

The Helicopter Technique

The Helicopter Technique uses storytelling and acting out of the children's stories. It grew out of Vivian Gussin Paley's idea and book *'The Boy Who Would Be a Helicopter'*. Trisha Lee of MakeBelieve Arts in the UK pioneered the technique after studying Vivian's work and visiting her in America.

Storytelling comes naturally to children- you only need to watch them play to know children freely created their own oral stories. Even more, even the wee boys who hate writing come to be interested in it. It was inclusive and empowering for them and made all children want to engage in writing as time progressed. Narrating and dialogue are natural things for children and humans to do. It really draws on and engages on who the children are and their ability to whakamana. It raises their confidence, and boosts their well being as they feel like their voice and ideas matter.

In particular, the helicopter technique enables children to directly experience the connections between different models of language, especially oral and written, as well as gain the attention of others, and to become better listeners. And to develop a class as an appreciative audience.

The Helicopter Technique Process. The tamariki sit in a big circle as the audience, you may use a rope or chalk circle. The inside of the circle becomes the performance area or the stage.

- The teacher invites a child to tell their story. The teacher writes what the child tells, word for word on an A5 notebook, double line spaced, making sure that the child can clearly see the story written down modelling written language.
- The teacher repeats back every sentence to the child to check they've got what they want you to record, changing it if the child requires it. The teacher does this without correcting grammar or anything, as it is the child's story.
- The limit of the story is the size of the page.
- The teacher underlines the roles and characters in the story and asks the child which character they want to play. The teacher circles that character.
- The teacher starts reading the story and invites tamariki to take up the roles as they come up in the story. They not only act out characters but inanimate objects, props, scenery, etc like chairs, doors, trees, rivers. Invite 2-3 children together to make a river, a forest, a taniwha etc. Can you 3 please show us what trees look like? Show us how the giant is feeling. Ask the other characters, props similar questions.
- Once the story is finished the teacher moves on to the next child on the list.
- Once the children know the process the teacher can collect stories any time during the day and use the circle time to act out the stories.

Conscience Alley to develop the stories further: Some stories lend themselves to this drama strategy and give the group an opportunity to explore and analyse a dilemma.

- Line all the children up in 2 lines and then turn the lines facing each other with about a meter gap down the middle. You don't need to use the whole class, some tamariki can be the audience if you like.
- Invite one line to think of reasons to support the dilemma and the other line to think of reasons against.
- Invite the character to walk down the middle, as they walk they turn to each child alternately on the different sides. Each child gets a chance to offer the character some advice and their reason for it. Make sure you model it first.
- Invite the character to make a choice out of the two options once at the end of the line. This always props cheers and laughter, e.g. "So giant, are you going to stay in the playground or not? Tell us why?"