

The Five Focus Words

These five words come from the art form, provide built in classroom management strategies, and are the key words to be mastered by the students and the teacher.

There are three primary tools in drama: mind, body, and voice. These tools are used almost exclusively, particularly when getting started in the art form. The support tools (costumes, sets, props, sound, scripts, etc.) are primarily tools of theater and should only be used when they become essential to the work.

Related to the three tools are five beginning skills in drama: concentration, imagination, transformation, imitation, and collaboration. In combination with collaboration, cooperation is also introduced and important in the beginning stages.

Drama feels like play; but it is also a disciplined art form. The drama classroom, like an academic classroom, is well managed even with movement, speaking, and sound. Focusing on the primary tools and five entry level skills will give students language to discuss the art form and practice with the self-discipline required for participating in enacted story. My approach to drama teaching is to give students the self-management, artistic, and collaborative skills needed to move from teacher directed to student directed play. The Five Focus Words, when mastered by the teacher, guide that process.

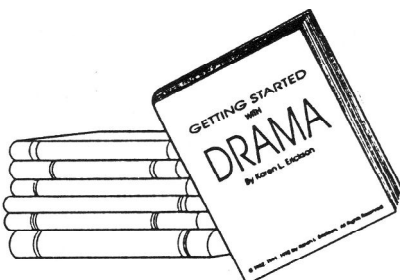
Overt negative behavior can be corrected through use of the five skill words without affecting a student personally. For instance, students can be encouraged to concentrate when things are getting out of hand. A leader can stop a class and introduce activities to strengthen imagination or concentration when a class is not focused and seems to be overly active. This is more favorable than a teacher becoming frustrated or angry with a class because they are "misbehaving" or "out of control."

Best of all, the students find it quite enjoyable to go back and work on specific skills focusing on these five words. Teachers appreciate the words because they provide a safety valve for unexpected problems and carry over into the general classroom.

Concentration

This skill, using the tool of the mind, needs to be in operation before participation can progress. Concentration is necessary for the imagination, another process of the mind, to function at full tilt.

To think about one thing really hard



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Imagination

This component of the artistic process (and a necessary skill for the creating of art) uses the tool of the mind in a unique manner. When the imagination is operating and providing mental images, then imitation becomes the outward manifestation of those images.

To see images in the mind (sound, taste, smell, touch, or visual images) of what is not there now or what has not been

Three ways artists engage their imagination:

1. Observing: others or the environment
2. Memory: accessing stored knowledge
3. Listening: building on the ideas of others

Imitation

THE ACTION VERB
To act like you're doing
without really doing

Imitation engages the drama tools of voice and body to become the outward manifestation of the imagination. Through imitation an artist gives life to her imagined people, animals, and objects by adding action, sound, and language.

Transformation

When a participant in drama/theater concentrates at his fullest, engages his mind imaginatively, and imitates the actions, movement, and sound of his role with ease, then we say that a participant has reached "flow" and transformation can occur. Acting is transformation; it is becoming character (or sometimes setting).

THE NOUN
To change into something or
someone else

Collaboration

To work together to solve a
problem and then to cooperate
by carrying through on the
solution or agreed action

Drama is an ensemble art form and this skill is vital in moving from teacher/leader directed to participant directed work. In this curriculum students are guided from solo work into partner, small group, then larger group work.



ACHIEVEMENT INDICATORS FOR CONCENTRATION & COLLABORATION

I am asked over and over how I can tell if a class has successfully achieved two important areas in drama classroom management that are also necessary for the development of the art form. The three areas are: concentration and collaboration. Here, then, is a summary of what I observe in classrooms that indicates how well classes or individuals are progressing in each of these areas.

Concentration and Showing Off Indicators

Focused participants show:

- A facial expression that is set with a purpose.
- Awareness of and the ability to evaluate the task at hand. This might lead to adaptation in the middle of a task.
- Blocking out of all distractions. Attention is on partners and tasks.
- Absence of showing off (see below).
- Absence of self consciousness. There is no giggling, no self deprecation evidenced through body language, and no looking at the instructor for help.
- Energy is high and directed toward task.

The show off:

- Uses actions and movements that are overly broad in order to attract inappropriate attention and laughter from peers.
- Uses verbalization that is overly broad to attract inappropriate attention and laughter from peers.
- Looks around to see how many people are looking at him.
- Breaks the "wall" of personal space in order to distract others from their personal concentration.
- Drifts from group rehearsal space in order to bother other working groups or individuals.
- Causes the noise level in a work area to rise. (There are other causes for noise level rising. Check the indicators before you diagnose showing off as the cause.)
- Causes the teacher's attention to focus on her. Showing off pulls the eyes of the teacher from a general easy scanning to one individual.



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Collaboration Indicators

In a cohesive group, members will:

- **Ask**, not **tell**, each other what to do.
- Maintain physical positions at the same level. Children trying to take over the group will rise to higher and higher physical levels.
- Be quieter. No one needs to shout to know that the others are listening.
- Complete tasks. All participants will be eager to work as a team in order to have a drama to share at the end of the work period.
- Not hurt each other's feelings.
- Contribute ideas to the decision making process. All might not agree; there can be challenge and discussion. All individuals agree to agree on the final decision of the group, no matter what it is.
- Meet problems with plans of action that do not include using the teacher as disciplinarian.
- Accept compliments and criticisms as a team. No scapegoating.
- Allow leadership roles to be handled in a variety of ways.

Three Indicators of a Dysfunctional Group

1. **ISOLATED MEMBERS** are obvious and ignored.
2. **MONOPOLIZERS** control the tasks and decision process of the group.
3. **SCAPEGOATS** are created to account for incomplete work.

