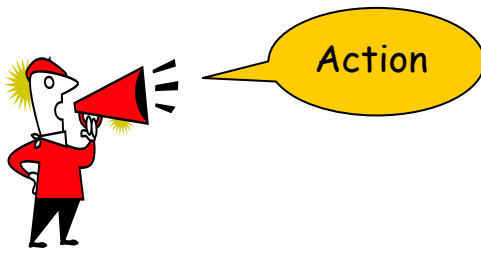


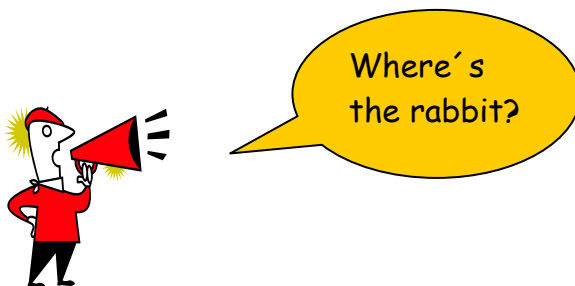
# Tips on getting children acting



We are not talking about achieving Oscar winning performances here. I am no expert in drama. I am simply talking about the simple basics which adults take for granted but young children may not. They need to be reminded. For some it may simply be that they would naturally do these things in their own language but when the play is in a foreign language it takes all their concentration to follow the script, and they simply forget to do some seemingly obvious things. The tips below represent all the things which I have noticed young children tend to need reminding about.

- **Practise entering**
- **Practise exiting**
- **Never speak with their back to the audience**
- **Use gestures and intonation to add dramatic effect**
- **When they are on stage they must always act, even if they aren't saying anything.**
- **Speak slowly**
- **Project their voices**

## Practise entering and exiting



Where are they entering from? How do you want them to enter? Walking? Running? Are they looking for something? Are they lost – looking around? Are they running away? Should they look scared? Are they deep in conversation?

Where do they go? To the centre of the stage? To the far end – maybe to leave lots of space in the centre of the stage if lots of children are about to charge on.

When they exit, Where will they exit to - left or right? How will they exit? Walk? Run? Excited? Scared?

## **Never speak with their back to the audience**

Many children will forget to do this. Don't worry, just keep drumming it into them! See *Turning the classroom into a stage* for ideas on how to deal with this.

## **Use gestures and intonation to add dramatic effect**

Probably because they are concentrating so much on the words (being a foreign language) most children tend to stand very stiffly, arms at their sides – looking like robots. The problem is it looks very boring from the point of view of an audience. It is incredible the visual difference a few simple gestures make. Most of the time I simply get children to use their hands and arms to add a bit of life to their performance.

I usually demonstrate this with an example. I enter and say "Hello, how are you? My name is Dominic." In a very monotone voice, standing stiffly with no gestures. I exaggerate this a lot. The children usually laugh – which is good because they can see that what I am doing is not very interesting. I then repeat this using intonation and using gestures with my hands. They can immediately see the difference such gestures make.

## **When they are on stage they must always act, even if they aren't saying anything**

When not speaking, many children will simply stand there, with a blank expression. This is natural since up until now they have been focusing on a script, and the script does not usually mention what every must act. Scripts tend to focus every one's attention on whoever is taking part in the dialogue at that moment. The problem is that when there are 7 or 8 children standing on a stage looking blank whilst 2 other children hold a dialogue it looks boring. They 7 or 8 are not invisible, the audience can see them and so by not acting they detract from the overall effect. If something exciting is happening on the stage, the other children need to react to it. If their friend is about to be eaten by a monster, they should look worried, or scared. If they can react like this, the visual effect is impressive. The whole scene comes much more alive. Don't worry, they will need to be constantly reminded of this. I usually make a joke about it, imagining my friend is about to die and I am looking bored. They always see how funny this is and realise that they need to react in some way to what is happening.

## **Speak slowly**

"Really?" I hear you say. "But my students usually speak very slowly anyway!" I know. I don't understand it, but it is a phenomenon that I have seen in almost every child I have ever done theatre with. Once they have learnt their lines, children tend to garble them out very quickly. In a native speaker this might not be so bad, but when we take into account the fact that their pronunciation will usually be not so perfect (good, but not excellent – of course!) the result can be that what they say becomes incomprehensible. It can be easy for teachers to not notice this. The teacher knows what they are saying because the teacher knows the script. We need to get used to listening as if we were someone who has no idea of the script – i.e. someone in the audience. You will often have to get the children to really slow down. Slowing down also, by the way, tends to make what they say sound more dramatic. An added extra!

## **Project their voices**

This is only important if you want to perform the play in a larger space, for example in a hall, but you are practising in a smaller classroom. Children will not automatically speak louder when in a big space. What can be perfectly audible in the classroom is usually inaudible in a hall. There are a few tricks for getting children to speak up. Emphasis how speaking in a loud voice is not necessarily the same as shouting.

1. Put two children at opposite ends of a class, or corridor, and ask them to have a conversation.
2. Put one child outside the class and close the door and make them talk to someone inside the class.