

## Drama as a CLIL Instrument

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### Introduction

My earliest memory of an integration of drama with a curriculum content subject was to do with a play called the Plague at Eyam. I was so taken with this amazing story of a small Derbyshire village during the Black Death in 1665. The play has some 12 or 13 roles to play and the story is based around a decision the villagers took once they knew they had the disease among them, to cut themselves off from the world outside. In effect the village quarantined itself setting a perimeter around the village which no one was to cross. The play contextualizes the study in Science of infections and the spread of disease. It also, obviously, offers a wonderful History focus too.

Speaking from a CLIL perspective I was taken with the magic of the script which gave learners a safe foundation within which to 'be' characters in the play. It offers the teacher a priceless opportunity to talk academically about infectious diseases in a very meaningful, engaging and motivating way.

After meeting the Plague at Eyam, I set about looking for similar **contexts for role play and drama combined with content curriculum materials** and this article describes some of those discoveries.

Another dimension of drama as instrument for delivering CLIL is found in some of the curriculum skills which are highlighted in specific subjects. Playing a role in a short drama, it goes without saying, can be good practice for speaking at length on a theme. Other skills which can be integrated in lessons through drama include 'hypothesis' where learners predict how a character might act or behave in a specific situation.

### Defining 'drama'

I use a broad definition of this term in this paper. For me, drama means acting, or playing a role. It could be as controlled as fulfilling a simple, single function 'in character', a character set by the subject, curriculum or teacher. Or, it could be participating in an entire mini play with a subject focus. I've avoided many of the 'games' that are included in some definitions I found in the literature, not because I don't value them, I just felt that this paper should keep with its focus on 'role play'. In this way, I hope to offer a clear approach to working with drama, but colleagues will find much more which is available if you search for them, and which takes my definition much further.

### Cross-curricular drama

#### History

My 11-year old daughter recently studied Troy in her History class. We watched the Hollywood movie of the same name and part of the discussion we had revolved around Achilles and why he fought for Agamemnon when he clearly didn't like the guy. Our discussion was quite dramatic and we talked of the supposed 'honour' in battle, the romance for males strutting their stuff, of the desire to 'be the best' and also of how chance can play a large part in who we are, where we live and what choices we make during our lives. Imagine a small group of learners watching clips from the film and being asked to play the part of some of Achilles' Myrmidon soldiers in discussion around the camp fire, talking about

Achilles decision, feeling disrespected by Agamemnon, not to participate in initial battles against Trojan forces. Drama clearly has a role in the History lesson in learners taking on parts from a period in History.

*Hot seating* is one technique which allows learners to fit into a 'role'. In this activity one learner is placed on a 'hot' chair facing everyone else. They are given a character to play from a History context, period, event and the class can ask any questions they like on the topic being studied. It isn't essential that a 'key character' be sitting in the hot seat. As with the siege of Troy, it may be interesting for learners to interview one of Achilles soldiers about his behaviour, as opposed to the man himself.

## Art



Primary children in Anglia School do a lot of art. I can remember thinking 'we'll do art every day' when I was first setting up the school. We use art in Biology where our juniors create a human body collage including their art representations of the organs in the human body, and then the children 'be' that body imagining blood coursing through their bodies.



Figure 1: Circulation and respiration

*Teacher in role* is another technique for exploiting drama to explore a content subject area. Much like 'Hot Seat' a person takes on a role, but this time it is the teacher who adopts a role. Even doctors, to relate our discussion to the lesson example above, in training do role playing. Taking patient notes and working through Socratic questions (see appendix) offers doctors the chance to practice their 'script'. It is actually this 'script' which is the job of the teacher to identify. The technical mechanical task of clarifying what language is needed (found in curriculum guidelines through cognitive functions, in textbooks through content texts and questions, in the teacher's head etc), leads to the creative aspect of looking at how to set up the drama and role play. Of course, no one is suggesting that teachers become actors all the time (though some would argue that this is actually what they do) but a 'hot seat' task once in a while, a 'teacher in role' from time to time offers the learners access to their own creative resources in what may be quite an abstract content area. My 11-year old is frequently demotivated by the dryness of the content in her school subjects, but she's easy to motivate if a pinch of creativity is introduced and she's asked, for example, to prepare a slideshow on a topic exploring the characters involved.

**Table 4** Some examples of the uses of analogy role-play and simulation in the science curriculum.

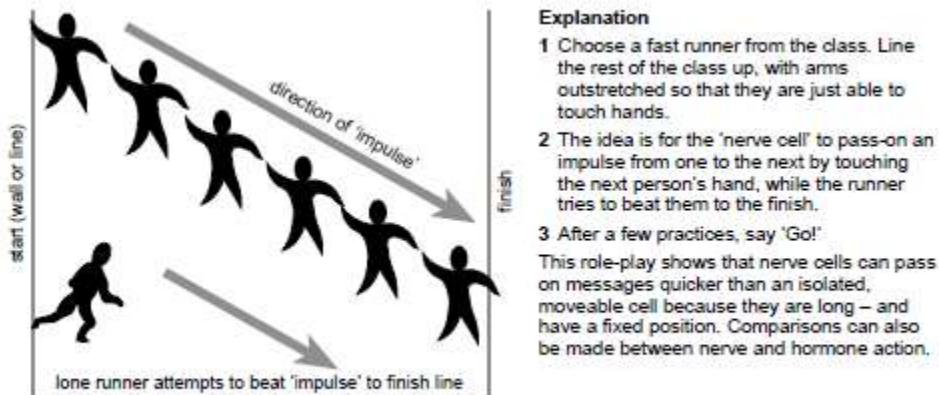
Type of role-play	Area of curriculum that can be described	Chemistry	Physics
<b>Analogy</b>	Circulatory system	Atomic structure (Figure 3)	Kinetic theory
	Structure and function of cells (Figure 2)	Valency	States of matter
	Enzyme action	Concentration effects	Expansion (Figure 4)
	Phagocytosis	Surface area effects	Electricity/electrical circuits
	Transpiration	Gas laws	Absorption of colour (see Batts, 1999)
	Antibody/antigen interaction	Diffusion	Refraction and reflection
	Predation	Sea-floor spreading	Movement of the planets and moons
<b>Simulation</b>	Environmental issues (SATIS no. 1208)	Environmental issues	Use of fuels/renewable energy
	Drug use	Ethics of oil extraction	Use of nuclear fuel (SATIS no. 109)
	Sex education debates	Ethics of raw material extraction	Noise pollution
	Ethics of genetic manipulation	Industrial hazards (SATIS no. 1002)	

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Figure 2: Analogy role-play and simulation in science

Figure 2 gives a collection of ideas for places in the science curriculum that lend themselves to role-play. Imagine getting learners acting out how particles behave in a liquid, a gas and a solid on their journey to understand the concept of changing states of matter.

Another example is getting learners to simulate how the nervous system works.

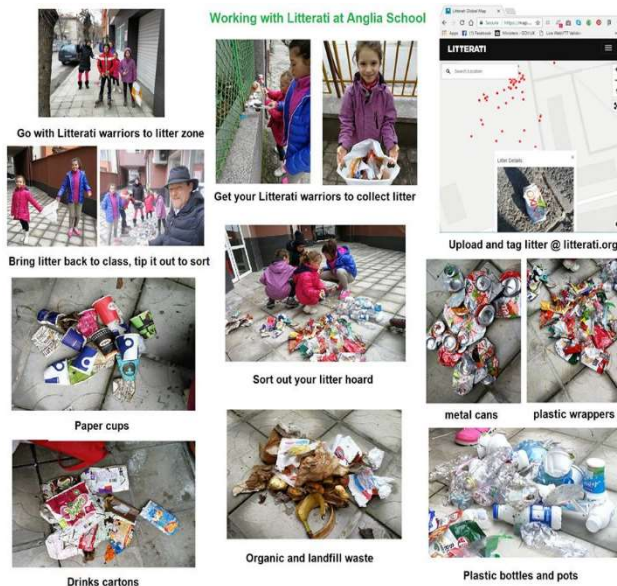


**Figure 2** A role-play to describe the structure and function of a nerve cell.

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Figure 3: Simulation on how the nervous system works

## Geography and Environmental Studies



Juniors at Anglia School frequently interact with their local community, whether it is mapping the streets, shops, street furniture locally, creating questionnaires to interview local shop keepers about their policy on plastic bags, sewing and handing out free cloth bags (in return for donations) at a local supermarket, auditing waste ([www.trashedworld.com](http://www.trashedworld.com)) in their neighbourhood: material types (glass, paper, plastic, glass, metal, organic), sources and origins (which companies make the waste). In these investigations, learners take on a role. They become detectives (in auditing waste – [www.litterati.org](http://www.litterati.org)), they become interviewers (in questioning people), they become scientists (in examining materials for recycling).

Figure 4: Litterati Warriors

This working 'in role' or 'in character' is easily applicable to older learners too. There is no monopoly on role play for young learners, no matter how more 'natural' it may seem. In fact, the older learners get, the more the need to maintain the connection between the content subject and the lives of the learners. The reason I believe this is that the content further up the age range becomes ever more abstract, and the intimacy once shared by learners' lives and the curriculum becomes ever less substantial, hence the challenge to bring the real world into the classroom for older learners. We can do this by exploiting roles for our learners to play.

## Science

The content curriculum, if it's a good one of course, gets learners to 'do stuff' all the time. I specify the content curriculum, because the activities, the 'doing', in the content curriculum are in many ways integral to the very learning of the subject. On the other hand, few would argue that in language classes, language skills lead the lessons. It is a magical thing to observe, for example, a class of young chemists getting their hands dirty while working on soil analysis in the chemistry lab. They are wearing lab coats, they are wearing goggles, they are using all the 'right' equipment. They are being scientists. They are working 'in role', being a scientist. Listen (speaks quietly in a whisper, looks around to make sure no one is looking), if you're an English teacher and you want to motivate your learners about the language ... (waves hand in a 'come closer' action) get your learners doing stuff in that language.

I've observed hundreds of lessons over the years. I've observed language lessons. I've observed content lessons. I've observed CLIL lessons (where there is content being learned through a foreign language) and it is the 'doing stuff' in the foreign language that motivates learners (both hard CLIL and soft CLIL learners).



A wonderful example of this 'doing' is referred to above where learners are examining different soils. In this extraordinary lesson, the learners are totally on task. The learners are functioning professionally in the target language and they are being scientists.

I always feel very privileged to be allowed into a colleagues' and learners' classroom to see what they do. In this case, I also have permission to use the lesson and recordings, so am going to share some thoughts on this with you here. My aim is to show that by engaging learners in 'playing roles' (and these roles can 'approach the authentic role of the teacher' – Geddes, 1978) we can create opportunities for meaningful language use in content classes with ease.

The context in question is a secondary class of chemistry in English in Austria. The learners are asked to watch two YouTube videos on soil analysis (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fufeaLBLG1k/> / <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GWZwbVJCNe>).

Learners are then asked to complete a chart which classifies different soils, using the information they view in the film to help them. As well as the types of soils the learners are prompted to listen for and note the characteristics of the different soils. In the figure below, learners are asked to use the chart and to listen / watch for information about different soil types (clay, loamy, sandy, etc) and note their respective characteristics. Learners hear many adjectives such as 'gritty', 'silky' and others which fit in the structure.

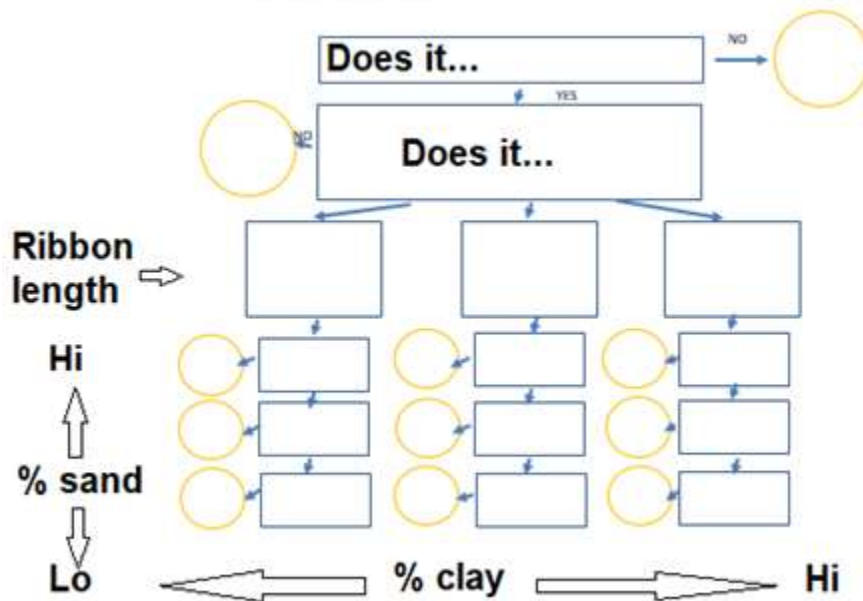


Figure 5: Structure for classifying soils with information from a film

This initial task, guiding learners through video input, also later acts as a 'semi-script' for the learners to practice carrying out their own soil analyses.

There are many other wonderful learning moments happening in this lesson, (and I thank the colleague and learners for letting me in to their classroom!) but my focus here is this 'acting as scientists'.



Figure 6: Learners as scientists carrying out soil analysis in a chemistry lab

[\(link to YouTube video\)](#)

There is a short clip of this moment linked in the pdf of this article. Practicals in science are such a great context for language simply because of the ‘acting’ involved. If you’re an English teacher, my advice is explore the rest of your learners’ curriculum for practical activities you can do in your English lesson and get your students ‘acting’!

#### Performance and audience

By way of conclusion, let’s say a word or two about getting students performing and the need for audience. Both of these concepts are accepted requirements in contemporary communicative language teaching methodology. There is an expectation that teachers will set up contexts where their students will practice language in a meaningful real life-like context. Nowadays, we have a wide range of media for broadcasting our students’ work too. Privacy and confidentiality aside (you’ll have to check and abide by the laws of your own country), it is still possible to record and ‘publish’ students’ work ‘in-house’. Setting up a camera, rehearsing a role or a play, or a scenario with a view to filming it is worth the effort simply for the value of students getting to see the end product they have a part in. You don’t have to publish it on the web, if that is inappropriate in your context.

There are clear advantages of having recordings. They are a little unsettling for students to begin with, but when they get used to the idea, it can quickly become a motivational factor in your teaching and learning. It also has the added advantage of showing learners where they may be able to improve their performance, which is invaluable.

Thinking about audience, try and find opportunities for your learners to share their performances with their peers, including groups of learners in other countries. Two places to look for ideas are Science Across the World ([www.scienceacross.org](http://www.scienceacross.org) – now inactive site, but the resources are still available in the

UK STEM website), and TrashedWorld ([www.trashedworld.com](http://www.trashedworld.com) – a current programme getting young people exploring waste in their local community and country and sharing their investigations with partner classes around the world).

In short, Think about the concepts and think about the language and how you can script or semi-script the language you want your learners to be fluent in using. Once you have this concept – language ‘plan’ exploit drama/role play to put it into practice. School and learning is all about drama and there is a lot we can exploit for delivering CLIL. Here, we’ve focused mainly on the idea of ‘scripts’ and practicing a standard language through a role or a scenario.

PS ☺

Since I became interested in role play and drama for CLIL, I came across the wonderful platform Play-Decide - <https://playdecide.eu/> - which is a collection of debate scenarios where participants have to make personal decisions and choices, but also as a group come to a joint decision which may involve a lot of compromise. The ‘game’ itself is very much in the spirit of carry out a role-play. I tried the debate on obesity with a group of doctors, and although they were already ‘in role’ as doctors, the fact that we had to come to a compromise, reach a ‘policy decision’ for our country, we were in fact role playing government and our decision was intended to come into law. Check it out, you won’t be disappointed.

## References

[www.litterati.com](http://www.litterati.com) (accessed 31.01.19)

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