Group devising

# Using research as stimulus

**Course:** Stage 6 Preliminary drama

**Course content:** Improvisation, playbuilding and acting

**Duration:** 8 weeks

## Overview

This learning sequence explores possible content and a suggested sequence to assist with teaching improvisation, playbuilding and acting in Year 11. It is designed as a starting point for teachers to differentiate teaching and learning strategies in response to the specific learning needs of their preliminary drama students. This learning sequence aims to enable students to investigate ways of using research as stimulus for the creation of an engaging group performance.

### Outcomes

In drama, the practices of making, performing, and critically studying interrelate. Students learn to engage in a collaborative process in which they explore, shape and symbolically represent imagination, ideas, feelings, attitudes, beliefs and their consequences.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Practice** | **A student** |
| **Making** | P1.1 develops acting skills in order to adopt and sustain a variety of characters and roles  P1.2 explores ideas and situations, expressing them imaginatively in dramatic form  P1.4 understands, manages and manipulates theatrical elements and elements of production, using them perceptively and creatively  P1.5 understands, demonstrates and records the process of developing and refining ideas and scripts to performance  P1.7 understands the collaborative nature of drama and theatre and demonstrates the self-discipline needed in the process of collaboration |
| **Performing** | P2.1 understands the dynamics of actor-audience relationship  P2.3 demonstrates directorial and acting skills to communicate meaning through dramatic action  P2.5 understands and demonstrates the commitment, collaboration and energy required for a production |
| **Critically studying** | P3.1 critically appraises and evaluates, both orally and in writing, personal performances and the performances of others  P3.2 understands the variety of influences that have impacted upon drama and theatre performance styles, structures and techniques |

[Drama Stage 6 Syllabus](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/wcm/connect/1ffa8deb-2716-402d-b182-3517494456ef/drama-st6-syl-from2010+Drama.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=) © NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) for and on behalf of the Crown in right of the State of New South Wales, [2009].

### Learning intentions

Through studying this sequence of lessons students will:

* value the contribution of each individual to the artistic effectiveness of a performance
* use research as a stimulus for playbuilding
* collaborate effectively to produce a group devised performance
* value innovation and originality in group work
* evaluate their own work and the work of others through the process of peer feedback/assessment
* engage in collaborative learning and performance activities
* collaboratively develop and individually express a clear dramatic intention
* deliberately manipulate the elements of drama and production to engage the audience
* experiment with and manipulate the actor-audience relationship.

### Key competencies

#### Collecting, analysing and organising information

Students will work individually and collaboratively to research significant people, places and events. They will then explore this information as stimulus for generating, structuring and refining an original group devised performance.

Communicating ideas and information

Students will communicate with each other and with the audience by creating dramatic meaning in an original performance.

Organising and planning activities

Students will plan and organise their time as they work collaboratively to select, structure and refine their dramatic ideas.

Working with others and in teams

Working collaboratively, students will find ways to share ideas, make choices and achieve a shared dramatic vision for their group performance.

Solving problems

Through exploration, experimentation and reflection students will make choices about the selection and structure of research and improvised material to ensure their group performance engages the audience and makes a cohesive dramatic statement.

Using technology

Students will use the elements of production (lighting and sound) to enhance the dramatic meaning of their original performance.

### Key questions

As they progress through this learning sequence, students may ask and answer some of the following key questions:

* What makes a balanced group?
* What does it mean to make a significant impact?
* How can active improvisation be used to build a play?
* How can research be used to create successful and innovative theatre?
* What are the advantages of collaborative work?
* What strategies can be developed to overcome the challenges of working collaboratively?
* What makes a coherent and engaging group performance?
* How can the elements of drama, stylistic conventions and staging be manipulated to create an original performance which evokes a powerful audience response?
* How can the logbook be used as a tool to develop and refine a group performance?
* Why is it important to have a clear intention for a dramatic work?

### Assessment

* Formative teacher assessment and peer feedback collected throughout the group devising process, can be recorded and reflected upon in students’ logbooks.
* A summative assessment task, including performance and written components, is provided.

### Differentiation

* Balanced groups should be formed to ensure student achievement through peer and teacher support/extension.
* Teachers may suggest people/places/events to be researched or provide sources and research scaffolds.
* The school librarian could create a list of useful websites or a collection of reference texts to be used during the generating and exploring phase.
* Teachers may choose to focus on one significant event/person/place and conduct collaborative research with the whole cohort.
* Students may benefit from viewing exemplars from previous cohorts if available.

### Resources

* Student logbooks.
* [Printed or digital copies of assessment task.](https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/creative-arts/7-12/drama/11-12-drama/creativearts-drama-resource-preliminary-groupdevisingtask-s6.docx)
* [Student logbook guide](https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/creative-arts/7-12/drama/7-10-drama/creativearts-drama-resource-studentlogbookguide-s5.docx)
* [Rationale guide](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/creative-arts/stage-6/drama#Rationale3).

## Teaching and learning activities

### Group dynamics

#### One week

##### Explore

Students take part in active improvisation exercises that help them form new creative partnerships through spontaneous collaboration. The teacher chooses structured improvisation activities that encourage the development of ensemble skills, play, energy and creativity through the key improvisation principles of offer, yield, extend and advance.

For example, beginning with a word/topic given by the teacher, students work in pairs to improvise a conversation in which every sentence begins with ‘Yes, and…’. In this way, students become familiar with the pattern of offer, yield, extend and advance.

Structured improvisation and devising ideas can be found in [STC – 10 steps to collaborative playbuilding](https://d2wasljt46n4no.cloudfront.net/pdf/content-pages/community-pages/STC_EBOOK_10STEPS_1.pdf), [Devising – Complicite](http://www.complicite.org/media/1439372000Complicite_Teachers_pack.pdf) and [Frantic Assembly – A guide to devising](https://fod.infobase.com/http/49800/49817_guide.pdf).

Teacher may also begin all lessons in subsequent weeks with an ensemble focused warm-up exercise.

##### Introduce

Teacher explains the key principles of improvisation and their function within the process of playbuilding/group devising. For example, ideas become performance through active improvisation. It is best to say yes to every idea and then edit, rather than dismissing before trying. Discourage students from spending too long discussing and instead experiment with ideas on the stage.

Teacher also outlines the role of the drama logbook as a tool for recording and refining research and ideas generated through active improvisation. It may be useful to refer to the student logbook guide.

##### Experiment

Teacher outlines some different approaches to group devised performance. For example, theme-based, issue-based, style-based, character-based and/or location-based. Using active improvisation techniques to generate material, students create a series of two-minute group devised performance using the following playbuilding stimulus below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Stimulus** | **Structure** |
| Theme | Collage |
| Style | Non-linear |
| Character or location | Linear narrative |
| Object or prop | Cyclical |
| Script excerpt, image, word or phrase | Episodic |
| Issue | Metaphor |

Students perform and discuss the different audience responses to each approach and how dramatic meaning was shaped by structure. Teacher facilitates a discussion about how structure can be manipulated to serve the function or intention of the group devised performance.

##### Discuss

Teacher unpacks the [assessment task](https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/creative-arts/7-12/drama/11-12-drama/creativearts-drama-resource-preliminary-groupdevisingtask-s6.docx) before facilitating group formation.

Students will work in groups of 3-6 to devise an original piece of theatre in response to the phrase, ‘But we’ve always done it this way’. The 6-8 minute group devised performance should focus on exploring the story of a culturally and historically significant place, event or person. Students may use the conventions of any theatrical form or style but must make a coherent theatrical statement that develops from wide research. The performance should evoke the intended audience response through manipulation of the elements of drama and production.

Each student must also submit an individual rationale which explains their directorial intention and a logbook with demonstrates their individual contribution to the group devising process. The logbook must show evidence and analysis of the performance taking shape from initial research through to final staging choices.

Teacher leads a class discussion about the advantages and challenges of group devising, compared to script. Teacher ensures students are aware that playbuilding is a chance to express a shared, original creative vision and for each individual student to utilise their strengths for the benefit of the ensemble. Through teacher-led discussion of the vital skills and advantages of a balanced group (driver, creative ideas, performer, ensemble, scribe, inspirer), students form balanced groups for assessment.

### Generating and exploring

#### Two weeks

##### Research, improvise and share

In their balanced groups, students can individually or collaboratively generate ideas in response to the phrase, ‘But we’ve always done it this way’, connecting it to places/events/people significant to their own cultural/historical experience. All ideas and discoveries should be recorded in individual logbooks.

Students can then share ideas and create a shortlist of three significant place/event/person ideas they are collectively most interested in exploring. Students then create three tableaux for each idea, highlighting the ways in which they might connect to the phrase. They can perform for peers and record feedback in logbooks. One option is to have the class vote on the idea they would most like to see developed further. Students should justify their choices through critical evaluation and respectful discussion.

Students access library/online resources and conduct in-depth research into their chosen place/event/person. Each group member collects a source related to chosen place/event/person. The source may be a podcast, film, song, interview, image, news report, article, poem, statistic/graph, story, email, advert, historical report, etc. Students should provide a copy of the source for each group member. All resources should be recorded and annotated in logbooks.

Groups can then share and select one piece of source material to share with the rest of the class. Peers provide critical feedback and generate creative ideas about how this source material might be incorporated into a theatrical performance in response to the phrase, ‘But we’ve always done it this way’. Students record discussions and suggestions in logbooks.

In their groups, students may continue gathering and sharing sources each lesson and using these as inspiration for active improvisation around a specific technique or convention. Students should use logbooks to annotate all sources and record all active improvisation material generated.

### Selecting and structuring

#### Two weeks

##### Building the play

Students use the active improvisation ideas, source material and peer feedback generated and explored in previous weeks to make decisions about the style and form of their group devised performance. By the end of this two week period, students should have at least 6 minutes of material structured and ready to rehearse and refine. During this phase, the teacher may suggest any of the following strategies, dependent on the development stage of the work and needs of each group.

##### Try, try, try again

Working in their groups, students select 3 pieces of devised material from the previous two weeks and connect them in a performance that is clearly linked to the phrase, ‘But we’ve always done it this way’.

Students select 3 pieces of source material from the previous two weeks research and connect them in a performance that creates strong visual imagery and evokes a powerful audience response.

Through group discussion and reference to existing knowledge of performance styles and theatrical forms, students stage the opening minute of their draft performance in 3 different styles. For example, verbatim, melodrama and physical theatre.

Groups choose one source-based moment created over the previous two weeks and perform the same moment using 3 different structural approaches. For example, episodic, non-linear and montage.

Students can perform any of their devised scene options for peers or teacher to gauge the differences in audience response to each approach. This could lead to group or class discussion about how a common idea can be presented in diverse ways to communicate different dramatic intention.

Students should record all discoveries, feedback and choices in logbooks.

### Refining and rehearsing

#### Two weeks

##### Staging and intention

At the start of this phase, the teacher should further unpack the written rationale in order to help students to clarify the intention of their group devised performance. It may be helpful to use the [rationale guide](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/creative-arts/stage-6/drama#Rationale3) as a basis for this lesson.

Students spend the first week, utilising regular teacher and peer feedback to refine the performance material they selected and structured over the previous two weeks. During this phase, the teacher should encourage students to spend the majority of their time actively staging and sharing their draft work. Logbooks can be kept close by to record key choices and changes. Students can be encouraged to consider some of the staging and intention questions below.

* Why is it important for us to tell this story?
* Is it clear what makes our chosen place/event/person so culturally/historically significant?
* What response do we want from our audience?
* Is our performance engaging?
* How can we show theatrical innovation in our staging and dialogue choices?
* Is our research evident in our performance?
* How can we utilise space and actor-audience relationship to serve our artistic intention?
* How can we control and manipulate the elements of drama to ensure our dramatic meaning is clear?
* What stylistic conventions could we use more effectively?
* How can we utilise the potential of the whole ensemble throughout our performance?
* Is our group performance a clear response to the phrase, ‘But we’ve always done it this way’?

It may be helpful to begin the second week by encouraging each group to create a rehearsal timeline with a specific goal for each lesson. These could include:

* no prompts to be used from now on
* time the piece (6-8 minutes)
* rework opening/closing scene
* finalise audience arrangement
* block all scenes with a full set
* finalise transitions
* make costume choices
* experiment with lighting and sound to enhance dramatic meaning
* create a lighting and sound cue sheet
* finalise and rehearse with all props
* technical run
* dress rehearsal.

### Assessment and reflection

#### One week

##### Perform

Students perform their group devised theatre assessment for the drama cohort. See assessment task for details and marking criteria.

##### Write

Following the performances, students use their logbooks to reflect on their own performance and the performances of others. They then submit their logbooks, including individual rationales, for summative assessment.

### References

[Drama Stage 6 Syllabus](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/wcm/connect/1ffa8deb-2716-402d-b182-3517494456ef/drama-st6-syl-from2010+Drama.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=) © NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) for and on behalf of the Crown in right of the State of New South Wales, [2009]. Accessed 15/02/2021.

[STC – 10 steps to collaborative playbuilding](https://d2wasljt46n4no.cloudfront.net/pdf/content-pages/community-pages/STC_EBOOK_10STEPS_1.pdf) date accessed 10/03/2021.

[Devising – Complicite](http://www.complicite.org/media/1439372000Complicite_Teachers_pack.pdf) date accessed 10/03/2021.

[Frantic Assembly – A guide to devising](https://fod.infobase.com/http/49800/49817_guide.pdf) date accessed 10/03/2021.