

The Teaching of Drama in the Primary School

Brian Woolland

The Effective Teacher



***The Teaching of Drama in the
Primary School***

THE EFFECTIVE TEACHER SERIES

General editor: Elizabeth Perrott

EFFECTIVE TEACHING: A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO IMPROVING YOUR TEACHING by Elizabeth Perrott

THE EFFECTIVE TEACHING OF ENGLISH by Robert Protherough, Judith Atkinson and John Fawcett

THE EFFECTIVE TEACHING OF MODERN LANGUAGES by Colin Wringle

THEORY OF EDUCATION by Margaret Sutherland

PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHING AND EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY by David Galloway and Anne Edwards

SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHING AND EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY by David Galloway and Anne Edwards

CONTEMPORARY DEBATES IN EDUCATION: AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE by Ron Brooks

THE LEGAL CONTEXT OF TEACHING by Neville Harris with Penelope Pearce and Susan Johnstone

TEACHING STATISTICAL CONCEPTS by Anne Hawkins, Flavia Jolliffe and Leslie Glickman

THE TEACHING OF DRAMA IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL by Brian Woolland

THE EFFECTIVE TEACHING OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION by Brenda Watson

TEACHING AS COMMUNICATION by Bob Hodge

THE ASSESSMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS: WHOSE PROBLEM? by David Galloway, Derrick Armstrong and Sally Tomlinson

THE EFFECTIVE TEACHING OF SECONDARY SCIENCE by John Parkinson

THE EFFECTIVE TEACHING OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION by Mick Mawer

THE EFFECTIVE TEACHER SERIES

***THE TEACHING
OF DRAMA IN THE
PRIMARY SCHOOL***

BRIAN WOOLLAND

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 1993 by Pearson Education Limited

Published 2014 by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Copyright ● 1993, Taylor & Francis.

The moral right of Brian Woolland to be identified
as the author of this work has been asserted

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Notices

Knowledge and best practice in this field are constantly changing. As new research and experience broaden our understanding, changes in research methods, professional practices, or medical treatment may become necessary.

Practitioners and researchers must always rely on their own experience and knowledge in evaluating and using any information, methods, compounds, or experiments described herein. In using such information or methods they should be mindful of their own safety and the safety of others, including parties for whom they have a professional responsibility.

To the fullest extent of the law, neither the Publisher nor the authors, contributors, or editors, assume any liability for any injury and/or damage to persons or property as a matter of products liability, negligence or otherwise, or from any use or operation of any methods, products, instructions, or ideas contained in the material herein.

ISBN 13: 978-0-582-08906-8 (pbk)

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is
available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Woolland, Brian, 1949–

The teaching of drama in the primary school / Brian Woolland.

p. cm. -- (The Effective teacher series)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-582-08906-9

1. Theater--Study and teaching (Primary) 2. Drama--Study and teaching (Primary) I. Title. II. Series.

PN2095.W6 1993

372.6'6--dc20

92-28989
CIP

C O N T E N T S

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
<i>Editor's perface</i>	xi
PART ONE <i>The Place of Drama in the Primary School</i>	1
1 <i>Introduction</i>	3
<i>The National Curriculum</i>	5
<i>Myths of time and space – finding time for drama</i>	13
PART TWO <i>Drama in Practice</i>	15
2 <i>Starting out</i>	17
<i>Drama and Story</i>	18
<i>Using photographs and paintings as starting points</i>	21
<i>Using poetry in drama</i>	27
Example: <i>'The Island'</i>	28
3 <i>Working methods</i>	34
<i>Small group work</i>	34
<i>Forum Theatre</i>	40
<i>Games and exercises</i>	42
Example: <i>Keeper of the Keys</i>	45
<i>Still images</i>	49
<i>Teaching in role</i>	55

vi Contents

Example: <i>The Roman Census</i>	61
<i>Whole group work</i>	61
4. Organisation and development	73
<i>Control in the drama lesson</i>	73
<i>Reflection</i>	76
Examples	77/8
<i>Questioning skills</i>	80
<i>Narrative: dramatic structure and dramatic tension</i>	85
Example: <i>Difficult decisions and their consequences</i>	88
<i>The dramatic frame</i>	89
Example: <i>Smuggling, various dramatic frames</i>	89
<i>Non-verbal language: use of space; symbol</i>	91
<i>Collaborative teaching</i>	97
5 Drama and the whole curriculum	103
<i>Topic work</i>	104
<i>Writing in role</i>	105
Examples: <i>The Crashed Spaceship</i>	106
<i>The Giant Awakes</i>	106
<i>The Deserter</i>	107
<i>The Iron Age Encampment</i>	113
<i>The Construction of a Railway</i>	115
PART THREE Early Years	123
6. Drama with children in Key Stage One	125
<i>Play</i>	125
<i>Making a start</i>	127
<i>Working in the classroom</i>	128

<i>Whole group work</i>	130
Examples: <i>The Magician who lost his Magic</i>	131
<i>The Circus</i>	132
<i>Pretend and Reality</i>	132
Example: <i>The Giant's Toothache</i>	133
<i>Magic</i>	134
<i>Still Image and Forum Theatre</i>	136
PART FOUR Performance and Production	141
7 Developing the work towards presentation	143
<i>Plays, productions and presentations – a rationale</i>	143
<i>The school play</i>	145
<i>Theatre skills and skill-building exercises</i>	152
<i>Masks, costume and lighting</i>	161
<i>Audience/performer relationships</i>	169
<i>Scripts and spontaneity</i>	170
Example: <i>Sharing spontaneous drama work</i>	174
8 The Donkeyman's Daughter	177
<i>Aims and objectives</i>	177
<i>Preliminary planning</i>	178
<i>Implementation and development</i>	180
PART FIVE Planning and Assessment	189
9 Planning and assessment	191
<i>Assessing relevant factors which affect planning</i>	191
<i>Aims, objectives and intentions</i>	193
<i>Opening up a topic</i>	195

viii Contents

<i>Lesson plans and schemes of work</i>	197
<i>Assessment and evaluation</i>	201
10 <i>Opening up and planning a topic-based drama project</i> <i>(Written in collaboration with Lib Taylor)</i>	207
<i>The preliminary stages</i>	207
<i>The work in practice</i>	215
<i>Realization of the project</i>	219
<i>Sharing the work</i>	224
Appendix: General Advice	227
<i>Research</i>	229
<i>Materials</i>	231
<i>The drama room</i>	232
<i>Drama policy guidelines</i>	233
<i>Using video in drama work</i>	237
<i>Rehearsal schedules</i>	239
<i>Staging – diagrams</i>	240
<i>Story books recommended for use in drama</i>	242
<i>Select Bibliography</i>	243
<i>A brief discussion of some of the books referred to</i>	244
<i>Useful names and addresses</i>	246
Index	249

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

I would like to extend thanks to the following, all of whom have been extremely helpful.

Mary Martyn-Johns, Lindsay Beaton, Liz Pye and the staff of Redlands County Primary School, Reading, who will recognise much of the practical work described in this book.

Alistair Black, David Davies, Dorothy Heathcote – each of whom, in their very different ways has been a positive influence on my drama teaching.

I am indebted to the colleagues and students with whom I have worked over the years, who have influenced and challenged my thinking – in particular my colleagues at Reading University in the Sub-Department of Film and Drama and the Department of Arts and Humanities.

I would like to thank Lib Taylor, always an encouraging and supportive colleague, for her contributions to the introduction to this book and to Chapters 7 and 10.

We are grateful to the following for permission to reproduce copyright material:

The author's agents for the poem 'Whale' by D.M. Thomas from *Selected Poems*, Secker & Warburg 1983. Copyright © D.M. Thomas; Don Campbell & Co. for the 'Smuggling' poster; Kunsthistorischen Museums, Wien for the picture Kinderspiele (Children's Games) by P. Bruegel; Ann Hollaway for the Pied Piper of Hamelin storyboards.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

EDITOR'S PREFACE

This new series was inspired by my book on the practice of teaching (*Effective Teaching: a Practical Guide to Improving your Teaching*, Longman, 1982), written for trainee teachers wishing to improve their teaching skills as well as for in-service teachers, especially those engaged in the supervision of trainees. The books in this series have been written with the same readership in mind. However, busy classroom teachers will find that these books also serve their needs as changes in the nature and pattern of education make the in-service training of experienced teachers more essential than in the past.

The rationale behind the series is that professional courses for teachers require the coverage of a wide variety of subjects in a relatively short time so the aim of the series is the production of 'easy to read', practical guides to provide the necessary subject background, supported by references to guide and encourage further reading, together with questions and/or exercises devised to assist application and evaluation.

As specialists in their selected fields, the authors have been chosen for their ability to relate their subjects to the needs of teachers and to stimulate discussion of contemporary issues in education.

The series aims to cover subjects ranging from the theory of education to the teaching of mathematics and from primary school teaching and educational psychology to effective teaching with information technology. It will look at aspects of education as diverse as education and cultural diversity and pupil welfare and counselling. Although some subjects such as the legal context of teaching and the teaching of history are specific to England and Wales, the majority of the subjects such as assessment in education, the effective teaching of statistics and comparative education are international in scope.

Elizabeth Perrott



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

PART ONE

***The Place of Drama in the
Primary School***



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Introduction

The purpose of this book is

1. To consider the importance of drama in the primary school, both as a subject in its own right and as a means of motivating and enhancing learning in other curriculum areas.
2. To suggest a coherent approach to the teaching and use of drama in primary schools.
3. To offer a range of examples of good practice.
4. To look at ways and means of creating successful and exciting theatrical presentations and productions.

The book is aimed at teachers (and prospective teachers) in primary and middle schools. The approaches to teaching drama suggested here should hold good with whatever age group is being taught. There is, however, very little published about teaching drama with children in their first years of schooling (in Key Stage One) and I have therefore included a specific section on working with children in Years One and Two, attempting to show how some of the ideas described elsewhere in the book (which might at first glance appear slightly inaccessible) can be readily adapted for use with this age group.

Hopefully, the book will be of use not only to teachers who have never taught drama (and who, perhaps, feel a little anxious about making a start) but also to those with considerable expertise. The book asserts that drama is an important subject in its own right and should be taught as such; but it also recognises that drama has a vitally important part to play in developing the whole school curriculum.

The book attempts to show that there are many opportunities within the school for sharing drama work; that you don't have to wait for a major School Play in order to develop good presentational work; that the valuable exploratory activities of high quality classroom work need not and should not be threatened by presenting work to an audience; that the School Play itself (too often an annual merry-go-round of fraught tempers and frayed costumes) can be a joyous event.

4 The Teaching of Drama in the Primary School

Using this book

The book is organised into six parts:

Part One examines the place of drama in the primary school:

1. How does drama fit into the National and the school curriculum?
2. What is drama? And what constitutes quality in educational drama?
3. Why we should find time and space for drama.

Part Two, *Drama in Practice*, looks at the practice and processes of teaching drama. Although each of the four chapters are subdivided into sections for easy reference, it's important not to think of any of the techniques referred to here as self-contained. Good drama is not about having loads of good ideas, but about teasing out the meanings and the significance in what is often one very simple idea.

Here, as elsewhere throughout the book, there are numerous examples given of work in practice. These are all genuine examples of work with children in primary schools (in a wide variety of different types of catchment areas) throughout the country. The examples are given with the intention of providing a stimulus or a framework, as jumping-off points from which it should be easy to develop your own work. If initially, as you're building up your own confidence, you want to use these examples as they appear here, do so – but try not to see them as prescriptive; make them your own.

Part Three focuses on using drama with children in Key Stage One. Many of the ideas and approaches suggested throughout the book can be easily adapted for use with young children. This section picks out a number of activities which are particularly useful, and suggests ways of adapting some of the techniques and strategies suggested elsewhere which at first seem more appropriate for use with older children.

Part Four is concerned with performance and production. What do we mean by 'presentation' and 'production'? What place does this work have in school? How can we create a piece of theatre to be shared with others without losing the benefits of the more spontaneous and exploratory work we do in educational drama?

Performance work should be an educationally productive and exciting part of the work of a school. Whilst educational drama and theatrical presentation are not synonymous, they are usefully complementary.

These two chapters look at all aspects of drama presentation in the primary school – from small group work in the classroom, through Assemblies to the School Play. Good presentations and plays should

feed into the work of the school, motivating work of real excellence in all curriculum areas, becoming both a celebration of the work of the school and a driving force behind that work. It is not, however, the intention of this book to suggest that high quality drama work necessarily culminates in presentation or production.

This part includes specific suggestions about scripts, lighting, masks and costumes. It also contains a detailed example of how a drama project could be developed into a major School Play involving every child in the school.

Part Five looks at planning and assessment. It attempts to tackle the 'I've run out of ideas' syndrome. It offers a way of planning drama work which enables you to think ahead whilst avoiding the pitfalls of making the work over-prescriptive; it suggests how to build in links with other curriculum areas at the planning stage. It contains a detailed account of the planning that might go into an extended drama-based project and a section on evaluation and assessment in drama – including self-assessment.

Part Six – the Appendix – comprises a resource bank, offering General Advice.

It contains:

- suggestions of where to find useful resource materials
- suggestions about using video in drama work
- a set of *policy guidelines* which might be adopted by primary schools
- a list of useful story books
- a brief selection of poems which lend themselves to use in drama
- an annotated bibliography
- lists of useful addresses.

THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

Drama – including role-play – is central in developing all major aspects of English in the primary school.¹

At the time of writing schools in England and Wales are in a state of considerable upheaval; the establishment of a National Curriculum is one of many changes occurring within the education system. The situation is similar in many countries all over the world where teachers are having to think hard about educational practices and the theory which underpins that practice.

There are some who have argued that drama is in danger of becoming marginalised. It appears neither as a core nor foundation

6 The Teaching of Drama in the Primary School

subject in the National Curriculum for England and Wales. Some people have found this omission both worrying and demoralising.

There are, however, some grounds for optimism; the National Curriculum may not recognise drama as a core subject, but it does contain numerous references to it. Whereas before the advent of the National Curriculum it was possible (if not sensible) for a headteacher to argue that an individual teacher should not be teaching/using drama, it is now clear that any school which is genuinely delivering the whole of the National Curriculum would have to be using drama; and I would argue strongly that it should be taught both as a subject in its own right and used as a learning medium for teaching other subjects.

There is substantial evidence that active participation in drama can enhance learning in most curriculum areas.² The very fact that we have specific Attainment Targets for Speaking and Listening should encourage many hitherto reluctant teachers to make time and space for drama, or at least for drama-type activities. It is difficult to see how much of the work required by the Programmes of Study in the statutory Order for English can be achieved without using drama.

The great value of using drama to motivate and enhance work in other curriculum areas is underlined by the various curriculum documents – for Maths, Science, Technology, History, Religious Education, Geography – all of which refer directly or indirectly to the usefulness of role play or drama.

The National Curriculum Council has published a large poster entitled ‘Drama in the National Curriculum’,³ which identifies specific references to drama in the Statutory Orders for English, Science, Technology and History; it also indicates where these elements are explored further in the Non-Statutory Guidance documents for English, Science, Mathematics and Technology. So long as you don’t view the poster as indicating that drama is primarily a service tool for these other subjects it can be useful.

Teachers who have used drama as a learning medium, a way of deepening understanding, as a means of delivering other aspects of the curriculum, will not need specific clauses in curriculum documents to encourage them in their work; but the clauses are there – and the National Curriculum Council poster referred to above points out some of the more interesting specific references.

Chapter 5 deals with drama and the whole curriculum in depth, offering specific examples of how drama can be used in the teaching of history, science, technology and maths.

Drama as a subject

Drama deals with fundamental questions of language, interpretation and meaning. These are central to the traditional aims and concerns of English

teaching . . . We would stress, however, that the inclusion of drama methods in English should not in any way replace drama as a subject for special study.⁴

However successfully we can use drama in teaching other subjects we should never forget that it is also a subject in its own right.

Dramatic fiction is the form of fiction with which children are most familiar. Very few children arrive in school without a wealth of experience of drama on television; many act out simple, but important, dramas in their own play. A number of children come to school without having ever been read to: their vernacular knowledge of drama and dramatic fiction is far greater than of written forms – but it is also very uncritical. Drama, in one form or another, is an important part of their lives; we should give children opportunities to understand and make their own dramas as well as simply enjoying it passively.

Drama in schools is a practical artistic subject. It ranges from children's structured play, through classroom improvisations and performances of specially devised material to performance of Shakespeare.⁵

The Arts Council's *Drama in Schools* booklet⁶ offers some excellent advice on drama in the National Curriculum, including a curriculum model. The booklet includes suggested programmes of study and end of key stage statements. Every school in the country should have received a copy. If you would like your own copy the address to write to is given in the Appendix. The booklet asserts that 'the three activities which constitute the subject of drama in schools are making, performing and responding'. Although I have not used the same format in this book, the classification is a useful one and the suggestions in this book should be seen as complementary to the programmes of study suggested by the Arts Council.

Throughout the book I argue that presentation and performance work (of various kinds) is complementary to good classroom drama work, and indeed that drama and theatre are inextricably bound up with each other.

But all of this begs one vitally important question: What do we mean by drama?

What do we mean by drama?

For too long the subject has been surrounded by vagueness; attempts to evaluate drama have been shrouded in a veil of subjectivity. Of course there are extraordinary personal, subjective benefits to be had from being involved in good drama; but this should not invalidate attempts to look objectively at the skills involved which are unique to

8 The Teaching of Drama in the Primary School

drama. Many of the claims made for drama have tended to be along the lines that

- it encourages self-expression
- it makes people more sensitive to others
- it promotes an awareness of the self
- it encourages co-operation and collaboration.

It may well do all these things, but many teachers would claim that similar intentions underlie all their work in the primary school. If we are to argue strongly for drama to be given its place in the curriculum, it is essential to ask the question ‘What makes drama *uniquely* drama?’ If we are to convince colleagues, parents, governors and (most importantly) children themselves that drama is not just ‘worthy’ but essential, we really have to think very carefully about what drama *is*, how it works and what it does.

If in music the ‘building blocks’ are *pitch, melody, harmony, tempo, rhythm* and *texture*, what are the raw materials of drama?

Role or Character

- acting *as if* you were someone else; or
- as if you were yourself in another situation.

Narrative

- ordering a sequence of events or images in such a way that their *order* creates meaning. This is not necessarily the same as story telling and plotting, which are examples of the ways in which narrative can be used.

Language

- verbal
- non-verbal (including, for example, body language, facial expression, the use of space).

There is a danger of over-simplification (non-verbal language can range from facial expression to symbolism and ritual) but by seeing these as the basic building blocks we do get a clearer sense of dramatic activity as a continuum: from pre-school play to professional theatrical performance.

When pre-school-age children successfully engage in dramatic activity they are using these ‘building blocks’. When a young child says: ‘This is my shop’, she is pretending to be a shopkeeper, turning a

chair upside down to become the counter, making part of the kitchen into a shop and playing with a narrative sequence. The grasp of cause and effect narrative may be only tentative (a young child might well pay the customer for the bag of sugar!), but part of the purpose of the child's dramatic play is to work out possible sequences of events and their consequences. Furthermore, the adult who joins in with the play can challenge it and give it focus: 'I wonder if you could help me. I've forgotten my shopping list.'

Whether the specific dramatic activity is imaginative pre-school play about shopping, or performing at the National Theatre (or indeed watching that same performance) the drama is primarily dependent upon all parties agreeing to the pretence.

By focusing on an imagined, fictional world of make-believe, the drama (whether it's in a large theatre or in the classroom) draws our attention to aspects of the 'real' world; it helps us to recognise a sense of our own reality, and understand it better.

Drama is essentially a social art form; it is concerned with how individuals relate to the world they live in; how individuals interact with each other and with society in a wider sense.

It therefore becomes the drama teacher's central task to find ways and means by which s/he can encourage as broad an understanding as possible of these various interactions – between the fictional world of the drama and the actual world; between the personal and the social.

In any dramatic activity there is some shared, tacit understanding of the rules of the make believe, although there is of course enormous variation in the way these rules are set up. The child playing shops declares the rules simply by saying 'This is my shop . . .'; in the school hall during a drama lesson the teacher might explain – 'I shall be playing a part in what we are going to do today . . .'; and in the National Theatre the Battle of Agincourt is represented without a drop of blood being shed. We learn to 'read' the rules, to understand the conventions remarkably quickly.

When we are working in educational drama with children we have to consider *role*, *narrative* and *language*; but all of these are dependent on *context*:

- Where does the action of the drama occur?
- In which historical period?
- What are the political and social conditions?
- What is the setting; and the specific situation prevailing at the time of the action, the 'back story'.

This context offers the characters a background against which to make decisions and provides motivations for their actions. Context is crucial in understanding the interactions which take place in the imagined world.

10 The Teaching of Drama in the Primary School

Perhaps we are doing a drama with Reception children about trying to find out if a dragon is friendly. Whether we tell the children the context or ask them is very much a matter for the individual teacher; but if the drama's going to be successful we'll need answers to the questions:

- *When and where* Does the action take place today, in the here and now, a dragon hiding somewhere in 'Our Town'? Or is our story set long ago with Knights in Camelot?
- *Political and social conditions* Who makes the decisions? The local Mayor, the townspeople, the children, King Arthur? Who do we go to for help – or who comes to us for help?
- *The 'back story'* And how did this dragon get here? Has it woken from a long sleep? Hatched from an egg discovered in the school pond?

Chapter 2 contains detailed examples of practical work approached in this way.

Narrative

This is the means by which the drama is propelled forward. In a drama lesson the teacher uses various devices to create dramatic tension (*Chapter 4* includes a specific section on this), effectively holding the children's attention and interest by ordering events, enactments, meetings, scenes, etc. in such a way that information is withheld or released to tantalise and intrigue as well as to inform.

The narrative of a drama lesson can function in all the ways that it can in the theatre; and the range of possible narrative effects is just as diverse. As events are revealed and explored (not necessarily in chronological order – drama lessons frequently have most unusual time structures) so understanding deepens: of the fictional world, of the characters which populate it, of the 'real' world, and of ourselves.

Language

In drama we use a variety of different and varying forms of language, both verbal and non-verbal. We can use our voices in a huge variety of ways. We can communicate through body language or sign language, developing physical, visual forms of theatre which do not require words. This spectrum of language ranges from 'talking heads' in a radio play (in which sound and music play a very important part) to mask work, mime and dance/drama.

Even in verbal language, there is a range of possibilities open to us (in spontaneous exploratory work and in performance):

- naturalistic dialogue, day-to-day speech
- formal heightened style of language, perhaps to indicate the beginning of a ritual, or a regal proclamation
- direct address to an audience
- characters in a play talking to themselves
- choral speech.

Non-verbal language

In addition to the more obvious use of non-verbal language in drama – mime, masks, sign language – we also use props, costume, set, lighting, sound and music. They are all part of what might be defined as a non-verbal sign system; using them effectively is part of the language of drama.

We establish and develop the drama by working with and manipulating:

- symbols
- body language
- space
- ritual.

Symbols

Even the simplest dramatic activity involves the creation of symbolic meanings at some level. The child who uses an upturned chair as a shop counter is using the chair to represent the counter; when the counter becomes significant in the dramatic play it begins to function as a symbol.

Props are often invested with symbolic qualities. The particular choice of props is what shapes the contextual world. A large set of keys, for example, might in different contexts signify imprisonment or freedom. No object is symbolic on its own. The context in which it is used gives it its meaning.

Symbolic meaning has to be relevant and readable to the group you are working with; the richer the symbolic meanings you create for a group – either as participants or as audience – the richer the dramatic experience.

Use of space

In any dramatic activity the space in which events take place, the space between people and between objects, should itself be significant and meaningful.

12 The Teaching of Drama in the Primary School

Any movement based activity uses space as one of the elements to explore, create and communicate meaning. Simply ordering the space in the school hall during a drama lesson – so that part of the hall represents a well, another part a dried up-river – is making the space itself articulate: the space itself is used to communicate meaning in a simple but effective way.

Ritual

Finally it is worth considering the relationship between ritual and any dramatic activity (be it improvisatory work, rehearsal or presentation). Ritual is a distillation, encompassing all the above rules and elements in a condensed and highly stylised form. In ritual the roles adopted, the props used, the costumes, the use of language, movement and narrative is all reduced to essentials – in which each of the elements becomes deeply significant and thus takes on a prominent symbolic quality.

The value of ritual for the drama teacher lies in its ability to encapsulate the central focus of the play at any one moment; it can function effectively on both an emotional and an intellectual level for participant and spectator alike.

In practice all these elements become inextricably interwoven. For example, the use of certain types of sound and lighting in a theatrical performance could well signify malevolence, but their use would also increase the dramatic tension at that moment, thereby driving the *narrative* forward. Similarly, in a classroom drama, heightening the style of your verbal language might:

- create expectations of the role you are playing
- create a narrative interest
- imply an element of ritual.

Spoken language itself is a form of symbolic interaction.

It is the moments of high theatricality which give drama (in the intimacy of the lesson or the public arena of the School Play) an excitement, an exhilaration that is unique to the subject. And it is where you recognise most clearly that drama and theatre are indistinguishable: good drama is intensely theatrical; good theatre intensely dramatic!

MYTHS OF TIME AND SPACE – FINDING TIME FOR DRAMA

Alright then, I'd like to do some drama; I can see that it's useful, but . . .

'The hall's always in use. There's just no space.'

'The timetable's so full; and with all the pressures of the National Curriculum, I simply can't find the time.'

There are four big myths surrounding drama in the primary school:

1. *You need to be a good actor* You don't. Many of the best drama teachers I have worked with are quietly spoken and would never want to take an acting role in a theatrical production. (The issue is dealt with more fully in Chapter 3 in the section on 'Teaching in role'.)
2. *You need to be creative and arty and inventive and have lots of wonderful ideas* Most of us would love to be more creative than we are. And most of us are much more creative than we think we are. Good practice in drama (on the part of both teacher and child) is characterised far more by the abilities to listen, to be responsive and to focus attention on a key issue than by being cleverly creative. I hope the chapters on *planning* in Part Five will help scotch the myth of creativity and convince the doubters that by tackling problems task by task they have plenty of *appropriate* ideas.
3. *You need time on the timetable put aside for drama* I think this is desirable, but it's not essential. When you're first starting out with teaching drama it's a good idea not to be committed to a long period in the school hall, which can be nerve-racking and confidence draining. Good drama can take place in five or ten minutes, providing these short sessions are on a regular basis. Infant teachers will be familiar with the idea of focusing and challenging children's play by joining in with it. Older children can equally benefit from the opportunity to work on something for a short period in small groups *in the classroom*. This approach is discussed in detail in Parts Two and Three.
4. *To do good drama you need the school hall* No, you don't. What you do need is to ensure that there is adequate and *appropriate* space when it's necessary. What is appropriate? Certainly, there are times when it is right to work in the hall, but the size, the cold floor, the echo, the noise from an adjacent kitchen, the use of the hall as a throughway – all these factors work against you. In many primary schools there are other spaces which are better suited to drama: the TV room, the library, a music room, an unused classroom. And there are plenty of occasions when the everyday classroom is a *better* place in which to do drama than the Hall (in which concentration can quickly be lost as children somehow

14 *The Teaching of Drama in the Primary School*

expand to fill the space). This book contains many suggestions for such work.

If you are going to use the hall, try to make sure you're not going to be interrupted. One of the other great myths of drama is that it's always noisy. There are all too many occasions when I've been teaching a lesson and somebody has come in and apologised, saying they didn't know we were there! Quiet, rapt attention is as much a characteristic of good drama practice as invigorating (and loud) discussion.

Drama is important. It deserves an allocation of time and space which communicates that importance to children and parents. The Appendix of this book includes a short section, entitled 'The drama room', where I discuss how such a space might usefully be equipped.

It is all too easy to find excuses for not doing drama. Working in a primary school is very demanding and extremely hectic. But it really *is* worth finding time for it.

At the end of a short series of lessons with a class of five and six year-olds I asked them what they thought drama was. One child said acting, another making plays – and then a rather shy child (who had clearly enjoyed our work together without ever pushing herself forward) said, with a beaming smile: 'I don't know what it is, but it's tickly.' It may not be a definition, but it's a pretty good description of what it feels like when it's good.

Notes

1. English for Ages 5 to 16. Proposals of the Secretary of State for Education and Science and the Secretary of State for Wales, June 1989. DES, HMSO.
2. For further reading about the usefulness of drama in developing language: Parsons, B. et al. 1984. *Drama, Language and Learning*, NADIE, Tasmania; Fines, J. and Verrier, R. 1974. *The Drama of History*, New University Education, is an excellent account of the benefits of using drama to teach history. See also, for a more generalised account: DES 1990 *Aspects of Primary Education: The Teaching and Learning of Drama*, HMSO.
3. National Curriculum Council, March 1991. *Drama in the National Curriculum*, DES.
4. English for Ages 5 to 16. op. cit.
5. HMI. 1989. *Drama from 5 to 16 – Curriculum Matters 17*, HMSO.
6. Arts Council of Great Britain. 1992. *Drama in Schools – Arts Council Guidance on Drama Education*, ACGB.