and what they want to devise" (Oddey, 1994, p. 148). Each group member brings to the group their own ideas, skills and passions. It is because of this that the richness of possibilities exists. This helps to create its uniqueness and is one key reason why the devising process works for the group at the time but can be very difficult to repeat exactly with another group in a different time and setting.

2. The Environment

To devise successfully, the right environment needs to be established to allow for trial and error, where all group members can explore the ideas. "The success of the group creating a worthwhile product will depend on the group developing a group rapport and sensitivity to each other so all members can take risks without fear of personal rejection" (Clark, 1971, p.

36). The group requires the opportunity to trial ideas; and to accept, or reject them, as a team. The acceptance to decide to cut out or reject an idea becomes part of the process and should not be seen as failure. Sheila Kerrigan reinforces the need for opportunities to trial ideas and to allow for failure within the workshop process. “Failures are an important part of the creative process. Love your failures, embrace them, learn from them” (Kerrigan, 2001, p. 5).

3. Improvisation

Improvisation is a key factor in all devising (Heddon & Milling, 2006; Kerrigan, 2001). Anne Blom and Tarin Chaplin (1982), who work in the dance discipline, agree stating that “improvisation is the practice of creativity” (Blom & Chaplin, 1982, p. 5). Through developing a group environment that allows for creative exploration, the participants will have opportunities for the possibilities that arrive from the moment. “A discovery in rehearsal can shift your direction. Mistakes turn out to be gems” (Kerrigan, 2001, p. 5). These chance happenings which occur during the improvisational process are needed for the successful collective creativity of the participants.

4. The Role of the Director

During the research explorations, my role as the director developed into an encourager; empowering the children to take risks and explore their creative ideas. This shift or redefining of the role of the director with less emphasis on the traditional model and a move towards a sharing of responsibility appears to be a shared experience by many working in the devised realm (Hedding & Milling, 2006). As director I had to explore methods for the group to discover a collective creative outcome. “Devising theatre allows the young people to be in control of the product they create, supported and directed by the facilitators. There is a strong sense of participation, ownership and empowerment” (Clifford & Herman, 1999, p. 16). By doing so, it frees the participants to redefine the performance and take control of the product. The performers no longer have to fit an existing model or always respond to a director’s command but to shape and reshape the theme through exploration (Spolin, 1999)

The director is a key figure throughout the process. Brook summarizes this well when he stated “a director learns that the growth of rehearsals is a developing process; he sees that there is a right time for everything, and his art is the art of recognizing these moments” (Brook, 1968, p. 118).

5. The Decision Making Process

The decision making process is a problematic aspect of any group of people working together. In devising when the goal is to rid the process of traditional hierarchical structures including that of the traditional director’s role, it is fraught with difficulties. In the classroom the decision making process has its difficulties and its moments of revelation. In my experience, when the children could not agree on a decision as there were two good options to choose from, or there were strong willed participants, the director would step in and help them, using such strategies as:

- pointing out the advantage of each option and getting them to vote again
- dividing the group in two and exploring both options or

- telling them if an option was not possible due to other limitations. (This included obvious inappropriate choices such as not having a live cow on stage or doing a real bungy jump in the theatre.)
- giving them two minutes to decide or I will decide for them.

Above all, when it comes to directing in the classroom, it is important to distinguish between the production process as an opportunity for the exercise of group democracy and the production process as differentiated collaboration towards essentially dramatic ends. Neither approach necessarily excludes the other, but the teacher must be clear about where he or she wishes to place the emphasis. (Hornbrook, 1991, p. 79)

6. The Focus or Underlying Theme and Stimuli

The mood, or focus and the theme is an important aspect of devising, as it is this underlying driving force that molds the work as it is explored and is intertwined with the function. It will influence the methodology used by the participants. The theme or story also needs to be relevant and of interest to the participants or there won't be a commitment to the creative process. "Playbuilding only proceeds when ideas come from the group" (Bray, 1991, p. 14).

"The most fundamental requirement for devising theatre is a passion or desire to say something, a need to question or make sense of a starting point that encourages you to investigate further through a variety of processes and close enquiry" (Oddey, 1994, p. 42). This passion or desire needs to start from something, the stimuli. To ignite the passion is very important.

7. Research

"Research is vital to any playbuilding project" (Tarlington & Michaels, 1995, p. 13). Within the devising process, time needs to be given to the children to research the topic. They need to gather information around their topic and carry out investigations to gain insight. How to do this varies according to each context, the resources available and the children's abilities. Establishing what the participants need to find out and what they need to know will help direct their research. The source of the information may vary from the traditional use of libraries, newspapers, internet and interviews, through to the observations of people, friends, animals and places. Most New Zealand state primary schools have access to resources such as technology, broadband internet, classroom computers, library books (fiction and non fiction) and resources supplied by Ministry of Education ([Learning Media](#)). Some of these resources are free of charge to schools. For the classroom teacher needing ideas and support there is also the [Ministry of Education Website](#) and [Arts Online](#).

Research is a vital tool to develop depth, knowledge and credibility of the topic or theme. "A good devising director is bound to ensure that a period of 'research and design' is built into the project" (Bicat & Baldwin, 2002, p. 12).

Final Statement

When making connections between the theory of devised theatre, the key competencies in the New Zealand Curriculum and with classroom practice, the most important realization is that

working in this discipline opens opportunities of learning and discovery in authentic contexts. Devising theatre allows students to engage in the use of the five key competencies (managing self, relating to others, participating and contributing, thinking, and using language, symbols and text). It also opens opportunities for students to develop these competencies in ever increasingly more complex contexts and in ways not necessarily offered in other subject areas.

There are many processes that can be used and to reduce it to one singular method is wrought with difficulties and there is a risk of diminishing the original purpose of devising in the first place; that is to give the participants a voice to create a theatre work around their chosen topic in a collective creative way. Allowing for an open fluid method or process to be used increases the opportunities and possibilities of using the key competencies in a variety of authentic contexts.

The research undertaken at Westburn Primary School reinforced the theme within the literature that there is no one method of devising. By giving the children the opportunity to create devised works around their given topics, they were motivated, inspired, creative, thoughtful and reflective. They chose their next step according to what they needed and the topic they were focused on. They gained knowledge and applied this new knowledge to a new situation in the form of their dramas/theatre works. The groups' creativity and focus drove the process.

The most important conclusion from this study and one the director of devising theatre needs to keep foremost in their mind is that "Every project generates its own working process" (Oddey, 1994, p. 25). The strategies, methods and tools discussed, are examples of possibilities to be explored, modified, rejected or accepted by the group and not imposed upon them. By doing so, the participants are engaging in and developing the key competencies. By creating this freedom the group can fly with their ideas. There are no limitations. Kiwi kids really can fly!

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Biography



Annette graduated from Christchurch Teachers College with a Diploma in Teaching (commendation) and has a Bachelor of Education Degree (Massey). Annette also graduated with distinction from the New Zealand School of Dance. She was the recipient of the prestigious John Malcom Award for Best All Round Dancer. Most recently Annette has graduated with a Masters Degree in Visual and Performing Arts (Charles Sturt University, Australia). Her area of interest in research is in children's performance.

Annette is now a leading dance and drama specialist in schools in Canterbury. She currently lectures at the University of Canterbury in dance and drama for Primary Teacher Education and dance for Secondary Teacher Education. Annette is active in a number of theatre companies in Canterbury and is very supportive of both amateur and professional theatre.