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'whole group drama'*

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DRAMA, CREATIVITY AND THINKING SKILLS:

The lost art of 'Whole Group Drama'

By Anthony Gears

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Abstract

My primary aim in this research has been to present a case for the impact of a 'Drama as Process' whole group improvisation model on creativity and thinking skills and to assess how it may be more successful in raising achievement in those areas than 'performance' and 'convention' styles of drama. The thesis identifies the elements of teaching and learning styles which may develop creativity and thinking skills most effectively and examines other key learning areas developed in the 'drama improvisation process' and, how these are best approached.

Whole group drama is a form of narrative story exploration carried out for the benefit of the participants, and is not concerned with performance for an audience beyond the immediate group of actor-spectators. The thesis presents a theoretical argument, and examines practice in detail to test out the validity of the whole group model and to provide concrete examples of it in practice. This thesis constitutes an argument illuminated by empirical evidence drawn from practice including: observation of classes; teaching of classes; experiments in improvisation and thinking skills, where the number of changes of direction in thinking required by participants, within a given time were recorded; observation, transcribing and analysing of videoed Drama lessons; interviews of individuals and classes; completion of pro-forma questionnaires by pupils, ex-pupils and staff.

Creativity and thinking skills are central to the methodology of whole group improvisation, and operate throughout the process. Through observation and discussion with students, it became clear that operating in the improvisation model they could work at their own level, developing their creativity and thinking skills in the manner most appropriate to the individual and as their levels of confidence grew.

The contextualisation of their knowledge and understanding in the drama was seen to enable them to use their ideas in a relevant and experiential manner, without the hindrance of feeling they were 'showing/performing' or that they needed to plan or rehearse presentation, developing their flexibility and ability to react imaginatively and creatively to situations and questions.

INTRODUCTION

To put my views into context, I have been a drama teacher for over twenty years; I have a Drama degree, teach both GCSE and AS/A2 and have been a moderator and examiner at both levels; I have directed and written numerous plays and been a Youth Theatre Director for over fifteen years; I am an Advanced Skills Teacher in a specialist school for the performing arts (which has received an Arts Mark Gold award) and I have taught students from 5 to 75 years old, from nursery to PGCE level. I am not, therefore, arguing for whole group drama because it best suits my training. I feel perfectly secure in all ways of working and believe implicitly in their importance. What I am trying to do, without bias or clouded thinking, is to find the best and most effective educational tool for my own school-age children, for the students that I teach, and for all of any age that desire a drama process that is of real worth. I have observed the decline in whole group drama and in improvisation based ‘process’ drama generally (as developed by Bolton 1998 and others), the rise of a ‘conventions’ approach (McGuire 1998, Neelands 2000, O’Neill 1982, Taylor 1981) and the gradual re-assurgency of theatrical ‘knowledge’ based lessons (Hornbrook 1998). Partly my reason for approaching this thesis is to question why a method I feel is so relevant is being neglected or even rejected.

In Chapter One I examine the role of drama in our schools, going on in Chapter Two to define what is meant by ‘drama’ more closely. In Chapter Three I look at the nature of improvisation. Whilst the immediacy of improvisation is the central tenet of this research I feel I should make a clear distinction between the types of improvisation. There are many workshops exercises, improvisation games and warm-ups designed to challenge and develop skill levels. These are vital and essential to the training of any actor, or participant in a ‘whole group’ drama, but alone they have limitations and to

build a drama curriculum around them, I would argue, is to leave students with a strange mutation of real drama. In these preparatory chapters I present a researched theoretical background in support of my argument.

In Chapter Four I look at the nature of creativity in drama with specific reference to a research exercise completed with three Year 8 classes, whilst in Chapter Five the thinking and conceptual development taking place in a whole group drama lesson are examined through concrete examples from an observed class, providing empirical evidence to demonstrate how creativity may be developed.

In Chapter Six I look at the whole group process model for drama in detail with specific reference to several whole group projects as empirical evidence as to how they operate in the development of creativity and thinking skills. The now 'lost art' of whole group improvisation was once a popular and highly discussed method but is now rarely if ever dealt with. It involves a class working together, often with teacher in role alongside them, in a fictive dramatic context and I decided to do this research because all my own experience and learning as a participant told me that this method of teaching and learning was particularly effective. I had no proof that this was the case, but many pupils asked to comment in the early stages of my research observed what I felt at an intuitive level. 'Performance' style work, many commented, was not a good means of developing their confidence and said that they were nervous and uncomfortable with this style of drama. Those, like myself, who had developed into actors/performers and appeared on stage in theatre pieces all attributed their 'improvisation' in whole group work as the essential factor in developing the confidence to appear on stage. In support of this, during my research I observed that by encouraging students to work seriously and with commitment to role enabled them

to 'perform' in front of others in improvisations without being self-conscious, because they were too absorbed in their drama to be concerned with the audience.

Chapter Seven looks at how we may appraise the raising of achievement, creativity and thinking skills, in whole group drama with detailed reference to work with a Year 9 class and a Year 10 GCSE group. In Chapter Eight comparisons with other conventions and theatre lessons are made from several lesson observations, across a range of year groups and in a number of schools to highlight how whole group drama operates, I believe, more successfully in the development of creativity and thinking skills.

Throughout the thesis I refer to comments made by teachers and parent, and by students in interviews and on pro-formas.

It is important I feel, to reiterate that I have not only taught drama, I have 'done' it, been a practitioner, been an artist. Whatever my students have gone through in 'conventions' drama, on stage or in a whole group improvisation, I have experienced. There is no doubt in my mind that the latter has been the most effective learning and developmental activity for me.

Chapter One: Drama in School

The present education system has, in the main, three types of drama each excellently taught and vitally important for our young people.

1. Theatre Studies enables students to develop knowledge and skills to express ideas and communicate artistically in a medium; this is increasingly linked to employment in the growing 'cultural industries'.
2. Drama-in-Education methods facilitate the teaching and learning of a diverse range of subjects.
3. Drama-in-Education as an independent subject promotes a holistic issue based education through the means of drama with more emphasis on process than product.

In particular I am presenting an argument concerned with Drama in Education of the third kind, and in particular the whole group drama process. Even in this arena there are differences of approach. *Bowell and Heap (2001:p.7)* building on the work of *Heathcote* clearly see the process as being where,

“attitude is of greater concern than character.”

Pupils, on the face of it, all play the same kind of part (role) in the drama. Students will, however, be creative even within the limitations seemingly being placed on them by the teacher. What I later refer to as 'focus' within the drama, the drawing together of the group to share moments of dramatic tension and problem solving, are resolved in this method by (*ibid: p.43*),

“selecting roles for the pupils which bind them together from the outset of the drama.”

Their argument is that,

“Random self expression...by a class-sized group will rarely facilitate the development of the drama.” (ibid: p 44),

This is an argument for which I have some sympathy. The pupils’ self-expression should be focused I would argue through context and character rather than left to random choice. The style of process whole group drama as described by Bowell and Heap is essentially used to teach specific subject knowledge and fits type two above; the model that this thesis is chiefly concerned with, described in more detail with specific examples in Chapter Six, is a character based whole group process, and is one which I believe offers the most for our young people whatever their career aspirations. The Drama In Education model (3) aspires to use the elements of drama to allow the study of life as we live it, through the process that it creates. It is often spontaneous and improvised, drawing upon what it is to be human, rather than upon the skills of a performer and is an approach in which all the class and the teacher are involved in the process. Davis and Behm offer the following useful definition (Ritch, 2001 p.1) of this type of drama:

“an improvisational, non-exhibitional process-centred form of drama in which participants are guided by a leader to imagine, enact and reflect upon human experiences... The creative drama process is dynamic. The leader guides the group to explore, develop, express and communicate ideas, concepts and feelings through dramatic enactment.... the group improvises action and dialogue appropriate to the content it is exploring, using elements of drama to give form and meaning to the experience. The primary purpose of creative drama is to foster personality growth and facilitate learning of the participants rather than to train actors for the stage. Creative drama can be used to teach the art of drama and/or motivate and extend learning in other content areas.”

In recent years, with the growth of Drama in schools, despite or in spite of the national curriculum, many non-specialists have been called upon to work in the field and have quite naturally sought help. Due to the sad decline of the advisory services this has been in the form of lesson plans and ideas from books; and so grew the 'conventions' based approach, mini-dramatic rituals to focus classes on specific and easily managed tasks. These very successful and often well written and well-meaning 'Teach drama in 3-Easy steps' type manuals (e.g. Bennathan 2000, McGuire 1998) often seek to bridge the gap between the three types of drama; text work, theatre games, exercises and improvisation mixed freely to form a new hybrid. Neelands writes (2002, p. 8) that,

“Over the last decade, a desperate and uncritical urge to find consensus and normalize drama so that it appears and becomes as arid as any other official subject has led us to ignore, and not to continue, to debate and develop the essential pedagogic principles underpinning the best D.I.E. work.”

We have essentially had in our schools then, theatrical drama, and the two variations of drama in education.

The once popular phrase 'process or product?' applied to Drama in schools, divided the two camps. Theatre has tended to be seen as product orientated, whilst Drama In Education dealt with process. But there is a case to be answered here. Theatre can only be product through a creative process and process can only make sense if there is a product being created. Mace (1932 p.62) writes,

“The constructive act occurs only as one specific phase in a process directed to an end. It occurs when such a synthesis will provide the solution to a problem; it occurs to satisfy a need.”

And Fleming (1995 p.17) rightly points out that,

“in an active discipline like drama every end product contains a process within it and every process is in some sense a product”.

However Daldry assumes (Hornbrook 1998 p. x) that

“Play development which does not seriously intend to become play production is a waste of everyone’s resources.”

This clearly misses the point that the participants in whole group drama are operating both as actors and audience, both as playwright and director, and that the act of ‘doing’ is in itself play development and play production. Brecht felt that his Lehrstück plays, to be performed by students and workers for their peers, were more for the development of the actors own understanding than that of an audience. As Brecht said (Mueller: Ed. Thompson and Sacks 1997 p.86):

“The great pedagogy changes the role of acting completely: it annuls the system actor/audience; it recognises only actors who are at the same time students.’

As with whole group drama (Thompson and Sacks 1997 p. 86),

“The performance/audience gap is entirely dissolved – one is identical with the other”

The difference is that in the drama improvisation model, there is no sense of theatre as an end product. As Dorothy Heathcote writes (Johnson/O’Neill 1984 p. 44)

“The end product of improvisation is the experience of it. Any artist in any field will tell you this.”

Process drama of the conventions type (McGuire 1998, Neelands 2000, Bennathan 2000, Taylor 1991) can often leave students with the question ‘what is the product?’

The goal becomes blurred if the product aim is not clear and so, as a result the process

loses its sharpness of intent. The solution is often to make the 'product' a set of lesson objectives; for example (Bennathan 2000 p. 23): -

“By the end of this unit students will have learnt:

- how still pictures use space, body language and expression to communicate meaning
- to use and appreciate still pictures as a way to structure, edit and select narrative
- to use and appreciate monologue

McGuire (1998 p. 6) explains to students of drama that,

“The drama techniques make the drama form. This is the way of presenting the drama work that you or your teacher chooses. As you become familiar with the techniques, you will be able to use them to explore or enhance your own work. The various techniques provide tools to develop ideas, character and plot.”

The conventions/techniques can thus become the learning they are meant to promote.

Product orientated theatre work on the other hand often presents a problem of time.

The depth one would like to go into with the work is often sacrificed to the needs of the performance, which as a result can become superficial and 'technical' in approach.

The goal becomes to perform well, not the content of what is being performed. (It is interesting to note here that Edgar Dale's famous Cone of Experience (Wiman and Mierhenry, 1960) places “simulate a real experience” above “Do a dramatic presentation” in the cone of how people best remember things.)

But is there really a big dichotomy? There are certainly some differences but also a lot of similarity. The two styles overlap and use elements of each other constantly but

importantly one is concerned with communicating pre-conceived ideas whilst the other is intended to challenge, explore and develop those ideas.

DIFFERENCES	
Drama	Theatre
Creative	Expressive
Challenging/Exploring Ideas	Communicating Ideas
Involving/Participatory	Watching/Performing
Improvisation	Script
Some planning	Planned
Immediate/Spontaneous	Rehearsed

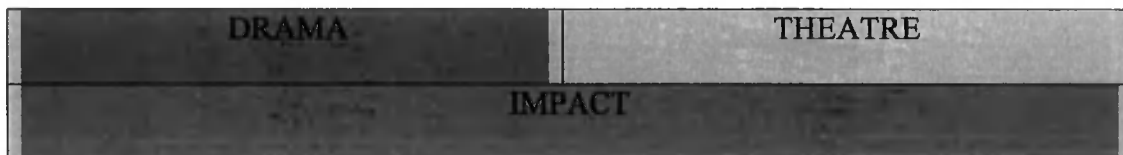
SIMILARITIES
Drama/Theatre
Empathy
Objectivity
Performance
Acting

My view is that whole group improvisation which is built around character development, resolves the perceived problem by bridging process and product, simulation and presentation; whilst not taking the 'product/presentation' (the completed drama improvisation and exploration of its meaning) as far as polished performance but leaving it at 'created work' stage there is a real sense of performance and 'acting' involved. It is merely a matter of the time needed to carry the work through the staging and refining process, finding theatrical methods and techniques to

turn the drama into theatre, or indeed into film. The work of Mike Leigh is relevant as an example of filmed improvisation.

But do we need go that far? The majority of our students do not want to work in theatre nor be actors. They have acted, analysed, created imaginatively, worked in a team effectively and evaluated continuously in order to have got to the end of the whole group drama process.

I have developed a model for teaching Theatre Studies students that may be helpful here to fully understand my point. When approaching a text the students must appreciate the drama first, and then apply theatre techniques to communicate the meaning of the play, in order to create impact on the audience. When devising their own pieces of theatre I demonstrate this to them with a triangle: -



Four key questions must be answered in order to create meaningful theatre:

WHAT? DRAMA	What is the meaning? What themes/issues are being dealt with?
WHY? DRAMA	How is this justified from text? Why is the material being interpreted in this way?
HOW? THEATRE	What performance techniques will be used to communicate these ideas? What theatrical tools will the student use to express their meaning?

<p>EFFECT CREATED?</p> <p>THEATRE</p>	<p>What effect is being created for the audience?</p> <p>What effect/impact are they trying to have?</p>
---------------------------------------	--

- The drama is explained to be the ‘what’ and ‘why’. What is the meaning of the piece? What themes and issues are being dealt with here? The ‘why?’ is to do with justification through text and character detail. These first two are the elements being dealt with in whole group drama.
- The last two elements are clearly to do with traditional theatre. These also appear in the whole group drama, of course, since students are using performance techniques to communicate their ideas, and are creating effects and impact on their fellow participants, but they are concerned primarily with the creation and analysis of meaning rather than its communication.

Students of whole group drama between the ages of 11 and 18, all of whom had also taken part in theatre work, were asked on a questionnaire to analyse the differences between the two experiences. I present some of their comments to illuminate my argument:

- “I think when you are acting you have to be aware of the audience watching you, your lines are rehearsed and you know what’s coming next but with improvisation you never know what will happen. You can become completely absorbed in your character.”
- “Character improvisation can lead to anything, where as acting you know what is going to happen.”
- “With improvisation you can change the whole course of the drama.”

- “In character improvisation one word can change the entire flow of the drama and you have to think and react.”
- “In improvisation, no one knows what will happen and you have to “go with the flow”. There is no turning back and saying, ‘that never happened, lets go from there’, you must learn to continue and never block others.”
- “All the emotions in improvising are of the moment and in a way part of you. There is no script and it’s all spontaneous.”
- “Acting is being given a particular thing to do and you have to do it how you’re told but character improvisation allows you to choose what to do and how to do it.”
- “When acting in a play you are given the roles and given circumstances of the characters. In Drama the individual has the freedom to develop the character and roles for themselves.”
- “You are able to put your own feelings into the character.”
- “Character Improvisation allows me to be totally creative and imaginative, not restricted by anyone else’s ideas. Also the range of skills used is far greater and so more challenging.”

Bolton (1998 p. 271) defines something called ‘Making’ drama which is close to the whole group model I am describing and which I present here in edited form: -

1. Although there is an emphasis on ‘process’, a product is being made, to be reflected upon during or after the drama.
2. Each individual’s contribution is part of a collective enterprise, culturally determined in language and action. The activity is cultural in a second sense: the participants, are creating their own make-believe identity with the underlying ‘laws of the social context being created.

3. It may not be repeatable but it is interruptible and episodic.
4. The parameters of their role as pupils and their teacher's role as 'teacher' slacken.
5. The teacher in role provides a challenging model of belief, style and dramatist's skills.
6. Time and space is limitless and fluid.
7. The responsibility of each participant as that of dramatist/actor/director/spectator.

When Hornbrook (1998) criticised the state of drama in schools, his comments were all the more annoying to stalwarts of Drama in Education because much of what he had to say was, and is, true. Drama in Education has increasingly become a confused arena with its philosophical aims and goals obscured in the muddy waters of classroom survival, GCSE syllabi, changing trends, league tables, national curriculum and the rest! Ironically it has been the growth of Drama at GCSE, brought about by excellent results, which has both caused the rapid growth of the subject in schools, and almost killed off 'the golden goose', (laid in the first place through pioneers like Slade, Heathcote and Bolton et al). Drama in Education has an incredible amount to offer but it requires specialisation and training. Crucially, (and this has been a major factor in its decline) it is difficult! Heathcote and Bolton (Davis.1997 p.8) ask,

“Are we able to put our hands on our hearts and affirm that we know that what we are doing is right for today?”

This research is intended to demonstrate one particular methodology that allows for the utilisation of Drama for an education for life, an approach which is constantly being changed and updated by the students taking part, making it always relevant. In this thesis I aim to show that there is a clear technique and set of key 'life' skills to this 'lost art' and that its aims and objectives can be clearly stated and their effectiveness measured. As Ryan (1999 p. 25) states,

“an education that does not supply us with basic tools for dealing with the world is no education at all.”

An exam board representative addressing over thirty Drama teachers explained that it was important to teach the students a taxonomy of drama conventions, and used Neelands name as an example of this kind of work. The thought that our young people are to be judged on their ability to know and understand artificial drama conventions invented to enable teachers to engage students in drama activities is patently not supplying them with any tools they can use even in the broader Drama community let alone the world.

I argue that the form of drama in schools that is the most effective means for providing these tools is whole group improvisation. Drama of this kind, as Bolton (1998 p. 277) says,

“.....represents a hugely important educational and dramatic tool. To ignore ‘living through’ drama, as some recent publications appear to do, is to deprive our pupils of a firm basis for understanding dramatic art.”

Chapter Two: What is Drama?

"All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players"

We all indulge in drama everyday, all of mankind. We pretend we are not scared and fake confidence; we rehearse situations in our minds and in our bathrooms. We smile while inwardly we feel other emotions. And don't we all seek an identity? The notion of 'our true selves' may no longer be in vogue but who is it that plays so many roles that is 'our' life; a life that is a complex plot with many diverse characters, a wealth of sub-plots and an often-unanalysed sub-text? It operates within a play on a worldwide scale, but focused in smaller scenes of family, work and leisure. It is the drama called life. The 'drama' has for thousands of years sought to present 'life' to us through the medium of theatre, and last century through the new media of radio, cinema and TV. Drama has never been as all-pervasive as it is today. Real drama touches that within us which is truly human; the sense of tension and suspense, of fear and love and of paradox. Real drama is recognisable because it is somehow 'true' without the need to be factual. It is true whether the context is a thousand years in the past or the future, between talking anthropomorphic animals or people sat in a modern public house. It is a metaphor for our life in the actual. Drama has to do with the individuality of human persons, their interrelations and their actions.

Drama is a concrete art form, not an especially abstract one as some parents seem to think at department open evenings. It deals with people and relationships, no matter the context or surreal nature of the piece. Music, art, dance are all in the eyes and ears of the beholder but drama is 'in your face', to use modern parlance. It is direct, immediate and accessible. People may feel Shakespeare is difficult to understand but

not when compared to Picasso, Henry Moore, Martha Graham or Schoenberg. Drama communicates through both the visual and the spoken. Even if you do not comprehend Othello's soliloquy and his style of speech means nothing to you, his facial expressions and action tell us plenty. To paraphrase Shakespeare, drama may hold up a mirror to nature, or presents us with a Brechtian 'working picture of the world' where (Brooker: Ed. Thompson and Sacks 1997 p.189),

"The puzzles of the world are not solved but shown."

We are vain enough to want to see ourselves in these reflected versions of reality, 'warts and all' and even the most outspoken critic of Drama in schools, against grants to theatre companies and hostile to the arts generally cannot resist the drama on TV and film. The Drama is a human need and we indulge in it throughout the seven ages of man. Hatcher (1996 p.7) observes that,

"Drama consists of characters in conflict and in action"

As viewers we voyeuristically encounter the lives and problems of others. From Ancient Greece to modern street theatre, Ramsey Street to Stratford, Hollywood to Japan's kabuki theatres; drama constantly incarnates, and in some way all our lives are affected by it. The direct relevance it has in our lives would seem to be unquestionable, but if this is so, why do some people want to deny it the importance place it deserves in our school curriculum? The reason is, perhaps, that our relationship with drama in school is unclear. What is it? What do the students actually do? Is it just fun and entertainment? (TV/cinema and theatre are, I think rightly, considered to be 'entertaining' rather than educating; even the more mature Brecht had to concede this, but it was also a view he was willing to challenge in the sense that he argued that a good education should be 'entertaining'. He wrote (Willett 1991 p. 181),

“Let us treat the theatre as a place of entertainment, as is proper in an aesthetic discussion, and try to discover which type of entertainment suits us best.”

We are ‘entertained’, in that we are excited and thrilled, by new knowledge, which we feel contributes to our lives. Stanislavski would argue that high quality drama’s “function is to civilise, to increase sensitivity, to heighten perception (Benedetti 1989 p.11).” The Greeks considered ‘catharsis’ (the outpouring of emotion through drama) as sufficiently important to deserve a regular festival and a god, Dionysus, to overlook it. Watching and ‘performing’ theatre are vital educational tools but I am not arguing simply for an educational commitment to viewing drama. That is central to our lives in the 21st Century, and if we can agree that point, then we must recognise the significance and importance of drama itself. How much more vital, I argue, must be participation in that drama be, rather than simple observation. No one would argue against the idea that sport is better for us if we participate in it, despite the many important things to be learned from watching it. Even playing darts has more to offer than simply watching the Olympics (back to the Greeks again). The growth of ‘interactive’ computer technology may help clarify process drama’s participatory nature. Marie-Laure Ryan (2001 p. 1), a researcher in this field makes the useful observation that:

“From the point of view of a participant a plot that would not be very interesting for a pure spectator may become fascinating – Just as playing a tennis game not worthy of televising may be a richly rewarding experience for the player.”

Participation is more than just performance, or acting out, it is actively taking part in the creation of the drama, bringing us ‘into’ the lives and problems of characters in a way we can never truly grasp merely by watching. Participating in a play, at best,

gives us an understanding of sub-text and causality, of the real feelings and motivations of the characters. Participation in a creative drama session allows freedom to imagine, explore and challenge. Whole group improvised drama is as direct, immediate and personal as the art form can ever be. In this method we are no longer wondering how the character feels for we are that character.

But what is the difference between a role and a character? The term role-play is used a great deal and in this thesis I also refer to the playing of roles and characters, but I feel it would be beneficial to the reader if I explain what I mean by the two terms and how they differ in drama practice.

A role is the function you play, the job you do, the way other people see you, e.g. a Doctor, a Head teacher, a sister, a witness. A character, on the other hand is a personality, an individual. Two doctors will have the same role but may be very different characters. Drama that is simply 'role-play' is about the examination of 'attitudes' and whilst this has its place in education, it is a very different experience to the creative and thought provoking character drama I am describing in this thesis.

What "getting into role/character" actually means, to use the words of Stanislavski (Ed. Hapgood 1963 p. 121) the famous Russian director is:

"merging with your part ... the achievement of a sense of being inside your part, and its being inside of you."

In fact,

"The actor ceases to act, he begins to live the life of the play". (ibid: p121)

In other words, a character in a drama is the person you would be if you had shared their life and experiences. It is an extension of yourself via your imagination. You experience their life 'as if' it were your own. If you had been born in their time and lived their life you would be this person – it is you, but as you would have been not as

you are. This prevents stereotyped role-play or over simplistic performance. It also means you feel and think as the character whilst still being yourself. You are only truly experiencing in a Drama when you are no longer controlling it but you are being controlled by it. We should be accepting and building to the point where we are no longer making things happen, but they are happening to us; we have reached the point of 'living through' the drama. There have been several attempts over the years to clarify the stages of achieving empathy with a role, but these are the four levels of being in role I have developed and use with students:

a) LEVEL ONE:

- Taking on a simple role e.g. I am a Doctor
- Accepting a situation imaginatively e.g. I am on a Bus

At Level One you are basically still yourself. Some educational role-plays use this to examine how the participant may deal with a real life situation.

b) LEVEL TWO:

- Taking on a role and accepting a situation imaginatively whilst working with others also in role.
- At Level Two you are still yourself but have extended into an imaginative world outside yourself, which is inhabited by others also in role.

Basic role-plays like job interviews etc. are Level Two activities. Here the participant actually improvises with others 'as if' the situation and roles were real.

c) LEVEL THREE:

- Taking on a role and developing the character of that role. At Level three you are no longer yourself but accept a new personality within an imaginative situation, working with others.

- At Level Three you are thinking as if you were this person/character that you represent.

At level three you are 'acting' not just role-playing. The character you are pretending to be may be significantly different to your real self and a level of empathy for their ideas/opinions and beliefs becomes necessary.

d) LEVEL FOUR:

- At Level Four you both think and feel as the character. You share on a feeling level the frustrations, worries etc. of the character.
- Level four is empathy. Sharing the Characters whole personality, which is now your own within the Drama.

This is called "creative acting" or Stanislavskian acting. I will discuss this more in Chapter Three.

However, the student should be able when needed to step back and be objective. This means to look at what the character has done as if it were someone else and not you that have done it. Being objective is to be able to criticize and comment upon your character's actions as though they were those of a stranger. It is separating yourself completely from your creation. In terms of learning to see perspectives and understand others it is an essential ingredient of the whole group drama. It is the Brechtian element, if you like. Creative acting requires the actor to engage fully with their character, building and developing a truthful reality within the 'given circumstances' of the dramatic context. As one student put it, whole group drama can present you with,

"A lot of hard learned truths about yourself and others."

It is through 'engagement' with the material (character) that true creativity is possible.

May (1975 p. 41) writes on the subject of the creative act:

“The first thing we notice in a creative act is that it is an *encounter*.....A healthy child’s play, for example, also has the essential features of encounter.....*Escapist creativity is that which lacks encounter.*”

In drama that engagement is with ‘character.’ A student of whole group drama in response to a question ‘what does the whole group process give you?’ answered:

“We learn to improvise, to follow trains of thought to conclusions that normal life would not permit. We learn to remove ourselves from ourselves and recreate our character in every moment.”

In whole group drama an author or director does not drive our contributions, or those of our ‘team-mates’. In this almost ‘free-form jazz’ like improvisation (see page 21) we do not know where this story will take us, or how. We are not telling a story or expressing our opinions, we are an involved participant in a process, living through the drama, sometimes controlling, driving, manipulating, other times washed along, driven or manipulated. We are actor, director, author and audience all at once, and within a team of equals, all contributing their own perspectives and ideas. As Heathcote writes (Johnson/O’Neill 1984 p. 69)

“Improvisation is essentially living at life-rate, in the present, with an agreement to pretence. Dramatic activities are concerned with crisis, the experiences of life, small or large, which cause people to reflect and take note.”

Vicarious means to experience something through someone else and the word vicar comes from this since we are meant to experience God through them. In most forms of drama we experience through the actors and theatre team. In whole group drama the vicarious experience has made us the ‘vicar’ and we no longer need someone else to be our link with Dionysus. We are centre stage. It is of little wonder that actors and

directors struggle to describe the state of 'being in role' and often sound pretentious, using phrases that jar with our 'audience' understanding. The actor has traditionally been our gateway, our priest, but if we are freed from the traditional text and performance, we do not require their levels of skill, craft and knowledge to assume that position. Drama-Theatre courses, which teach only techniques, will lack a sense of the drama's content. John Fowles (1981 p. 147) bemoans this shift towards what he calls 'the turning of art into a kind of pseudo-technology':

"In the hideously misnamed 'creative writing' courses the notion is spread that it is sufficient to learn the technique to achieve the value."

It is this 'slick' technical approach which I have observed being appreciated by exam boards (and thus by examiners) above content in examinations at GCSE and 'A' level and which many drama teachers in all styles rebel against. As Fowles goes on,

"Their artifacts are cleverly assembled and fashionably neat, neatly fashionable, and yet the whole is never more than the sum of the parts. When the technique is praised, everything is praised. There is a spotless eggshell, but no meat."

This is not to say that there is no skill, craft or knowledge involved in the whole group drama. Acting in any different media requires different techniques, so likewise does this method. The actor may not require complex vocal and physical training but the main elements of Stanislavski's System are essential, as are some of Brecht's techniques for distancing and objective analysis. Whilst the skill of verse speaking is not relevant, the craft of sustaining and developing a role is; the ability to memorise large chunks of text may be redundant but the imagination to create and shape dialogue is vital; the skills to express given meaning are replaced by those enabling us to explore and judge meaning. I could go on but I think the point is clear for now.

What we are dealing with here is a form of drama with artistic demands in its own right, which parallel and overlap those of other drama forms but are nevertheless uniquely shaped to its needs. The conventions and roots of this drama are the same as all others, but just as theatre differs from cinema, and by a change in audience function so does the viewer's role, so it is that improvised drama differs from other drama styles. And why should 'theatre' dominate our appreciation of drama. Hatcher (1996 p. 12) rightly asks the question,

"Is drama only found in theatre? No. Drama can be found in film, on television, in fiction".

In the whole group drama each individual contributor fulfils all the creative roles and observes the process in action. Freed from the need to communicate an opinion or pre-decided meaning, the participant can instead explore and experiment with meaning. In fact to quote Fleming from his research (1999 p. 17): -

"The creative process was one in which the emphasis was on the making of the drama rather than any prior emphasis on significant meaning; the latter was rather 'discovered' in the process. The learning and understanding with regard to content emerged through the process of group articulation and expression...meaningful content emerges through handling of form but is by no means a necessary consequence."

The practice and development of creative thinking skills, and creativity in general, are not restricted to working in a particular field, nor are they limited to one dramatic medium. To quote psychologist Abraham Maslow (Ed. Collings 1993 p. 7):

"It is better to make a first class soup than a second rate painting."

The limitations of school timetables make producing high quality theatre difficult, but does allow for high quality whole group drama. With the removal of the theatrical need for clear 'meaning' or message, the fact that no one knows in advance what is meant or what is trying to be said, removes potential pedagogical barriers and educational hang-ups, such as accepting half-truths or playing to what the teacher/examiner might want to hear. Neither the teacher nor the students are not forcing meaning upon the work but experimenting with the concepts and ideas underpinning the drama. It allows the teacher to take part as facilitator, partner and resource, in a non-threatening and truly artistic way. Unlike in some drama-in-education models such as the conventions mode discussed in Chapters One and Eight, participants need not try and anticipate teachers preferred answer because the very nature and structure of the activity as we shall see, precludes this, and forces them to think, in role and out, for themselves, with no clear answers provided, but within a structure where group support and encouragement, and challenge, are ever present. Their creativity and thinking skills are constantly in use. As Mace wrote (1932 p.75),

“The primary function of the teacher is not to impart useful information, but to stimulate by every device at his disposal the questioning attitude of mind and to provide the student with the technical equipment for following up his questions.”

Or to paraphrase Lord MacMillan of Stockton, interviewed on television shortly before his death,

“The chief, if not the sole purpose of education, is to enable one to know when someone is taking rot.”

CHAPTER THREE: Empathy and Emotion

The materialist, I imagine, shudders at the use of the 'danger word', emotion. Some people, notably for me teachers of other subjects, wrongly believe that emotion in drama is uncontrolled and uncontrollable. A great tragic actor heavily in role and sobbing through a speech is not, of course, out of control. In fact they are thoroughly in control. They have learned to control their emotions. Drama helps us to understand and control our emotions. Students heavily involved in complex debates in role, physically, mentally and emotionally engaged with a character can shift back to the day-to-day business of going for break or lunch.

Like Richard Wagner I believe that the essence of Drama is 'knowing through feeling'. It is concerned with the 'emotionalising of the intellect'. We need emotion in education, because that is the nature of all understanding. Knowledge can be known without being understood. We all know that. But we do more than know it, we understand it, and we understand it because we have all experienced it. Experience is not purely an act of the intellect; it is both intellectual and emotional. Drama is learning through experience. It promotes understanding. Many learning theorists (Rogers et al) do, of course, advocate experiential learning.

When drama functions as art, it enters the world of metaphor and symbol. McLeod (1989 p. 4) writes,

"Theatricality is a quality, which makes the drama dramatic; it is a way of organising human experience to give it a reality of its own which is complementary to, but not identical with, real life. Theatricality lifts drama out of the ordinary. Drama is based on a central paradox; actions in the drama do not denote what those very same actions would denote if they occurred in the real world. No one, for example, really believes that Mimi dies at the end of

Puccini's 'La Boheme' but the appalling truth of the event is still felt. Drama symbolises aspects of the human condition not through some abstract means but rather through a particular event in a particular time".

The 'fictional story' of drama provides a particular time and event to represent reality for us. It operates as a reality because we can empathise with the characters within it. As Coleridge in his 'Biographia Literaria' (Raine 1976 p. 192) explains it, we

"transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for a moment, which constitutes poetic faith."

This 'willingness' to suspend our disbelief allows the empathy, the 'feeling in the unreal" as Sartre (1976 p. 163) terms it. We experience the drama through this deliberate act as Sartre explains:

"feeling in the unreal is not failing to feel, but deliberately deceiving oneself about the meaning of what is being felt."

I shall come back to this later when we consider the thinking involved participating in improvised drama who must take this process further as 'creative actors' developing their own dramatic story. The whole group drama has sometimes been misinterpreted as being aimed at creating 'real' situations with real emotions, simulations of real life situations. Some twenty years ago when I was a student teacher I was asked by a Drama adviser to 'pretend' to be a police officer and convince a drama group that I really was investigating a crime in which they were implicated. This 'experimental' type of drama carried out in the late seventies and early eighties is a far cry from the type of whole group activity I am describing here.

Drama's non-real world allows us to deal with issues in a unique manner quite different to a class discussion for instance. Certainly there will be emotion in a

discussion, but there is unlikely to be any real learning unless the group is very mature. Note the House of Commons as a discursive assembly. The debate/discussion is at best a heated 'real-time' clash of opinions and only when roles are taken on and Drama's "aesthetic distance" between the individual and the subject matter engaged can any objective reality be observed. The kind of dramatic emotion to develop through empathy is not the "heated" emotion of debate and argument, even though that heat and passion may be a feature of the drama in a different form, 'Aesthetic distance' is the acknowledgement of 'the unreality' of the drama; that we are 'feeling in the unreal', that we are "suspending our disbelief". We are not personally involved but vicariously so through a story, role or character. Drama uses these symbols to represent reality and allow us to view the world at a distance; to create the 'working picture of the world' of Brecht's as referred to previously. But this I argue can only be attained through Stanislavski's creative acting to achieve empathy with the character. Empathy is the real route to understanding and to fully achieve this we must acknowledge the process. We are operating in an art form of drama and the obvious yet often over-looked point is that to be an art form we must know it is an art form. We need to be fully conscious of the process. As Neelands has recently put it,

"Imagining what it is like to be someone other than yourself is at the core of our humanity. It is the essence of compassion, and it is the beginning of morality." (2002: p.5)

Theodor Reik outlined four phases of empathy in his 1949 article 'Listening with the third ear', (Katz 1960 p.41) which make perfect sense when related to empathy in this type of improvised Drama.

1. Identification.

We allow ourselves to become absorbed in the contemplating of another person and their experience. When we identify empathetically, we don't put our attitudes into the role but, rather, allow the "other" to act upon us. We think like them, feel like them. Understand the world as they understand it by seeing it from their perspective. We stand in "someone else's shoes". As Naranjo (1975 p. 167) comments,

"The process of identifying with an object or character is implicit in the understanding of art."

There is a clear comparison here with 'Level Two/Three' of being in role described in Chapter Two.

2. Incorporation.

Taking this new experience into ourselves. We introduce the "other" into our own understanding of the world, something which is partly alien and foreign to us. This is clearly reflected in 'Level Three/Four' of role, as the participant is thinking and beginning to feel as if they were the person.

3. Reverberation.

What we have taken in from the "other" reacts with our true self and awakens a new appreciation. The dialectic between the actual me and the 'me' which is identified with the "other" becomes a new source of insight. Something familiar is evoked within us. We can share something with the role, and we learn a little more about the "other" and ourselves and what links us. Ionesco in his preface to *Les Possedes* writes,

"I had learned that each of us is all the others...the actor can, better than anyone else understand human beings by understanding himself...in learning

to act I havein a certain sense, learned that the others are oneself...that you yourself are the others.”

This is very much what ‘Level Four’ of being in role feels like. The relationship between the real and the imagined creates a new and powerful understanding. Stanislavski is very aware of this state when he talks of the actor ‘becoming’ the character, and the ‘character’ becoming the actor: Characterisation involves taking on the role, but writes Stanislavski (Ed. Hapgood 1963 p. 32):

“This does not mean the actor must lose his own personality; it means that in each role he must find his individuality and his personality, but nevertheless be different in every role.”

4. Detachment.

We withdraw from empathy and become objective. We try and place this new understanding into perspective. Having had the “vicarious” experience of being the “other” we now try to objectively understand the “other” person. From this we learn about them, our common humanity and ourselves.

Brecht is referring to something like this when he writes about ‘*verfremdungseffekt*’; the theatrical attempt to make us perceive everyday experience as something new and different. (Ed. Willett 1990 p. 192);

“designed to free socially-conditioned phenomena from that stamp of familiarity which protects them against our grasp today.”

It is the point at the end of whole group drama when we try and reflect upon the characters in a totally objective way to alienate ourselves from them, their actions and the events that evolved. A new level of thinking is employed to analyse and draw conclusion and implications from the dramatic narrative. This process is described in more detail in Chapter Eight.

In the theatre we may empathise with many different characters. Our empathy may shift as the story develops. A dramatist may compel his audience to live on several planes at once. They may ask us to empathise with several characters and thus share several perspectives. We are then forced to see the paradox behind the dramatic problem. We are required to use what Brecht called the 'complex seeing' of a dialectic theatre, that is seeing from a number of perspectives. By 1956 Brecht was preparing to replace his Epic Theatre with a new doctrine

“whose emphasis above all would be on ‘contradictions’ and on the chain of conflicts in the story.” (Willett 1991 p. 185)

Huxley (Naranjo 1972 p.88) identified a problem for us, which we must address: -

“Understanding is not conceptual, and therefore, it cannot be passed on. It is an immediate experience, and an immediate experience can only be talked about (very inadequately) never shared”.”

But all theatre, in fact all drama, deals with the attempt to communicate understanding, not by 'talking' but by engaging the audience or participant in an immediate experience that at least equates to that understanding. Actors and directors do try and articulate their understandings, and in my research I include many attempts by students to record theirs in words. Whether they mean anything to the reader it seems to me depends on the reader's own experiential memory. Just as the facial expression and body language of the actor only create echoes of meaning for the viewer if we have 'understood' them, that is experienced them ourselves in some way.

If there can be objective truth then perhaps as Naranjo (1972 p.91) writes

“The best approximation of the truth that we can have is a variety of points of view”.

Drama allows us to gain new perspectives on the world, and become closer to the truth. Drama allows us to understand others better, to see the commonality between people, to appreciate their 'perspectives' and thus to develop greater compassion for humanity as a whole. Improvisation in drama allows us to experiment with empathy and perspective in a manner totally individual to ourselves, not created for us by an author who had their own objectives in the creation of that role; this links with the other factors to the Dramatic experience that can also be identified. Empathy with a role/character, for instance, is also experiencing 'self' in the guise of the other. The role allows us, to quote a student, to 'experiment with our understanding of self'. It is a vehicle for the 'expression and unfolding of the self'. As she explained,

"We can try out aspects of our own personality, see sides of ourselves which we did not know existed."

Other students of whole group drama have expressed similar understandings as these examples show:

- ❖ "We learn that other people's thoughts and ideas and they themselves are to be dealt with as much consideration and time as yourself. We can look back in history and discuss accuracies within the drama. It's of infinite value."
- ❖ "We learn to cope with situations and to see people's reactions and emotions."
- ❖ "It helps us to be able to put ourselves in other people's positions so that we are then able to try and begin to understand/help them."
- ❖ "Understanding of people and their problems. Drama allows a person to become another person and leave their every day lives in order to become a completely different person in a different place."
- ❖ "You learn about different aspects of life. Each role you are a different person and get to learn about other people's way of life."

We move beyond the boundaries and barriers of our own “persona”. The “ego” is put on standby. The ego-self represents a layer of consciousness in the world and stepping out of this ego-self and into another role/character allows a new view of humanity to come into play. The perceived world is now viewed differently and a more universal truth is possible. In theatre and film when we empathise with another character we adopt their consciousness and humanity in some form and grow if only slightly in our perspective on the world. In the whole group drama participants are engaging in a deeper and more significant way. Through improvisation we are challenging and experimenting with who we are and who we perceive ourselves to be. As Naranjo (1972 p. 131) writes,

“We are living in only one room of our house. The house is actually a palace, with towers, salons and gardens, but we are locked up in the kitchen, perhaps in the cellar, believing that this is the whole house”.

Empathy/Identification/Character work through improvising in drama – gives us the key to other rooms in our house. Naranjo (1975 p. 167) writes about identification of this nature,

“It is a form of meditation...a temporary end to the subject-object dichotomy of discursive thinking.”

Author John Fowles (1981 p.146) makes the particularly relevant point that,

“All artefacts please and teach the artist first, and other people later. The pleasing and teaching come from the explanation of self by the expression of self; by seeing the self, and all the selves of the whole self, in the mirror of what the self created.”

Drama allows us to participate and yet be detached. The Sufi’s have a saying “Be in the world, not of the world,” and for the duration of the improvisation the participant

is precisely that. The totality of self is being explored, “our boundless possibility”. Hornbrook (1989 p. 92) disagrees, however, with this notion of improvised drama and quotes social anthropologist Clifford Geertz,

“we can never apprehend another people’s or another period’s imagination neatly, as if it were our own.”

He goes on to argue that the superficiality is rather meaningless if not dangerous.

“Are our strong feminist and anti-racist convictions simply to be abandoned as we cross national or even local boundaries?”

It is an argument that appears relevant, but with the provisos that: -

- The role-play really is superficial and is not ‘character’ based (Stanislavski) and well thought through. This is likely in some conventions based approaches and text work.
- The notion of acting really is to abandon ones own convictions. (A strange sort of acting which if it existed would condemn most, if not all, of Shakespeare’s plays.)
- Empathy is to be understood to mean losing all sense of analysis and objectivity, which from Reik’s work we have previously demonstrated is not the case.
- ‘Tolerance and understanding’ through compassion achieved by empathy are worthless qualities. Theatre and perhaps all art are null and void if this is true.
- We are doing drama simply to understand historical meaning. Shaffer’s Royal Hunt of the Sun, for instance, would seem to be condemned here by Hornbrook and Geertz.

The argument Hornbrook poses is a cold scientific one, which does not marry with my experiences in the world of drama, that are rarely as basic as Geertz implies.

Gooch (1998 p. 6) for instance, observes about playwriting that,

“You may, for example think you’re writing a play about South Africa, but in fact it’s your sense of injustice towards your boss which is really motivating you. And the play develops and scenes unfold, you suddenly find yourself unexpectedly writing a powerful confrontation between a black mineworker and a white boss. It may be something you had not planned. It may knock the structure of the play completely askew. But it’s the best bit of writing in the script. Every other scene pales beside it. That’s what you’re really writing about. That’s your ‘idea’, your sense of the world.”

The context is less important than the understanding and meaning about the individual in society (‘self’ for want of a better term), which are explored in the process of creating drama. Mudford (2000 p. 28) writes of the process involved in creative acting:

“As Stanislavski realised, scenic truth is not like truth in life. Stage truth is discovered by the actor within himself, through imagination, and a ‘childlike naivety and truthfulness’, which enables him to develop an artistic sensitivity to the truthful in ‘soul and body’”.

Simon Callow (Callow, p. 200)”, describing the effect of a ‘good performance’, associates it with a ‘dazzling mental clarity’,

“ The chambers of the brain open up one by one. The number of levels on which you are thinking is uncountable.”

Creativity and thinking in role are activated in an exploration of the nature of self, truth and the character being portrayed through their life, circumstances and

perceptions. So much of work in role is about perceiving the world through the eyes of another that it belies the notion that this is irrelevant or unimportant. Improvisation in role allows the student the opportunity to explore their world in this way. The perceptions of feminism and race in the character being explored are empathised with and a glimpse of their perception is gained. As de Bono (1996 p. 248) has pointed out,

“If our perceptions are wrong then no amount of logical excellence will give the right answer. So it is a pity that almost the whole of our traditional intellectual effort has been directed at logic and so little at perception. Logic will not change emotions and feelings. Perception will.”

Through work in drama, theatre or improvisation we are stepping out of our own ego led perceptions into those of a character created by us or for us. 11-18 year old students who have operated in whole group drama responded to a questionnaire asking what they enjoyed the most in whole group drama with the following observations:

- ❖ “I enjoy Drama because you can be another person in yourself.”
- ❖ “It enables me to explore the different roles had in life and begin to understand people and problems.”
- ❖ “You get to become a completely different person from your own personality and you can imagine yourself in situations that you may probably never experience in real life.”
- ❖ “It allows a person to become another person and leave their every day lives in order to become a completely different person in a different place.”

To quote Mehar Baba (Naranjo 1975 p. 118),

“Life cannot be permanently imprisoned within the cage of the ego. It must at sometime strive towards the truth”.

De Bono (1992 p. 15) makes an interesting observation when he states

“At meetings people want their idea to prevail – whether or not it is the best idea – because their ego is involved. Because of this serious ego problem, an important aspect of learning to think is the development of techniques to detach thinking from the ego.”

Drama allows us to be free of our own ego, if we will let it go, so as to learn more about others and ourselves. It allows us to develop more flexibility within our own personality. It is the imagination that frees humanity to see itself and to understand itself. A highly developed imagination can respond to any problem or situation because it is free of restrictions placed on it by logic, reasoning or ego. It is the imagination that permits knowledge to become understanding without the need for direct experience. A student responded to the question what do you get most out whole group drama with,

“I love using my imagination, getting a chance to be other people, seeing what living in different situations is like. I love the creativity of it and the endless possibilities.”

Naranjo (1975 p. 171) comments,

“Every drop of true understanding – which is experiential knowledge – kills some ghost in our fantasy life and opens up a way into the real where we may find further understanding.”

No wonder Einstein (NACCCE 1999 p.30) said,

“Imagination is more important than knowledge”.

Drama is the medium that allows us to begin to understand the social world we live in, because, to quote Koestler (1964 p.352) echoing the earlier points made about empathy and perception,

“A quarrel will assume the dignity of drama only if the audience is led to accept the attitude of both sides as valid. Dramatic conflict thus always reveals some paradox, which is latent in the mind. It reflects both sides of the medal whereas in our practical pursuits we see only one at a time.”

Drama teachers I would argue must ensure that their students come to understand the true empathetic nature of drama through experience rather than put valuable time and energy teaching ‘knowable facts’ about the history of theatre, or how theatre techniques can be used to create effect. The levels of empathy and exploration of ‘self’ possible in improvised drama are I would argue, greater than in other forms of drama. We may have to ‘assess’ but let us not abandon the art of Drama so as ‘to be seen to be’ teaching. Let us neither leap into Brecht’s didacticism with lessons on ‘bullying’ or ‘racism’ because then we can say we’ve ‘taught’ something, nor assume that text work is more important simply because it reflect the so-called legitimacy of ‘legitimate’ (which simply means professional) theatre. It is a materialistic approach (foreign to the nature of Dramatic experience), which may have certain limited uses in theatre-in-education but drama teaching, like playwriting is more than merely “delivering messages”(attributed to Ionesco). Experiencing an art form is all well and good but the notion that cultural sophistication and moral virtue or broader educational value is the same thing is missing the point. Ryan (1999 p. 21) makes the point,

“The only thing Mozart can be guaranteed to do for those whose souls he touches is to touch their souls.”

Perhaps we should remember the commonly quoted words of Galileo: -

“You cannot teach a man anything; you can only help him find it within himself”.

CHAPTER FOUR

Drama and Creativity

Our ancestors would never have turned stones to tools, cultivated crops from wild plants, drawn pictures, and invented the written symbol had they not asked 'What if?' In fact no human progress would have taken place. Creative thought led us to the industrial revolution, the computer age, and the exploration of space. But what is creativity? Here are some definitions that may be helpful. Hargreaves (2000) writes:

"At root the capacity to generate a new idea within a particular form of life -a discipline or medium"

'All our futures' (1999 p.5) defines:

"Imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and valued"

Creativity leaves current knowledge, or puts old ideas or familiar things together in new ways. It leads to fresh insights and revolutionary ideas. However, creativity is not the same as intelligence. A high IQ does not make you creative. Truly original thinking involves non-intellectual factors; such as reception to novel ideas and a knack for making connections that haven't occurred to someone else. Top scorers on intelligence tests do not necessarily score highly on creativity tests. IQ tests often have problems that demand sticking to rigid rules to find the answers. Smith (2001 p.1) makes the following observation:

"Perhaps one of the reasons creativity can't be measured by standard intelligence tests is that they measure convergent thinking. But creative people tend to think divergently, which cannot be measured."

Convergent thinking tends to be a linear, logical, step-by-step process, and this certainly has its place in the whole group drama process, but the improvisation element certainly meets the definition in *Mindpower: Enhance Your Thinking Skills* (Ed. Collings 1996 p.51) of divergent thinking as:

“ where lines of thought come from various different directions and might produce lots of different answers, all of which would be equally valid.”

The book goes on (ibid. p.55)

“If you are not used to divergent thinking it can sometimes be very difficult to liberate your mind to start looking at a problem in different ways. Once you get used to thinking divergently, however, all sorts of new insights will come to mind often providing you with more interesting, appropriate, or satisfactory solutions to your dilemma.”

Creativity tests require thinking in new ways, such as finding new uses for everyday objects. This is a common drama warm up game too. As part of my research I did a simple creativity experiment with a group of Year 7 students who regularly attend my drama club. They were asked to respond imaginatively to a recorder, by creating a new use for it as a dramatic ‘prop’. They came up with the following without any planning or discussion, simply by passing the recorder around the circle and ‘acting out’ its new purpose. I outlawed any ‘musical instruments’:

- A baseball bat
- A walking stick
- An ice-cream
- A cricket bat
- A dog’s bone
- A gun

- A tennis racquet
- A person – the pupil stood the recorder on the floor and mimed shaking hands with the person represented by the recorder!
- A magic wand
- ‘Ainsley Harriot’s’ cooking implement – complete with mimed impersonation
- A golf club
- A sword
- A torch
- A pen
- A hairbrush

Satisfied that they could respond imaginatively I challenged them to try again without repeating any of the ideas and avoiding further variations on the sports equipment theme. They came up with: -

- A tie
- A lipstick
- An ear-ring
- A shield
- A shoe
- A fork
- An ear bud
- A key
- A snake being charmed out of a basket
- A cigarette
- A hand grenade
- A set of num-chocks – a martial arts weapon apparently!

- A back scrubber
- A rugby ball.

Smith (2001 p.1) makes the very simple but vital point that:

‘Originality’ the third step in the creative process – ensures that the ideas that have been generated are not only unusual but also useful.”

To test this out within the process I asked the Year 7’s to use the recorder prop now as the base of a spontaneous centre of the circle improvisation (a skill which they are still learning). The ideas had to be ‘useful’ in stimulating a dramatic response and acting as a focus for improvisation. The group came up with several but I quote here two short ones to prove my point:

A boy went in and picked up the recorder, turned it once in his hand then pushed it under his arm, straightening up and shouting:

Boy: Company! Men!

Others rushed into the circle to become the recruits.

Boy: You came here to be the best of the best – You are in the TS centre. The milling will start at 0600 hours. Do you know what milling is or do you not?

Others responded confused.

Boy: Are you trying to make a fool out of me? Milling is where you are in the field...What private?

Boy2: What is that sir?

Boy: It’s my baton. So what do you want to be?

Girl: In the army, sir. To be a soldier

Boy: What about you?

Girl 2: A sniper

Boy: And you?

Girl 3: An ice-cream lady.

Boy: (sarcastically) That's a high rank in the army!

The pupils have responded creatively to the object and developed a scenario from it ending with a humorous bit of divergent thinking. The second example shows how students can develop whole complex scenarios very quickly:

A enters using the recorder as a sweeping brush.

B: Have you done those floors yet?

A: You only pay me £5 an hour.

B: That's more than we paid the last one.

C: What became of her?

A: You (to B) locked her in a cupboard.

D: Let me out.

B: (B lets her out of the cupboard) Now get to work.

A: You locked her in a cupboard for ages and now you expect her to start cleaning straight away.

E: We only fed her on sugar paper – it was all I could fit under the door.

F: Excuse me I am here to inspect the place.

A: We are the maids.

G: Her servants.

C: Look at the sores on me

G: She locked me in a cupboard.

F: For how long?

A: Five weeks!

Stimulus material is often used to begin drama work. To encourage divergent thinking I often begin by giving students a photograph of a boy on a bicycle riding down a lane. Initial reactions are often questions like:

“How can we do a drama if there is only one boy in it?”

“How can we do a drama about a bicycle?”

“This is boring, what can we do we this?”

A few simple questions soon get them thinking more creatively: -

“Where is he going? Where has he been? Who is behind the hedge? How do we know he *is* a boy? Is he running away from something? Or to something? Where is everybody else?”

And so on. I do a similar exercise with year 6/7' s on the theme of imagination. I place a chair in the centre of the circle I ask them to sit in and then ask them to describe it in detail. Then I ask them to tell me what it is that is not a chair. I make the distinction clear between what it clearly is – and what our imaginations can allow it to be.

In whole group drama the simple test of the usefulness of an idea is a whole group evaluation exercise in itself. How much of what is being done said or planned will actually prove useful? It is not just a matter of students being ‘creative’ or ‘expressive’ as may be assumed by less sympathetic members of staff passing the drama room. Over the centuries the creative thinkers have been mocked and ridiculed by logical, practical thinkers but they are responsible for about every invention you can name. Most learning is concerned with right and wrong answers and Albert Einstein thought it nothing short of miraculous that ‘the modern methods of instruction have not yet entirely strangled the holy curiosity of inquiry’. Without the creativity to go with it, knowledge is useless. Imagination and creativity must be

encouraged and fostered. They are highly important in all walks of life, and professions.

The problem for the arts generally, though I shall be focusing on drama, is that creativity has become associated only with the notion of self-expression and as such has become distanced from most people's experience. Drama in education certainly became associated with this through the works of Brian Way and others and improvisation is often dismissed or 'praised' only in terms of being an opportunity for 'self-expression'. In the world of popular art the question of what is creative and what is not have tended to define our attitude to the product. Is it art? "If it is self-expression, yes", has been the argument. But is self-expression creative? And is creativity always art? Firstly the debate about creativity and self-expression requires us to look again at our definitions, which on first sight seem to confirm the proposal. And yet, no company or business could operate with creative individuals who were merely 'expressing him or herself' and the definition seems to give scant appreciation to the likes of Shakespeare, Mozart or Da Vinci. To paraphrase May (1975 p.49), 'creativity should not be confused with a lack of discipline, carelessness or novelty for its own sake'.

There is some aspect of the individual's ability to express ideas in the notion of creativity, but clearly we also expect the application of craft or skill, and an outcome, which is somehow new and/or original. Total originality is very rare and creativity is most often associated with work based on an already existing model, but developed from it. Dyson's vacuum cleaner, in a sense is less an act of creativity than the first vacuum type cleaner ever made which was itself a development on already existing technology and cleaning methods. Mozart owed much to Bach and, despite Shaffer's story in his play 'Amadeus', to Salieri. Shakespeare borrowed freely from the Greeks

and others. In fact, originality is based on the word 'origin', and suggests something, which has its origins in the past! Fredman/Reade (1996 p. 61) observe,

“One of the reasons we panic when asked to improvise, is because we have a firm belief that to be creative we have to be original; what we say must be being said for the very first time. If that were true, Shakespeare would never have written a single line!”

Rather than straining to be completely 'novel' creative people develop by linking and generating around already existing ideas, an organic growth from that which has gone before. As Mace wrote back in the 1930's (1932 p.54)

“We can all think of something new. The difficulty is to think of something new that is also true and important.”

In drama, simple personal self-expression is possible for the playwright but for none of the other participants since it is a social-art form. Even when written by one person, to be performed as a one-person show by that one person, they are still dependant on others to operate lights, sound, help with costume, make-up or whatever. Self-expression in Drama is almost exclusively only seen through the 'lens' of many other collaborators. Educational drama of all types is very much about team effort, with all members of the class contributing in some way, their 'self-expression' serving the needs of the group. As with other examples of creativity students are likely to draw upon knowledge of previously used genres, plot lines, characters and contexts which they 'borrow', but when challenged, encouraged and prompted by the teacher, they can create something not only new to them but artistically valid in its own right, true and original.

A conventional approach to learning is not ideal in the development of creativity. To quote Evans/Deehan (1988 p.197),

“When anything is taught in school there is a three stage process involved. First, learners are exposed to a body of knowledge or a skill to be acquired; then they practice this; and finally they provide some kind of feedback to the teacher by way of a task or a test. If it has gone well then the learner should reach a predictable end-point, by passing the test or displaying the skill on the given task.”

I have observed Drama taught this way and indeed at times this is appropriate for certain aspects of skill development, but it is not a way to develop creativity. To quote Evans/Deehan (ibid.) again;

“The outcome or product of a piece of creative learning cannot be predicted.”

In whole group improvisation the class can all participate at their own level in an open-ended piece, and therefore, by definition in a manner which is creative; that is the application of learned skill and knowledge to produce imaginative new/original ideas within a form, actively fashioned to achieve the goal of dramatic development. The very essence of whole group improvisation is 'Creative Acting' as formulated by Russian actor/director, Stanislavski. The aim is to achieve a stage of 'intuitive truthfulness' in role, achieved by immersion of personality in the character. It is total empathy as discussed in the previous chapter. This is what has often been termed (Slade et al),

"Putting oneself into someone else's shoes."

And what Stanislavski (Ed. Hapgood 1963, p.122) himself calls,

" A kind of re-incarnation".

Creative acting requires the actor to engage fully with their character, building and

developing a truthful reality within the 'given circumstances' of the dramatic context. It is in this 'engagement' with the material (character) that true creativity is possible. May (1975 p. 41) writes on the subject of the creative act:

“The encounter may or may not involve voluntary effort – that is, “will power”. A healthy child’s play, for example, has the essential features of encounter, and we know it is one of the important prototypes of adult creativity. The essential point is not the presence or absence of voluntary effort, but the degree of absorption, the degree of intensity; there must be a specific quality of engagement.”

Stanislavski (Haggood 1963 p. 114) devised his psycho-techniques to enable the actor to achieve this kind of subconscious creativity:

“When an actor is completely absorbed by some profoundly moving objective, so that he throws his whole being passionately into its execution, he reaches a state we call inspiration.”

May goes on to say that 'escapist creativity is that which lacks this encounter'. Students who merely want to 'play' refuse to take on the implications of the role they portray, whether working in improvisation or script. One of the students who filled in a questionnaire made the comment:

“We learn different ways to solve problems i.e. shooting someone is a decision which is quickly enacted through which has far-reaching consequences. We learn that everything we do has implications and if we didn't explore character and their actions and ideas we wouldn't be able to expose consequences and implications, which ultimately shapes our lives.”

Interestingly, May (1975 p. 44) writes about those with great creativity but who lack talent.

“It was said of the novelist Thomas Wolfe who was one of the highly creative figures of the American scene, that he was a “genius without talent”. But he was so creative because he threw himself so completely into his material and the challenge of saying it – he was great because of the intensity of the encounter.”

I have known students capable of extraordinary work in role, whose level of commitment and intensity were enormous, and who could analyse and draw implications from their work, yet who were not talented actors. They could not learn lines well nor project their voices, and lacked highly stage presence. One such student is now doing a PhD. in Philosophy, another gained one in Mathematics and a third is training to be a medical Doctor. They are all creative, thoughtful people who speak very highly of their work in improvised drama and how it has helped them develop their creativity and thinking skills. None were great actors on the stage.

Harnad (2001, p.9) makes some interesting observations about creativity in the performing arts, which he argues:

“exhibit ‘real-time’, ‘on-line’ creativity.”

Something even the casual observer of a whole group drama, could not fail to notice.

He goes on to make the following relevant points:

“Every creative medium has its own constraints, its own ‘givens’.”

This is something that I am at pains to spell out to those who think whole group drama is just a free expression class. He goes on:

“The performing arts may in fact be especially revealing about creativity because they ‘externalize it’ so to speak, making it happen before your very eyes. The lessons one learns from it are familiar ones: much preparation and craft, considerable imitation of the past, an aesthetic sense guiding one’s taste

in innovation, and the ability and inclination to do something worthwhile, convincing and new with the raw material. Before the 'creative' and 'performing' arts were separated, one might have watched with one's own eyes while the performing poet-minstrel, in the thrall of an inspired moment – guided by his muse – elaborated an inherited (prepared) tale in a new and inspired way during an improvisatory performance.”

In whole group improvisation the team of individuals operating 'in role' and out, each with their different abilities, collaborates to take the project through planning to 'performance' (acting out) and finally to evaluation. Whole group drama is about teamwork and as such a secure and 'accepting' environment is vital. Whole group creativity requires everyone involved to take risks, often at the risk of looking silly, and anyone in the team reluctant to take part can jeopardise the drama process by 'blocking' the activities and imaginative ideas. Whole group drama, in spite of the size of the group and its less specific problem solving process, nevertheless reflects some of the ideas of George M. Prince's 'synetics theory of problem solving' (Ed. Collings 1993 p.104/5) where the group operate as equals, with a leader (in our case often but not always the teacher), building on each others ideas. Develop your Creative Skills (Ed. Collings 1993 p.109) goes on to make the point:

“Small teams, in which people draw on one another's strengths promotes creativity. A jazz band is a perfect example of this principle. Although each musician has the opportunity to take the lead from time to time, and to give expression to his or her skills, the individualism is subordinate to teamwork.”

Like free-form jazz in music this is far from simple and requires a skilled use of, and appreciation for the needs of the process. As Wynton Marsalis (Burns: Episode One Intro) says:

“The real power of jazz and the innovation of jazz is that a group of people can come together and create art – improvised art – and can negotiate their agendas with each other and that negotiation is the art.”

The relevance of the similarity is clear and the parallels startling: -

- To play in the same key- to be aware of the appropriate mood/tone and level of tension
- To play in the same or complimentary rhythm -to be aware of the timing, rhythm, tempo and pace of the dramatic activity
- To play the same song/tune -to be in the same drama. An awareness of what Stanislavski calls the 'super objective', Brecht the 'super-task' and what I will later refer to as the 'focus' of the drama.
- To play solos which are supported by each other, and don't dominate the ensemble -to take the lead in the drama when necessary, supporting others when they take the lead, by listening and responding, and not trying to dominate the drama. These are the skills of good managers and negotiators, people able to lead and motivate, work alongside and promote each other.

Jazz has much in common with Dramatic improvisation and like drama unless recorded it is come and gone. It is process led. The playing of jazz is the reason for its existence, the product evolving from the ‘jamming’. Burns (Burns Episode One: Intro) observes of jazz,

“It is an improvisational art making itself up as it goes along...it rewards individual expression but demands selfless collaboration...It has a rich tradition and its own rules but it is brand new every night.”

I would argue this is true also of whole group improvised drama but music is fundamentally different. By its very nature a song played or sung is available to an

audience; drama is often inaccessible without a lot of information. The dramatic improvisation is a 'happening,' an 'event', a particular new and challenging type of theatre which demands its audience's involvement and response. That response, in this type of drama (like in jazz), can be mere 'foot-tapping' or a fully-fledged solo, playing along with the band or demanding a change in rhythm, key and mood!

As in jazz, the creativity in drama is very much within the group's need and intention. The jazz musician is often unlearned in the craft of being a musician at all. He or she "does it their way"; often they can't read or write a note and play purely by ear, improvising their way through. There has been more than one jazz 'supremo' who has stated that classical music training actually limits a player's ability in learning jazz. Popular music of the 20th Century was built around jazz; its influence was everywhere, even on the classical world itself. The reason for this diversion is simply this. According to one of the major critics of the improvisational approach to drama, Hornbrook (1989, 1990, 1998), the vision of an art form (he describes drama) like jazz is untenable. Hornbrook's students can have none of the skills or abilities unless classically trained through "cultural models" and a variety of world genres. Unfortunately Louis Armstrong, Django Reinhardt, Stephan Grappelli, Fats Waller and company could only develop "limited" skills, clearly un-assessable since not tied to a progression-led product orientated curriculum! When Hornbrook argues (1998 p.4)

"it is naïve to think that young people can make a successful drama with no learned aptitude in acting, play writing or directing"

I agree with his conclusions. However it is the level and nature of that knowledge which must be clearly relevant to the learning process itself. He argues (1998 p. 39)

“The craft skills of theatre are thus withheld from students on the grounds that they interfere with the spontaneity of the dramatic experience, bring into play the intellect rather than relying on intuition and focus on communication rather than creative expression.”

But he seems to miss the point that it is the process of creating in role, which is the educational one, and not the simplistic acquisition of skills. Theatre is the communication of formulated ideas whilst the drama I am promoting helps the students to formulate those ideas, which surely even Hornbrook must agree is essential prior to scriptwriting or designing. And in any case, in this whole group drama model some of the craft of acting is highly developed, the intellect is fully brought into play and creative expression is vital. The actress Geraldine James (Mackey 1997 p.43) clearly makes a distinction between ‘acting’ and performing: -

“I don’t think performing is acting. I do a lot of work with children; some are very able to demonstrate, very ably, an old lady with a cockney accent. That is not acting. Occasionally, you’ll find a child who can actually respond on another level, but it’s usually the child who’s very quiet; she’s not bending her back, talking in a funny voice. There’s something she’s observed about old men, and she’s translated it, and I believe her as an old man. That’s acting.”

Marowitz (1978 p. 5) makes the vital point that,

“In the nineteenth century there was a great concern over whether the actor should lose himself in his role (operate entirely by instinct) or organize his actions under strict conscious control. These were erroneously called different “schools” of acting, and throughout the controversy no one made the elementary point that any acting worth its salt must be composed of both elements, and that even if he wanted to an actor could not eliminate conscious

control, and even if he chose to do so, an actor could not perform entirely on a wave of untrammelled instincts as the results of such performance would be to destroy his coherence and, more likely than not, his sanity.”

In role the student cannot just ‘romantically’ observe or simply ‘cathartically’ enjoy, they are pulled through an emotional and intellectual turmoil. Forced to analyse and be objective they cannot simply experience but are required to alienate from it in order to draw implications for the real world. The combination is experiential and scientific, combining two distinct disciplines in order to generate a ‘real’ response to an imagined experience. The analysis of the drama work is a vital stage since as O’Neill (1988 p. 26) writes,

“To realize the implications and significance of what is happening, while being at the same time caught up in the action, is almost impossible.”

However, research on the nature of creativity is more often associated with the finding of solutions to problems, and in general the steps of the creative-problem solving process are:

1. identify the problem
2. generate alternative solutions
3. test alternative solutions
4. evaluate alternative solutions
5. select solution (go back to 1)

These are the very same stages as those, which are used throughout the whole group improvisation drama process that I am advocating, where a whole series of problem-solving decisions need to be taken. What drama shall we do? What focus shall we have? What role shall I take? How shall I develop my character? How will my character interlink with yours? How shall we set it up? What technical requirements

do we need? These are just a few, and I shall explore them fully in a later chapter. This is fundamentally a different and more complex form of work than a teacher-led 'conventions' approach, since it is asking the students to develop the 'craft' of building the drama, operating as writers/devisers/actors/technicians and designers.

Within the whole group drama style I am promoting creativity is very much within and part of the whole approach, and through group support it is both encouraged and actively "taught". This is a particularly difficult concept for those who perceive creativity as an individual 'gift' rather than a response to a group need, but it is precisely this understanding which limits the appreciation of drama and the other arts, as subjects to teach creativity through in a way which is 'beneficial to society', rather than merely 'good for the individual'.

To confirm my argument that the students' involvement in whole group drama is in a creative art-form, I want to look at two specific approaches to defining the creative process, Guilford's 'Five Phases of Creativity' (1973) from, and Torrance's 'Four Components of Creativity' (1969) and relate these to the whole group drama process.

Firstly Guilford 's five phases; these are:

1. Preparation- acquiring skills, background information, choosing of resources, defining of problem.

In the whole group improvised model drama the students develop the skills and understanding to work in the process, develop background information to the drama, choose and develop their role within it, choose the appropriate resources, define the problem for the drama and for their character. In evaluation of the drama they further define any problems that may exist.

2. Concentration -intense focus on the problem.

In role they must concentrate fully on their role, giving it full attention and become 'engaged' with the drama.

3. Incubation- withdrawal from the problem, sorting, integrating, unconscious clarification, relaxation.

Both in role and out the student will:

- *become so engrossed in the drama as to become intuitive and relaxed, integrating and sorting ideas.*
- *out of role step back and distance from the drama, focusing on the form rather than the content so as to allow ideas to fully form.*

In most cases the students leave the lesson and return some time (a day or more) later, allowing incubation to take place.

4. Illumination -emergence of ideas, perspectives.

Through work in role the student becomes aware of new perspectives and ideas, which are further developed in analysis such as hot seating. A range of examples are give in Chapter Seven.

5. Verification/ Elaboration -evaluation, implementation, testing out.

In final evaluation and analysis the students are encouraged to formulate their ideas from the drama as implications, testing them out on others in the class for comment and debate.

The process does not gloss over issues but highlights them for challenging thought.

As a student explained on a questionnaire that,

“I enjoy putting myself into someone else’s shoes and attempting to solve problems. I enjoy allowing my imagination to run freely and exploring issues, which are often delicate or controversial.”

Torrance has described the four components by which an individual's creativity can be assessed as:

1. Fluency- producing a large number of ideas

The whole group drama process is often begun with consideration of many reactions to a stimulus in the initial stages, but fluency is also observed in the choice of roles and possible action/context etc.

2. Flexibility -producing a large variety of ideas.

This is seen in class discussion and improvisation on and around the ideas a variety of imaginative responses are encouraged.

3. Elaboration- developing and embellishing upon those ideas.

This is an essential element of the negotiation and role establishing process where the range of ideas are compared, linked and developed to create a whole.

4. Originality -producing unusual ideas that are neither banal nor obvious.

This is a constant throughout the process, in initial group work, individual role choice, in preliminary improvisation, the whole group drama and analysis.

As I shall demonstrate later when I give specific lessons as illustrations of the process in action, students involved in whole group improvised drama, of the type I am promoting, are involved in all these phases of activity at some point or another and are actively encouraged and supported in doing so. It is clear that in whole group drama students are taking part in the creative process and developing their individual creativity through dramatic play. MacKinnon (Skynner. 1993 p.130) has identified the two characteristics of the creative person:

"greater facility for switching into playful 'childlike' mode; and two, they were prepared to ponder problems for much longer periods before resolving them".

If that is not clearly enough related to drama, then consider what Professor Minkin has written (NACCCCE Report 1999 p. 30):

"Creative 'play' - seeking to see the world afresh – is at times a fight against the fascination which familiar associations and directions of thought exert on us. Young people need to be encouraged to understand the importance of this kind of 'play'."

This notion of the 'playful and childlike' is a common one when looking at creativity, and is similar to Stanislavski's idea of the 'intuitive' actor and the whole notion of the imagination supplying answers that the conscious mind cannot. Some people like John Norman (1999, p. 8) have linked this to recent ideas about left brain/right brain thinking (Maclean, Sperry, Herrmann) and no matter how one attempts to define it, the fact is that the phenomenon is real. Ironic then that one of the criticisms occasionally leveled against drama is that it is 'playing'. I have heard teachers, parents and even students refer to drama in this way. What they are picking up on is that in actual fact, students are 'playful and childlike' with matters essential to human relationships and consequently human survival. Many like the teachers and parents I have mentioned, see drama as a 'waste of time', an exercise in free thought that has little relevance, but this is a misunderstanding of Drama, and I would argue that drama should free the mind and be a mental holiday, and as such loosen up the mind, exercising the creative and imaginative faculties. Fantasy and imagination are sometimes considered 'silly' but only by those stuck in the 'left-hand brain' thinking mode. These are the same kind of people who thought that the inventors of the locomotive, the aircraft, the motorcar, vacuum cleaner etc. were silly. The evidence is

that the right hand side of the brain is the creative half. The left handles day-to-day business. Most of our education system is concerned with the left hand side of the brain, learning to reason and store information, access data and organize it appropriately. From an early age we are taught to value logic, practical ideas, established rules as more important than creativity/imagination and fantasy, insight and intuition. Only by allowing the mind its freedom to operate can it be expected to be creative. Drama can present those opportunities. Skynner (1993 p132) goes on to discuss how the 'play-thinking' idea works in reality:

"After you've done some play-thinking you've got to switch to the logical mode and analyse. Then you hit some new problems. So you switch back to playing again, and then after a bit back to logical criticism of the latest stuff you've come up with."

The ability to switch back and forth between play mode and analysis mode is very close to Brecht's notion of an audience able to observe emotionally but then pull back and objectively criticise the action of the characters. It is the model for the type of drama I am discussing, where students work in deep role, but must then step back to evaluate and analyse their work. It is also the model of truly 'creative centred' business such as Sony, according to Akio Morita (Skynner 1993 p. 131):

"At Sony we know that a terrific new idea is more likely to happen in an open, free and trusting atmosphere than where everything is calculated, every action analysed, and every responsibility assigned to an organisational chart."

The fact is that creativity flourishes amongst individuals able and encouraged to express their ideas in a spirit of mutual support and trust, where 'play' is seen as beneficial rather than negative and intuition rewarded rather than criticised as 'woolly thinking.' In truth it is a big mistake to think that this style of work is easy or

simplistic, on the contrary, students have to be taught through example and experience 'how' to let go and allow the imagination and 'play-thinking' to happen. It means allowing oneself to feel confused and to accept that we are unable to supply answers from logic alone.

The question may be asked, 'What is the role of intuition and the subconscious in learning through drama?' Intuition is actually the using of knowledge already acquired and a shortcutting of the analytical mind, so that knowledge appears to be used without effort or analysis. To work intuitively requires us to be no longer in control in the normal way. This can be experienced when riding a bike or driving a car (Claxton, 1997). The knowledge is immediately accessed. The initial effort to learn the skill is, of course, vital.

Most words we see or hear are immediately understood, intuitively, without effort but others will require analysis and/or concentrated effort. The same is true of body language and facial expression.

Our concept of a physical object will be limited if we only ever see it from one perspective. An understanding of an object can only be gained if the object is seen from a range of perspectives. Once seen thus the brain can intuitively react to similar objects in the future. The brain has been given a frame of reference. The mind similarly needs perspectives on concepts to fully comprehend them. What makes the world so confusing is that conceptually any one person's perceptions may be true but remain incomplete; it is only partially true. For example,

'2 plus 2 equals four- but 2 plus 2 may equal 2 lots of 2- or 1 (2 adults and 2 children equals one family ticket)- or even 22'.

Even in the concrete world of numbers perspective and context are everything, so how much more so must this be true in the abstract world of human behaviour. As Richardson (1999 p. 207) points out,

“meaningful contexts.....help develop abstract concepts in a grounded way.”

What is loyalty depends entirely upon the perspective from which it is seen. Concrete reality is the appreciation of all aspects, perspectives and perceptions. The intellect does not like this 'giving up of control' and the feeling of being "free", which is why students of all ages (and it gets harder as you get older, which is why ~ staff are the hardest of all to work with!) find getting into role and sustaining role-play difficult. It is also why those who can achieve that stage of 'creative freedom' (from their own intellect) can deal with change better and are more flexible and fluid in their dealings. They can accept that they do not know all the answers. In his speech from which I quoted earlier, David Hargreaves speaks about innovation rather than creativity, which he says is more valuable and easier to teach. He says that innovation can be aimed at getting people to,

"Take more control over their lives and escape from dependency... mobilising resources, people and buildings."

Through innovation Hargreaves hopes that the student will transfer their work related knowledge and skill to the community needs. Almost all Drama in schools, I would argue, clearly deal in this type of innovation since students are working together as a team, to create, carry out and evaluate together, developing knowledge (of themselves and others in the world around them) and skills which are easily and obviously transferable into the community.

This great strength for drama is also a weakness for some, however, since Drama employs intuitive styles of learning and as such the 'analytical' is not observed. When a student has to 'show their working out' in a Mathematics lesson they are doing so that it can be observed that this is not a fluke response, that the student can repeat the process and so that we can assess the validity and ease of the process they have found. However it is also true that the very act of trying to show our analytical 'working out' can actually interfere with and prevent our success at solving problems. Creativity is notoriously difficult to pin down but examples of creative thinking usually refer to moments of inspiration, which are non-analytical and totally free from the critical process. They are when the intuition takes over, often when sleeping or relaxing. As stated in *Mindpower: Enhance your thinking skills* (Ed. Collings 1996 p. 26):

“Creative thinking often involves the intuitive right side of the brain as opposed to the logical left side.”

Drama deals with humanity and we learn about that every second of our life. We employ that learning in the improvisational process – without working out – but nevertheless creatively and appropriately. As a result analysis is best done 'at the end of the process' so as not to disturb the process itself, which is complex and difficult in its own right. Bowskill (1973 p.65) makes the observation that,

“Real inner experience, personal expression and creativity come frequently by accident. The art and discipline of communication come by design and selection at a later date. It is harmful to the student's creative process to become selective too soon. A good motto is 'creation by accident – art by selection.’

It would be wrong however to assume that creative thought does not involve both divergent and convergent thinking. Clearly the ability to think of original ways to

move on the drama are important, but the intellectual ability to evaluate them and choose the best idea is also present.

With two year eight classes I conducted a simple experiment. Taking the simple 'pairs exercise', where two pupils take on two roles within a teacher structured improvisation, a third student was asked to sit and record the number of changes and developments within the spontaneous improvisation. A parent was to try and persuade a child to confess to theft from a department store without, if possible, revealing that they already know about it and have proof, in the form of a CCTV video. The improvisation ran for little over a minute. Students observing recorded 4/5 changes of direction (developments/additional information) within the minute. A creative development requiring a thoughtful adaptation and response every fifteen seconds. I conducted two further 'pairs exercises' of two and three minute durations and the observations continued to record changes of on average every fifteen seconds, or less! Results in the second class were identical. The observers at Year 8 were only recording verbal changes and older, more experienced students might also be looking for visual developments in facial expressions, body-language and movement.

I then repeated the exercise in a third Year 8 group, with a different class teacher. I observed and recorded examples of Year 8 pupils at work in the spontaneous pairs exercise. The first scene was a police officer talking to a parent about having CCTV footage of a theft. The scene was in the police station. The instructions they were given were to "imagine you are that character – be that character". The first scene I observed lasted 1 minute 30 seconds went as follows: -

A – We have some TV pictures showing your son in Tesco.

B – That's normal.

A – It is normal. But he's been stealing.

B- I don't think so.

A –But we've seen him on the CCTV. I'll get the video and show you.

B – I'd be intrigued to see that. My son does not do anything of that nature.

A – He didn't pay for an ice cream.

B – I don't know where he is. He said he had to go somewhere today.

A – He purchased an item that cost 30 pence.

B – Did you follow him?

A – We lost him. We are going to start a search.

B – I'm very worried about him. He's never alone. He's usually with us.

A – You will need to fill out some forms. Just sign there. I'll sign here. What's his name?

B – Michael David Ratapon (some slight giggles at the name)

A – What does he look like?

B – He recently dyed his hair. He likes to dye his hair.

The creativity inherent here is striking:

- The attitude of the father
- The sense of disturbed normality
- The protectiveness towards the son
- The detail of the ice-cream and the 'other' purchase
- The fear for him now that he is apparently missing
- The new detail of the hair dying which suggests something new about the son not immediately apparent in the previous dialogue.
- This scene remember was spontaneous unplanned improvisation by two Year 8 boys chosen randomly from a group of 28 working in threes, with one recording the number of developments.

In the second scene I observed three girls. They were asked to plan the details of a problem into their scene. Two friends are talking about a third friend who was been spreading lies about girl A. What were the lies? Who were the friends and where was the scene taking place? The creativity now is in the planning of appropriate information:

A – She could be lying that person A is gay or something.

B – Or to my boyfriend about me.

A – Saying you're gay with me.

B – Why?

A – She's jealous because she wants your boyfriend.

B – I'm 16

A – Could be a rumour that she's been spreading around school. People have picked it up and started to whisper about it.

Drawing information together quickly the two girls establish a believable premise and background to their scene. It may owe something to soap opera but it is new and original within their context and experience. The question now was could they improvise within the situation they had created?

B – I can't believe she's done this.

A – You mean about the rumour.

B – She's sly. She's meant to be our friend. I can't believe it. I couldn't believe she's do something this bad.

A – I know. I went round to her house last night.

B – It's shocking. She shouldn't have done it.

A – I bet she's jealous. She wants your boyfriend.

B – I thought she was getting close, friendly.

A – I'd have a serious talk to him.

B – Because everyone's talking about it he'll think it's real. All the schools been laughing at us cause of what she's said.

A – At lunchtime they were all laughing and I didn't know what had been said. I even saw Aaron laughing at us.

The scene leant itself to a more 'natural' approach since this was closer to home, but the development nevertheless demonstrates clear creative thinking and development of the ideas:

- Reactions to the 'friend' are more of hurt than anger.
- Disbelief is central to the reactions rather than revenge.
- A desire to understand her motives, albeit pre-planned is introduced and developed when they later consider that 'Aaron' too has been influenced by the rumours.
- The need to talk to 'Aaron' is recognised.

This is not a superficial or stereotyped performance but a very personal and creative response in role to a dilemma, which although it has its roots in 'soap' storylines is handled with originality and feeling by two Year 8 girls.

For the final scene I went to observe three boys obviously struggling with sustaining their work and who had less skill base, finding accepting of ideas and developing the ideas more difficult. The scene was to be the longest and concerned the return of a faulty electrical item, broken by the customer, to the shop. The shopkeeper knows that they do not sell faulty items.

A – I just bought this TV. It doesn't work. I want a refund.

B – What's wrong with it?

A – Something inside. I want my money back.

B – What have you done?

A – I switched it on. It didn't work.

B – I tried it yesterday.

A – It wasn't working when I used it and I want my money back.

B – It could be your plug.

A – No, it's something inside. I'm not happy and I want my money back.

B – I can fix it.

A – How much?

B - £200

A - £200 to fix a TV?

B - It's a good TV

A- I know but I'm not paying that for fixing it. I want my money back or a replacement.

PAUSE – they had run out of things to say, and then had an inspiration....

A – I'm waiting.

B – Get a TV from over there.

A – I don't want 'any', I want one like this.

B – They're the same price. Lift it up.

A – I can't I've got a bad back.

B – I'll get someone to do it. You, lift that TV down for him.

A – How much is it?

B - £1,000.

A – Take it back, I'm not paying extra for that.

B – It's in your car now. Oh go and get it out for him. So what do you want?

A – My money back.

The two boys had struggled, fallen into some repetition and a longish pause but still managed a number of noticeably creative developments:

- The offer to fix the TV, at an inflated cost, justified by the quality of the TV
- The fact that he wasn't leaving till he got something done
- The replacement's size and weight
- The need for an 'imaginary other' to lift and carry the TV to the car and back!
- The 'extra' money needed for the replacement.

In each of these examples the creative use of language, situation and character within a simple 'pairs exercise clearly demonstrates thoughtful and imaginative work. One is reminded of Simon Callow's point quoted earlier about the number of levels on which the actor is thinking.

In theory at least, I hope I have shown that creativity in Drama is innovation by the individual ~ for others (the community of whatever size), using skill and knowledge (craft) in an original, appropriate and flexible manner, which is likely to involve imagination (play-thinking) and evaluation, and whose product has meaning beyond the immediate. I believe that improvisation uses all these skills and develops them in its participants, and that students in whole group drama learn by contributing most in the areas where they feel strongest and letting others cover for their weaknesses. This I would argue is essential in any successful team endeavour. Drama encourages creative thinking, imaginative ideas, producing something new. Bowkett (1999 p. 16) advocates,

“creative thinking allows children to manipulate ideas in their heads, rather than simply accumulate dead knowledge and react to it subsequently.”

Surely everyone should learn to develop their creativity, which frees their minds from set patterns and pre-conceived ideas? Creativity and imagination are not merely artistic ways of thinking – they are a kind of thinking where all ideas become art. Science, maths, technology and business all need creative people with imagination.

CHAPTER FIVE: THINKING SKILLS

DRAMA AND CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

If Drama is normally considered the province of Dionysus, then we must balance this view, for Apollo, god of rational order and form, certainly has his place. Drama is about thinking and planning, and especially about understanding meaning. Stanislavski taught actors to look for the sub-text in their words and the super objective within the play. The engagement and encounter with character must always be paralleled by the actor's total awareness of where they are and what they are doing. Stanislavski quotes from the actor Salvini (Ed. Hapgood 1963 p.51):

“An actor lives, weeps and laughs on the stage, and all the while he is watching his own tears and smiles. It is this double function, this balance between life and acting that makes his art.”

But the most important development of thinking skills in drama, I would argue, is in the 'lost art' of whole group drama and the ability of a whole group to plan and develop a dramatic encounter, which engages the participant with concepts.

Thinking is essentially to do with concepts. What is a concept? It is our general notion or understanding of something. We all have a concept of what a chair is. We all have a concept of the sea. These words represent a wide range of possibilities, but we have generalized concepts in our minds. Science deals in concrete or absolute concepts, things that can be measured such as heat, light and weight. Things that can be calculated, added up. In Science we are looking for definite answers that can be agreed by a number of people. In drama as we have seen already we deal with abstract concepts, which cannot be measured, concepts about people.

Drama is a social art form. It is about people and by people, and the material we use to create it is people. The concepts we deal in are those we hold about people. Since they cannot be measured in any way, they are abstract – we cannot see them and we can't agree definite answers.

TRUST – LOYALTY – POWER – FEAR – LOVE – PREJUDICE

These are all examples of abstract concepts. We know them only through experience and as Berger and Seaborne (1966 p.182) note,

“Generally speaking the more abstract they are the more difficult they are to form.”

Until we have experienced them in some way these concepts have no meaning. In Drama we gain this experience through our imaginary involvement in a situation. We know it is not real but we “suspend our disbelief” to involve ourselves in it. As already noted we call this a ‘vicarious’ experience. We have the experience through the totally natural and normal process of empathy (feeling with others) and this particularly the case in whole group drama.

All dramas operate through a story or plot, which we call the dramatic structure. This focuses on a problem/theme or conflict and it is within this that the concepts will be experienced as a metaphor for real life. That which is depicted in the drama ‘represents’ reality beyond itself. The participant or audience will draw their understanding from the metaphorical meaning implied in the dramatic action. Whether that be quite immediate as in ‘kitchen-sink’ realism or highly complex as in ‘Waiting for Godot’, or indeed fantastic, as in ‘Star Wars’. A metaphor does more than replace or parallel reality however it illuminates it. A metaphor effectively produces what Brecht refers to as ‘*verfremdungseffekt*’ by ‘making strange’ a known concept and presenting us with a new insight. Pinker (1999 p. 59) observes that,

“Philosophers often try to clarify difficult concepts using thought experiments, outlandish hypothetical situations that help us explore the implications of our ideas. *The Twilight Zone*’ actually staged them for the camera.”

A metaphor is not like a simile; it cannot be replaced by an equivalent literal meaning. It is a mistake to think that drama can ‘literally’ stand for reality, and a misjudgment by any practitioner who thinks it can. I have referred to experiments of this nature in whole group drama on page 16. Even Stanislavski at his most naturalistic never forgot that ‘theatre is convention’ and urged his actors to remember that truthfulness on the stage does not mean merely behaving as in real life. He wrote (Ed. Hapgood 1963 p. 41),

“The theatre and its scenery as such is convention. It cannot be anything else.”

The ‘truth’ of the drama is the truth ‘recognised’ by its audience. As William Taylor (1984 p. 7) writes’

“The goodness, fit, truth, or falsity of a metaphor must be assessed in their own terms.”

Or as Nelson Goodman (Taylor 1984 p.6) observes,

“Metaphorical truth and falsity are as distinct from – and as opposite to - each other as are literal truth and falsity.”

The significance of the metaphor in the Drama context, rather than fable, allegory or parable, is that these words imply a moral or pre-determined meaning, whilst a metaphor simply exists to present an alternate way of understanding. .

Liam Hudson (Taylor 1984 p.73) writes,

“The use of fiction to explore fact is a time honoured enterprise”,

And Drama’s metaphors of society do just that. As Pinker notes (1998 p. 543)

“The intrigues of people in conflict can multiply out in so many ways that no one could possibly play out the consequences of all courses of action in the mind’s eye. Fictional narratives supply us with a mental catalogue of the fatal conundrums we might face someday and the outcomes of strategies we could deploy in them.”

How much then the dramatic ‘improvised’ fiction can offer. If the novel can be described as the ‘laboratory of narrative’, then I think the dramatic improvisation is the ‘experiment of characterisation’ and whole group drama its most extensive research medium.

But how may we address our argument to those still influenced by the reasoning of Plato? His voice still reverberates and echoes through the corridors of government, education offices, schools and private homes. Raymond Wilson (Taylor 1984 p. 114) quotes him,

“His objection to poets, not to put too fine a point on it, is that they are liars; they are moreover liars who are all the more reprehensible for being first class at their job, for their fictions are both plausible and pleasurable.”

The teacher, thought Plato, is guilty of ‘turning the pupil into a dreamer or sleepwalker.’ As creativity, this may be no bad thing. Wilson (Taylor 1984 p. 115) goes on to observe that any claims to the uselessness of the metaphor are,

“Contrary to all common sense, not least because the very language in which metaphor is condemned is itself as tissue of metaphor; but of metaphor that is not usually perceived to be metaphor because it is respectably dead.”

To some extent our reality is determined by the language we use since we know things by the language or symbol we use to define them. All statements about the nature of things can never be fundamental but are determined by the language in

which they are expressed. Plato's views lead us into the world of Mr. Gradgrind from Dickens's *Hard Times* (Bk.1 Ch. 1):

"Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else."

The scientific worldview still appears to authorise this position, despite theories of relativity, quantum physics and the provisional and invented nature of scientific speculation, through its assumption that facts have objectivity. But even Plato acknowledges that children, however regrettably, are creatures of the senses and that as such they must be led through poetry, the agency of the senses, towards the world of abstract thought in which truth, he imagined, 'is uniquely located.' As Cleese (1993 p.251) writes

"if you use comedy or drama to involve the audience...you can affect them at gut level from which behaviour arises".

If the novel is 'an extended and elaborate metaphor articulated through fictive plot and character' as Raymond Wilson believes, then the drama is the same. Skynner (1993 p.250) comments,

"Learning from stories is the nearest that words can bring us to actual experience. We get involved in the characters. We get absorbed in the situations. We care about the outcome.... At the end, the story has given us some of the feelings we would get if we had gone through the experience"

That which is conceived through character, action and situation is immediate and appealing, far more so than even the liveliest polemic. That which is *created by the participants from their own thoughts, concerns and subconscious in whole group drama* is likely to create dynamic and relevant meaning. As Postman and Weingartner (1969 p.97) stated:

“As soon as students realise that their lessons are about their meanings, then the entire psychological context of schools is different. Learning is no longer a contest between them and something outside of them, whether the problem be that a poem, a historical conclusion, a scientific theory, or anything else. There is then, no need for the kinds of “motivation” found in the conventional Trivia content.... In short the meaning-maker metaphor puts the student at the centre of the learning process.”

Even in the creation of that meaning they are engaged in a number of thinking skills. These I feel can be identified using Bloom’s Taxonomy of Thinking Skills (Bloom 1956) as a relevant means of assessing how thinking may be developed in drama. Basing my research on Bloom’s Taxonomy, students were observed in a number of lessons.

The following examples are taken from questioning during hot seating prior to a drama, in a Year 10 GCSE Class. Students asked the questions quoted to two other students in role as prison psychiatrists. The ‘she’ referred to is teacher in role as a killer. The questions were created spontaneously and checked on information already in existence, developed their understanding from what was being offered, inferred meaning from what was being said and created new ideas to develop the drama, often based from their own making of judgements. The following examples were not asked in this order, and there is obviously overlap between categories, but I have tried to link examples under Bloom’s headings. The questions were asked by a number of different students but it is possible to see how each question links into further developments. The questions were asked and answered relating to: -

- Knowledge: recalling, re-stating and remembering information.

1. I thought that she was the only one who could speak to her?

(Remembering previous information and asking for clarification.)

2. Will you appreciate that she may not want to talk to you?

(The student is remembering the nature of the character and designs a question to evoke a re-collection of fact also attempting to draw inference from it.)

3. Do you think you are good at your job, you said you had been a psychiatrist for nine years?

(From remembered information they ask for relevant opinion based upon it.)

▪ Comprehension: grasping the meaning, interpreting, translating information

1. Why do you think she's so clever?

(Requiring the hot seated student to respond with their interpretation of the preceding events.)

2. What made you want to go into this type of work?

(Developing the nature of the character by trying to understand why they would want to be a psychiatrist.)

3. Have you been following the case since the trial or have you just started?

(Leading question in order to infer attitude/opinion on the case.)

4. Have you ever worked on a case with such a high profile?

(Again leading question inferring possible pressures, stress which may be brought into play through working on a case of this nature.)

- Application: making inferences and finding evidence to support ideas.
 1. How long have you been a psychiatrist? So do you resent someone who is younger than you getting on?
(Infers potential rivalry.)
 2. You said you worked with your brother. Have you worked on case like this before?
(Infers the problems with this kind of case.)
 3. You are 33. Are you more experienced then than your brother?
(Again inferring possible rivalry between the brothers.)
 4. Is there any competition between you and your brother?
(Stating the inference.)
 5. What kind of questions...what will you want to know of the family?
(Infers there may be problems with questioning the suspect's relatives.)

- Synthesis: creating new information and ideas using what has been learned.
 1. Do you think that it's fair – having a woman over you, as your boss?
(This creates the potential in the drama for a conflict.)
 2. How do we know that the information won't be passed on to the journalists?
(This creates the dramatic possibility of leaks of crucial information about the suspect.)

- Evaluation: making judgements on the basis of the established information.
 1. Do you feel that because you're lower than the other two that your opinion doesn't matter as much?

(Infers a possible judgement and in doing so opens up further dramatic possibilities.)

Students were able at the end of hot seating to make judgements on the characters they had interviewed, their personality, their attitudes/opinions and their possible significance in the forthcoming drama. As Ritch (2001 p. 3) points out:

“Making meaning means making the problem, not just finding the solution.”

In the whole group drama context students are being asked to construct meaning, make sense of their ideas by deciding what is important and relevant, identify ‘why’ things happen or will happen. These examples are from one short section of the process and it would appear that throughout the whole group drama process students engage in the stages Bloom identifies. They recall factual knowledge/information discussed in planning and in the constant recall of the details they have created in the drama, they interpret the information and action of the drama in order to sustain a response to new ideas, apply this information in further action and debate in the improvisation and adapt their own ideas to it. They analyse and synthesise the ideas constantly throughout the improvisation process and finally again at the end when reflecting upon it and evaluating it. Improvisation in particular makes quick thinking demands on the participants and whole group drama increases these demands in relation to the number of those involved and the teachers’ own deliberate manipulation of the material to challenge and develop their students thinking. The ‘actor’ within the drama process is asked to empathise as I have discussed fully in the previous chapter, but they are also operating as thinking, creative participants.

The use of convergent and divergent questioning observed in this example of hot-seating may also be thought of as development of creative thinking. (Guildford 1956, Gallagher and Aschner 1963, and Wilen 1985) and it is interesting to note how

creativity and critical thinking can overlap so readily. In fact, as Caviglioli, Harris and Tindall (2002 p. 145) point out:

“To imagine that the differences between genres or between types of thinking skills are clearly defined and absolute is to court trouble and confusion...Thinking in the ‘real’ world as opposed to the clinically ‘clean’ world of the thinking skills programme involves using different types of thinking at the same time. You might say that real life thinking is ‘fast and dirty’.”

Drama I would argue presents students with those ‘fast and dirty’ opportunities to develop their thinking skills, both during conventions like hot-seating but even more so in the hurly burly of whole group improvisation.

Learning in drama then is a complex process indeed but let me quote Megginson et al (1993 p.70):

“Learning can perhaps best be understood as a word which describes a change in an individual’s range and repertoire of behaviour. It is the process by which behaviour is modified, either by the addition of new and different capabilities or by the extension and enhancement of those that an individual already possesses. Psychology usually defines learning as a ‘relatively permanent change in behaviour due to past experiences’ or as ‘a relatively permanent change in behavioural potential which accompanies experience but is not the result of simple growth factors or of reversible influences such as fatigue or hunger.’

Megginson et al (1993 p. 89) go on to make a very important point

“Much of what people learn is the result of subconscious cognitive processes which connect the person with their environment and take place almost independently of the intentions and desires of the individual”

I have already written at length about the ‘experiential’ nature of whole group improvisation and the intuitive subconscious cognitive process of Stanislavski’s approach to acting. Handy (Skynner 1993 p. 91) writes,

“Learning is measured only by growth experience...learning is not finding out what other people already know, it is solving our own problems for our own purposes,”

Mace (1932 p. 62) makes a similar point,

“Some of the most characteristic forms of thinking assume the form of an attempt to solve a problem.”

Solving problems is core to both in and out of role experience in the drama. Skynner (1993 p. 151) notes,

“The most important learning is finding out the limitations of what we know. Unless we know the boundaries of it, we’re not curious and won’t feel a need to learn.”

Best (Ed. Lawrence 2000 p. 17) supports the view that

“The most significant contribution of education is not the acquisition of facts and useful skills, important though these may be, but rather the opening of horizons of thought and feeling which would otherwise be closed, perhaps permanently.”

The world of social relationships, indeed of what the government terms ‘citizenship’ deals in concepts never ‘taught’ and indeed possibly unteachable in the traditional sense. Drama as I have argued, tackles these through experiencing them in the safe

fiction of role-play, challenging us to re-think attitudes and opinions, allowing us to share perspectives which normally we would neither be interested in nor listen to. Through this we can change people's behaviour. Educational psychologist E.P. Torrance, who popularised the technique of 'sociodrama' to explore ideas and problems said (Ed. Collings 1993 p. 110),

“playing a role permits a person to go beyond himself and shed some of the inhibitions that stifle the production of alternative solutions. Playing a role gives a person a kind of license to think, say and do things he would not otherwise do.”

Through role and character in the whole group drama we are freed to explore a dramatic narrative and its implications. Actor/comedian John Cleese (1993 p. 251) almost echoes Brecht when he writes,

“When you have a story, behaviour is linked to consequences, so that the hearer can make up his or her own mind whether the behaviour is desirable.”

Kolb, American psychologist, believes that there are four critical behaviours that learners need to engage in (Megginson et al:1993 p. 85)

1. Planning
2. Experience/doing
3. Reviewing
4. Reflecting

The order, he says, is variable. It takes little imagination to see the link with the whole group drama process of planning the drama, experiencing it, evaluating (reviewing) and analysing (reflecting).

Drama has long been advocated as an excellent means of language acquisition but is it more than that? In Al Pacino's film Looking for Richard (Fox Searchlight pictures, 1996) a man on the street is interviewed and has some relevant and interesting things to say: -

“Intelligence is hooked with language and when we speak with no feeling we get nothing out of our society. We should speak like Shakespeare. We should introduce Shakespeare into the academies – you know why? – Because then kids would have feelings. We have no feelings, that's why it is easy for us to get a gun and shoot each other. We don't feel for each other, but if we were taught to feel we would not be so violent. He did more than help us he instructed us. If we think words are things and we have no feelings in our words then we say things to each other that don't mean anything, but if we felt what we said we'd say less and mean more.”

Yes this a good argument for teaching Shakespeare but even more so for whole group drama where the words spoken come from empathy and feeling directly. As Katz notes (1960 p. 16)

“Empathy helps us to transcend the limits of our rational powers. When we empathise we are not confined to using the stock of labels or descriptive words at our command. Through our feelings we sense more of the quality of the feelings of others. Even if we cannot give a name to what the other person is experiencing, to a degree we can experience it ourselves and appreciate it more realistically and accurately.”

Or to quote Briffault (1921 p. 61)

“A feeling that is named is no longer a feeling. It is the presentation of a feeling, a mere cognition.”

The idea that when we understand a feeling logically we lose the immediacy of knowing is a common one and something artists have tried to overcome. The dramatist uses the written word but even theatre play scripts should be thought of as spoken rather than written text. Like musical notation the play script is merely a means of recording that which is to be spoken. In whole group improvisation the spoken language is also that of the author and as such communicates directly through the participant as actor, with need to neither search for sub-text nor find means to convey it since this will be immediately apparent within it. The written word is a symbolic representation of the spoken word. The spoken word is a metaphorical representation of our relationship to the 'other'. Our understanding of the world is conceptual, that is based upon our perception, what we conceive it to be, and the word is our metaphor for representing that understanding. Shakespeare clearly understood this and his language is alive with meaning but there is a predominant belief believes Bowers (1994 p. 4) that

“Language’ is a neutral conduit for communicating internally constituted ideas and feelings”

In this view language becomes an objective mechanism, externalised and separated from that which is communicated through it; it is merely a medium. Bowers (1994 p.4) writes that

“Computers re-enforce a Cartesian view of language as this conduit through which objective data are communicated.”

Since we view the very means through which we relate to each other as a dead mechanistic system, we lose the ability to use that system, and perhaps as quoted, the very ability to communicate at all. In Drama the word is contextualised and is an outpouring of feeling and meaning from characters operating within a fictional but

'true' narrative. Language is driven by need and according to context and character; new vocabulary can be introduced and assimilated, as can new language structures. Through improvisation participants are required to use language to capture meaning, subjective feeling and thought and return language to its organic and metaphorical roots. In a drama/science cross curricula support lesson, in which I was trying to introduce the scientific names for parts of the body I did a whole group drama about Frankenstein. The low ability group soon picked up all the correct terms and language through their 'need' to adopt it for the drama. Similarly drama work set in courtrooms has provided students with an opportunity to learn the appropriate language and styles of speech. Importantly the drama participant will freely use the language of the face, body and gesture alongside spoken language in a perfectly natural manner. This is often denied them in other classrooms and in theatre work becomes an objective externalised exercise in performance technique. A colleague relates the story of one of her drama students who when asked to explain why he had said something which was really poignant and moving said simply,

"The words tumbled from my mouth."

Mudford (2000 p. 17) explains that

"In speaking at all, we are playing roles created by the language we command. Wittgenstein was right in saying, 'the limits of our language are the limits of our world'; but language is not the limit of our identities, and is frequently a concealment of our selves which are not unitary, shifting with our circumstances and our environment, physical and human."

Through improvisation we can experiment with language, with role and explore our identity. All Drama is about a challenge; in whole group Drama the participants must challenge themselves. They are challenging their own confidence. It takes bravery to

step outside your own role and personality and into that of another. Some roles and characters clearly require even larger amounts of confidence and bravery, for instance taking on a role very different from yourself or one with whom you feel no sympathy let alone empathy. It is a challenge to the personal ideas of the participant. What is believed about situations, and attitudes held about various aspects of life can be tested out and challenged in a Drama – but the participant must do it. If their beliefs and ideas are correct they will remain, but often they are compromised and must be adapted.

Drama offers a challenge to accept and listen to others. They must listen to their ideas and sometimes their criticisms often indirectly of themselves, through their character. A participant must be willing to criticize their own character's actions, which if that character is them, then they are criticizing themselves.

The ultimate aim of drama as experiment is to examine, challenge and transcend our concepts and ideas.

CHAPTER SIX

WHOLE GROUP DRAMA IN ACTION

The intention in the whole group model I am proposing and have observed is that the whole group is in role together simultaneously, operating in a sustained way 'in role', thinking and feeling as the character. It is an experiment in human behavior.

Improvisation is the language of experiment. As I have discussed earlier Brecht had an idea for *Lehrstück* as a theatre laboratory, that by working on producing one of these plays, without actually performing for an external audience, the participants would learn about the world and want to change it. He wanted the moments of decision in all his plays highlighted by the actors to show that change is possible. Stanislavski had his actors improvise on and off text to explore the range of possibilities, including what might happen if they actually did something other than that which is scripted. Boal offers audiences the chance to change the behaviour of the characters, to alter the course of the play by recognising and suggesting alternatives for the actors to improvise with. Boal's (1979 p. 119) notion of theatre, like that of Grotowski, challenges traditional audience/actor relationships:

“the ruling class took over the theatre, and built their dividing walls. First they divided the people, separating actors from spectators. People who act and people who watch – the party is over.”

Improvisation allows us to experiment with behaviour, actions and decisions that we cannot in reality. We can experiment with aspects of our own characters and personalities, our voices, our mannerisms, our loves and hates, our fears and bravery. The improvisation allows us to experiment with life because we are the authors of the improvised 'text'. The life we experiment with is our own and since we are the actors

we do it through ourselves. The most basic differentiation we can observe in drama in the classroom is in the level of experiment students are willing to engage in. They will not all get the same learning experience. Not everyone is going to get the same thing out of a drama. But this should not be seen as a problem since not everyone in an audience will get the same experience out of any drama. It is wrong to assume that if everyone in the class is not learning the same thing that they are not learning at all. It is simply differentiation on one level and an artistic phenomenon on another. It would also be true to state that 'blanket learning' is unlikely to happen in any classroom in any subject. Even the rote learning of times-tables results in different levels of success as class tests prove. In drama we can predict that all those participating will get some experience from the lesson, which is not true of many lessons where any engagement with the work can be avoided. Some students may even think that drama is boring. Drama is about learning to be pro-active. It runs counter to many lessons in the day where they are required to be reactive and as such are conditioned in their behaviour to expect to be 'given' an experience rather than 'create' one themselves. Drama can appear 'boring' to those students who do not act in a 'pro-active' way until they learn to do so by becoming aware that their contributions are valid and valued. The gifted and talented student-actor (and this may bear little relation to academic ability) on the other hand is willing to play a role most different from the one associated with them in real life, and sets themselves the more difficult task by engaging in work which

- demands greater creativity
- demands greater thinking skills
- challenges their ideas
- inevitably creates the frame of mind for lifelong learning, since the participant is fostering an inquisitive and questioning mind set.

Hornbrook (1989 p. 127) writes of drama,

“Employed as a kind of living laboratory where decisions about what moves us morally can be made in the dialectical context of rival commitments after rigorous experiment and analysis”;

This is the aim of the whole group drama process, where different perspectives and objective views clash to create a new sense of truth. All Our Futures (1999 p. 33) makes the following observation, which is surely equally true of drama:

“The creative process of the arts involves developing forms of expression which embody the artist’s perceptions. *This is not a matter of identifying an idea and then finding a form in which to express it. It is through shaping the individual work that the ideas and feelings are given form.* Often it is only through developing the dance, image or music that the perception itself is clarified.”

The aim in whole group improvisation is that all participants will in time become more and more willing to develop their work in these ways. Improvisation is experiment in which acting is a tool and the ‘drama’ is the laboratory. The results of the experiment are to be found out, they are not pre-decided or known, though of course there will be a level of theorising.

In a drama about the Ku Klux Klan with a Year 10 group we could easily theorise from knowledge learned in history that the Klan were racists with unhealthy and misguided ideas about black people; what we could not predict was that some participants would come to understand that a deep love of family and a feeling of bitterness and hurt pride could both operate alongside and cause these things. The whole group drama brought these characters to life and, whilst in this case confirming the basic theory, nevertheless brought home a true sense of cause and effect and an

understanding of the humanity behind evil, that these people were not psychopaths but very confused and manipulated, hurt and lost.

Creative imagination applied through thinking in and out of role led to deep social and psychological understandings, which I would argue no other form of drama could achieve because the participants had not only seen or acted, they had been these characters and could recognise that their actions were real and truthful and came from them. The significance of this level of empathy enters the arena of the spiritual because we are in the realm here of compassion. Another example is in the analysis of a drama about a serial killer when one of the students commented:

“I think he did it all for attention. He was an attention seeker. I feel sorry for him. He must have been very disturbed to do the things he did just to be noticed.”

Empathy taken to its logical conclusion in this participatory drama leads to compassion with and for the characters, a true acknowledgement of their humanity and all their good and evil. You cannot judge a character on simplistic terms because you are they and they are you at some level of being. This is something great actors know and talk about. It is what Stanislavski aimed for and what DIE in this form aspires to, and can achieve. It would be foolish, however, to pretend that we can always reach this point but the moment it occurs is almost universally recognised in all types of drama, and is to be aimed for. Even Brecht did not as some believe totally reject empathy, he wanted an extra step, where an actor and an audience would be able to withdraw from the role or play and look objectively at it in a spirit of criticism He wrote (Ed. Willett 1990 p.71),

“The spectator was no longer in any way allowed to submit to an experience uncritically (and without practical consequences) by means of *simple* empathy with the characters in a play.”

I am advocating the same. The whole group drama requires the participant to move on from role to reality in just such a fashion, to be critical and conscious of practical consequences. Let us not forget that Stanislavski and Brecht both aimed for a ‘scientific’ approach in their own ways. The ‘System’ was designed around the latest ideas in the new science of psychology and these are now mainstream science. Brecht’s ideas came from a Marxist view of history, which gave us the notion of social causality, giving rise to the pseudo-science of Sociology. The idea that drama is by definition an art and therefore non-scientific is held by those not cognisant with the growing acknowledgement of the psychological and sociological aspects of the subject, the new theories about empathy and experience. The creative act in the whole group drama model I propose is not abstract but based on a scientific model and principles. Pinker (1999 p.63) writes that,

“Intuitive psychology is still the most useful and complete science of behaviour there is.”

Drama as experiment in human behaviour operates on a scientific basis: -

- Planning and preparation
- Experimentation
- Analysis of results
- Conclusions

Like all types of drama whole group improvisation requires Key elements. With students I often refer to using these elements to create a ‘Drama wheel’. Without these

elements the wheel will lack strength and possibly be warped. It certainly will not move. Here I list the elements with examples taken from a Year 10 lesson: -

1. Context– Time/Place

Where is the Drama to be set?

What are the implications of place, time etc?

Are there any special conditions to do with time and place?

Meeting place? Pub, Church, Town Hall or other?

Is there scope for the Drama to focus and all the characters come together to share ideas/opinions/thoughts/feelings and share information?

E.g. the group chose to do a drama about - The Wild West. A frontier town. A family settlement bothered by outlaws.

2. Conflict - Dilemma/Problem – The focus of the drama. Plot – starting storyline.

What is the Drama about?

What is the problem? What dilemma do the characters face?

The problem/focus is the hub of the Drama wheel – everything else circles and revolves around them.

Is there a contradiction, which allows exploration?

How does this operate as a focus for the whole drama, what Stanislavski would call a 'Superobjective'?

Does this complicate the Problem?

Will it prevent the problem from being solved too easily or quickly?

Will this create tensions/suspense?

All Drama must operate from conflict. This conflict develops out of a problem. Drama cannot operate where there is no problem at the centre to focus upon. It is the hub of the Drama wheel. Each role should feed from and to the central focus/problem. Links across characters help to strengthen the structure of the Drama. It is the conflict around the problem, which forces the Drama onward, or moves the 'Drama-wheel'.

Problem – Outlaws bother a wild Western town,

Focus – A woman federal Marshall is sent to help town against outlaws.

Here there is a problem – the outlaws, and a conflict between outlaws, town and Marshall. The Drama, however, is still very loose and could go in a number of directions. To control the route along which the Drama wheel will travel we need to build in a “contradiction to explore”. This means adding complexity to the problem so that the characters in the Drama are forced to examine it in a far more detailed way. The direction in which the Drama will move is now far more structured and defined by the characters interactions with each other than by pure storyline/narrative.

Problem – Town and outlaws,

Focus – Town, outlaws and female Marshall,

Contradiction - Some townspeople doubt her ability and think she will make things worse. This is ironic as she is capable and their only hope!

The contradiction leads to a clash of opinion (dialectics), which in turn lead to action and consequences that feed the Drama and keep it focused on the problem/issue. Contradiction creates an irony in the story. Contradictions create new and original thoughts and feelings, tension and atmosphere within people and between people. Shakespeare's Hamlet is a good example of a character with a built in contradiction – “To be, or not to be

That is the question?"

E.g. they chose as a focus for the drama - A woman federal marshal is sent to help.

She is good at her job.

3. Issue/Themes – Sub-textual implications

What real-life area is the Drama going to explore?

E.g. themes of the drama were clearly – Sexual equality, trust, and fear – even if some of them had not realised this.

4. Roles – *The specific task related occupation i.e. teacher/doctor/soldier.*

Characters – *The individual personality behind the role which includes objectives of the characters, what do they want?*

Are there enough? Is there a variety and range of role?

Who are the characters – do they have relationships linked to the plot/focus?

Are all the characters linked to the problem/focus?

Are Characters linked to each other?

How are individuals responding to the conflict?

What is their attitude? How do they feel?

What contradictions exist in their roles enable thorough exploration of the dramatic content?

The characters are the 'tyre' on which the drama wheel travels. Their link to the central focus are the spokes that give the 'wheel' its strength'. Cross-links between characters further strengthen the wheel by providing greater opportunities for interaction and involvement of all the participants with in the action.

It is important to remember, and to teach the participants that contradictions sustain the action.

E.g.

- ❖ *The townspeople –they hate outlaws but doubt the woman’s ability and think she will make things worse.*
- ❖ *The sheriff faced with prejudice and forced to doubt herself.*
- ❖ *The outlaws who doubt her ability to stop them and mock her.*

5. Focus point

A dramatic action or event/situation to start or re-frame the drama –i.e. a meeting. Conventions by which I mean rules or constraints to help channel the drama are very useful i.e. if a meeting is called everyone knows they must attend.

6. The drama

This is how through role-play the thoughts and attitudes of the characters develop.

The interactions of characters/ideas and their contradictions create new and original thought and feelings.

The climax of the action is eventually reached. This is not pre-planned but will result naturally from the ideas and developments taking place. Some possible ‘endings’ may have been predicted or considered, and may even be expected, as in any experiment, but the actual conclusion cannot be ‘known’ until it happens.

Endings can be very unexpected, in fact, and be as challenging for the teacher as the group but analysis will always yield fruitful conclusions and implications which can be drawn, if the students have been operating in role truthfully.

In the improvisation despite the sheriff’s best attempts she grew increasingly frustrated by the failure of the townspeople to back her and eventually left.

7. Analysis/Evaluation/Implications

Transferring what has been discovered and learnt through improvisation into real life, and finding means to share these with others.

E.g. sometimes people will not trust a woman's ability to do a job even when she is of proven ability, just because she is a woman.

I shall examine this part of the process in greater detail later.

If all the above elements are present and all these questions answered then you should have a good drama. If any element is missing the Drama Wheel will not be strong enough. Even one character not fully developed into the focus can cause the Drama wheel to buckle or go off course – losing the focus or direction of the Drama and the issue being explored.

Attempting whole group drama without one or more of these, or an understanding of their importance leads to a less than focused confusion of 'self-expression', which may or may not result in cohesive work, dependant on the co-operation skills of those involved. It has been the case in my experience that those who have rejected 'whole group drama' have done so because of the level of failure they have experienced, often related to the lack of awareness of the need for these key elements. It is, as I have suggested possible to do whole group drama without such rigorous planning and this is often how we might begin the class work in this style of 'Spontaneous whole group work'.

Before the group can operate fully in a sustained whole group drama they must learn to operate as a whole group in an improvised context. Spontaneous improvised whole group drama is a good way to train them in the basic skills needed. One or more people begin this but usually to begin with Teacher should begin them. This basic teaching has role has many advantages which I will comment on later, but at this stage

it simple ensures the class can get started. (Later as they become proficient the group can work in pairs or threes to devise their own starting points.) The group is sat in a circle. The scene is a meeting of some sort.

The leader of the scene introduces the context, characters/roles/problem. The other participants listen and join in when they feel able; as the group improve their skills, the people setting up the scene can be more adventurous e.g. asking the group to sit as if in a pub, as if on a train, a news conference etc.

The skills required are: -

1. Listening – to teacher and each other
2. Adapting to ideas introduced – flexibility and understanding are challenged
3. Developing the initial idea - creativity
4. Not all talking at once - co-operation and teamwork.
5. Individual personal creativity – encouragement by the teacher of individual responses rather than the class just following the crowd.

Learning areas are: -

1. Imagination – the ability to take part in the fictive situation
1. Creativity – the ability to respond to the ideas
2. Communication skills – the ability to communicate verbally and physically
3. Teamwork – co-operation skills
4. Performance Techniques – they are ‘acting’ out and performing roles.
5. Understanding/knowledge and use of Drama Techniques – understanding the notion of improvisation, mime etc.
6. Issues – the themes of the improvisation should be questioned and analysed.



The group who can operate successfully in the above style can then develop onto more sustained work where the key elements are pre-planned. Characters/personalities and relationships can be built up carefully through discussion and hot seating. The setting can be broader – a village, a castle, a school or whatever. Inevitable in this style the drama will not be focused in whole group all the time but will constantly split into pairs, small groups, re-focused whole group and any number of variations 'at the need of the improvisation'. The teacher can dictate when these shifts in action and group size take place if the group is struggling but this is not the final goal, which is that they can do this themselves, intuitively if possible.

The role of teacher is an unusual one in the whole group drama process I am advocating in that they are to some extent manipulators, in the sense that if they did not 'act' the activity would not take place. As teacher they have the expertise and skill to enable and facilitate the students work. But one must be careful; the balance is between guiding and observing, challenging and allowing the freedom for the student to explore in their own way. It is all too easy for the class to become the 'puppets of my play,' which I plan and organise for them. The aim is not to 'get what I want' as teacher but to define what we want as a group and use my skill to facilitate it happening. Teacher in role as one of the group enables the teacher to help structure the work from within, work with weaker members of the group, create conflict, monitor and assess the work, challenge students according to their ability. Teacher in role can vary in power according to the needs of the group. A poorly disciplined group may require greater discipline from the top, and a strong group can cope with teacher in role as a low status character. Teaching in role also provides students with an example of HOW to play a role, sustain it, present it etc. (A detailed example of teaching in role in the whole group drama context is given on page 56.)

Whole group improvisation operates through what I believe to be the basic structure of all art: -

- Medium – the subject matter
- Content – the sub-text, meaning at the heart of the drama
- Form – the structure given to the drama
- Meaning – the implications drawn from the drama in analysis

Here I present an example from a lesson with a Year 11 group:

Stage One: Discussion/Negotiation After discussion: - Jews in Nazi
Germany

The group chooses what is to be the theme

Of the Drama work; a subject or

Situation to be explored.

Planning and Designing the Experiment

What is to be explored? What is the problem?

How is it to be set up so as to ensure success?

Context? Roles?

What methods are to be used?

The initial negotiation is itself a complex and often difficult process where ideas are selected and rejected on their perceived dramatic merit. Analysis and creative thinking are essential for all, since they join in the process through their right to vote on the ideas. Once decided the group must think carefully about their chosen idea and where necessary research or listen to historical detail in order to understand the context. This is often linked to discussion of the dramatic methods best employed to set up the drama, conventions that may be used and so on.

Stage Two: Role Choice

Each group member chooses the role within which they wish to work, and these are communicated and discussed.

Honest German politician
Nazi party workers
Jewish shopkeeper and family
German shopkeeper and family
Son, on leave from the army

Further creative thinking and planning, developing ideas, trying out and rejecting those that don't fit or are inappropriate, with the help of the teacher and peers in the group.

Stage Three: Improvisation

Individuals place themselves within the imaginative world of the drama, behaving and communicating as if they were the characters they are creating. At this stage the initial role choice into a credible character, showing the relative complexities of human emotions, attitudes, motivation participants should be developing their and actions.

A prominent Nazi visits relatives in their home and informs them that they are trying to gain support in this area.

The Experiment. Dramatic Action: Conflict

CONTRADICTION TO EXPLORE

TENSION/SUSPENSE.

The 'improvisation' as I have already shown involves quick thinking, flexible creative responses to a number of stimuli whilst maintaining performance detail and shaping the dramatic focus.

Stage Four: Problem-solving

This can take a variety of forms but is most effective when all the participants are in closest identification with their 'character' and confront the problem or part of it, facing up to it and attempting to find solutions.	German family discover their son is in love with Jewess. Jews being intimidated by Nazis are divided by the news. Germans are also split. Boy and girl run away.
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In role, empathizing with the characters they are playing, perceiving the problems in a new way they must creatively encounter, the group must attempt strategies to solve the dramatic problem. The dialectic between their own thinking and that of the characters they play is an important learning area to be used in discussion later. Often the students recognise this dialectic in others much more clearly than they do in themselves, and this is then used during the hot-seating process.

Stage Five: Resulting Consequences

Stage four leads into the next phase of improvisation, facing the consequences and implications of the attempted solutions, and attempting new strategies, or addressing new elements of the problems.	Nazis strike, killing Jewish boy. Jews shop destroyed by fire. German family split.
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The climax of the drama is as in any drama the explosion of feeling as the solution is tried successfully or otherwise. The creativity and thinking, co-operation and communication skills involved at this stage are obvious enough to any observer.

Stage Six: Discussion

Analysis of what happened and why/Analysis of Results

What does this drama tell us about how people behave and why?

Universalising – finding other examples from real life to back up our findings.

This may take place both during and after the particular Drama theme is being explored. Participants reflect upon and evaluate their work; attempt to appreciate the viewpoints of those in other roles, and draw conclusions based on the implications of the girl results of the attempted solutions to, and causes of, the problem; generalize and universalize from the drama to seek others' implications for their own lives.

Was it credible?

What did it feel like to be your character?

What alternatives did the boy and have?

How far are we all influenced by

Discussion of alternative solutions/consequences.

Evaluation of method.

Finally an objective look at their own work and their own creation of meaning within the drama. A different style of thinking is now required to reflect and consider, draw upon their new perspectives and consider the possible further consequences and implications of action.

A simple addition to the process to bring it in line with the new GCSE syllabus is: -

Stage Seven: Theatre

The key moments are listed as a scenario and worked through to ensure the resulting consequences (implications) are clear to the audience

Which techniques are needed?

What other theatre resources could be used?

What parts of the story could be Condensed, cut or put into descriptive dialogue?

Drama has now become real content-based theatre. Hatcher (1996 p. 18) colourfully describes the relationship:

“Drama is the steak; theatre is the sizzle.”

But now let us look more at the ‘sizzle’ and how teacher in role can facilitate it. As part of my research I tried to note down a full process as it happened, my own decisions as teacher in role and the complex way in which students can employ thinking and creativity to sustain whole group drama, which is recognisably ‘dramatic’ to the reader. The following example is taken from a whole group drama conducted with over 40 students during a youth drama summer school. The students’ ages ranged from 14-19 years.

The students were put into groups and were then given a piece of stimulus material to look at, with the objective of coming up with a drama idea which:

- Contained an element of conflict
- Had a clear context
- Had sufficient characters for a group of fifty where all characters had importance

The stimulus was a medieval style map of the Island of Lindisfarne. They were presented with a creative problem that needed both convergent and divergent thinking, in order to meet the needs of the group.

After work in groups, some showing of ideas (theatre) and discussion/negotiation the group chose to develop a drama based on the following idea presented by one of the groups:

A traveling fair quack doctor selling medicines regularly visits a community based around a monastery. The religious condemn the quack for heresy in selling these potions, but some do work and some villagers buy them.

After further discussion by the whole group this was developed further:

- The traveling fair is run by gypsies, not all of whom are Christians, in fact some are of the old druidic faiths – “They could be accused of witchcraft.”
- The quack doctor has a family
- He has sold medicines in the past, some have worked but one woman claims he is responsible for the death of her child.
- Rome has sent an emissary, a Jesuit from the Inquisition to check on the Celtic Church and investigate heresy

Creative thinking develops a range of roles and developments of the conflict, which remain true to the initial focus but develop connections for the whole group. They drew on their knowledge to create a new story, using any relative points e.g. someone knew about the Spanish Inquisition and was able to build this into the plot; someone was interested in druidic religions and was able to involve this element.

The group then chose to split into the three main groups and assign roles/develop characters. The three groups were the villagers, the religious people, and the fair people.

The groups were given the remit to ensure that they planned in a way, which sustained the focus on the quack doctor, and the following examples show how this was achieved:

The Villagers –

- 1. Those who had been cured previously by potions and had sympathy with him*
- 2. Those with 'bad memories' of potions, including the woman and her family*
- 3. Those not affected either way, essentially neutral.*

The Religious people-

- 1. The Jesuit and other dogmatic monks opposed on principal*
- 2. A herbalist monk who has worked with the quack in the past*
- 3. Those unconcerned.*

The Fair people-

- 1. His close family – including the wife who actually makes the potions.*
- 2. Druidic members of the fair – some who may not like the attention he is bringing upon them, others who support him.*

The druid group then decided to add in the detail that they want to conduct a service in a stone circle currently within monastery grounds.

Again a great deal of divergent and convergent thinking involved in the planning of ideas to ensure the participants active involvement in a dramatic plot, which does not lose the initial focus.

Teaching in role I chose the role of the quack doctor. Occasionally groups may see this as teacher 'hogging' the best roles, but an explanation of the role of the teacher as

facilitator and guide in the process is usually understood and accepted. I chose to add some contradictions to the story to ensure depth and challenge to the theme, which to me seemed to be, "Should he be arrested and tried? Would there be justice?"

The decisions I took were:

- He is a devout Christian. – Creates conflict and problems with many characters
- He sells 'pretend' holy relics with his mother, but goes to confession for absolution – involves the young girl playing my mother and other inexperienced students playing priests who take confession
- He loves his family and regards the druids as harmless eccentrics – builds a sense of loyalty and brotherhood within the fair people
- As a gypsy he has a strong sense of justice and individuality – he is able to argue coherently and will not be pushed around, enabling me to provoke action later if need be.
- He is a thief – there can be no easy answers, and people's perspectives can be challenged.
- He did give the woman's child poison, because it had leprosy and would otherwise have died an agonizing death. A final challenge to perspectives and possible prejudices.

We decided to begin the drama with a clear and active focus, the arrival of the fair in town. The improvisation began with interaction between the groups and individuals as the fair set-up their tents etc. on the green. Using dramatic irony, (my character not knowing what I know) to ensure dramatic focus and provoke action I set up the doctor's tent next to the area representing the woman's house immediately involving the family in discussion and argument, and interaction with the gypsies. With

dramatic irony again I attempted to sell holy relics to the Jesuit as he wandered around the fair again provoking action, this time amongst the monks. Soon after I sold medicine cheaply to a sick woman – deliberately as teacher trying to gain sympathy for the quack, who means well. Visiting the priests I was profusely religious to demonstrate my devout nature but also organised the theft of a chick from the farm, which provoked action again, involving another group of students and presenting another perspective to the group.

The students reacted in a variety of ways to these actions and the development of the plot by others leading to:

- The arrest of my mother for questioning, my son and then myself intervening, attempting to break them out of prison for fear they would be tortured. This led (deliberately provoking actions and thought) to the accidental knocking down of the inquisitor monk and my own subsequent arrest.
- The intervention of the sheriff to move the fair, which was refused due to our royal charter (The students again using real knowledge from their own experience with the local town fair!)
- I then made various accusations against the character that had been responsible for my mother's arrest, and a series of subsequent arrests followed as claim and counter claim unfolded.
- As a result the role of my wife as the potion maker was revealed and she was arrested for witchcraft.
- The mother character then gave information on the druids in order to save me

It is not hard to appreciate the complexity and depth of thought and action taking place. Remember fifty students were actively improvising responding and developing ideas throughout the session.

The drama eventually became split into three areas of unconnected action. In role I decided to re-focus the story by taking the inquisitor character hostage to free my wife. The focus was now on the whole town –what would they do?

This was a key moment in the drama as in role they reflected on the various options and what they understood to be happening and why.

The key moment however resulted in no direct action being taken and I was faced with choices, do I:

- Freeze the drama to discuss and choose an appropriate response for the town.
- Accept the town's indecision as what happened.
- Attempt to force the drama on in a new way.

I chose the third alternative because the level of role was so great that freezing it at this point would lose the depth of empathy so far achieved and alienate too early from the characters perspectives. I chose to involve the villagers and the sheriff by demanding arrest for killing the King's deer prior to any of the other crimes which I had since been accused of. This took me out of the Jesuits' hands and placed me squarely into the jurisdiction of the sheriff and the town since I argued treason was a more heinous crime than knocking over a monk or even witchcraft. The sheriff agreed and took me to the villagers with the new focus of 'what should happen now?' In was still maintaining the focus of justice and prejudice, still challenging the students to reconsider their ideas. The priests reacted by arresting my family again and beginning

further enquiries about the druids. After the sheriff questioned me, the priest demanded I be handed over in the name of the Pope.

This use of the higher authority was again students using their knowledge to develop ideas appropriately and creatively to solve the problem faced by their characters. Again I chose to take the priest hostage to re-focus the group but this time allowed myself to be persuaded to give myself up so that my family could be freed. As soon as I did so I was taken out to be burned at the stake, and again the drama was fully focused on the green with the key question – ‘Will anyone intervene?’

When an actor is completely absorbed by some profoundly moving objective, so that he throws his whole being passionately into its execution, he reaches a state we call inspiration.

At this point another of the monks stopped the Jesuit at knifepoint (mimed) and demanded my freedom. The inquisition gave in and allowed my family and I to leave by boat for the mainland.

At this point we froze the action. The dramatic improvisation had lasted for two hours and thirty minutes and fifty students had taken part, all actively involved, all thinking on a number of levels and responding both creatively and critically throughout.

We then employed alienation techniques to reflect upon the characters and their dilemmas. We first of all discussed and identified:

- Who were the five main characters?
- Who influenced events the most? (Eleven characters were chosen, not just teacher in role as you might at first have supposed.)

The group was then split up into groups representing history students knowledgeable about the events of hundreds of years ago on Lindisfarne and was allowed to question the five characters identified by the group, who were:

- The quack doctor
- His wife
- The Inquisitor
- The woman whose child had died
- The monk who freed them

They employed modern perspectives and objectivity; they thought about all the perspectives they had attained during the drama and were able to use these in questioning.

Finally any remaining questions were asked to any of the characters 'out of role' to ensure a thorough understanding of the events were achieved and conclusions were drawn.

As teacher I was catalyst and protagonist, but I was also an active and equal participant. Though operating very deliberately I was myself able to function 'in role', to act, to perform, to be creative and empathise with my character. It was a very moving and thought provoking drama for me as a participant. It is this strength of the process which convinces me of its worth even if all my research did not support my own reactions.

As I feel I have demonstrated the students thinking skills are further challenged when it comes to analysis of their work. Analysis in whole group drama is explaining why people did what they did, how the events came about and looking at the causes and consequences of action.

On why his character changed so much during a drama about Victorian London one Year 10 student said:

“Failure changed him. He failed to fulfill his dream. He'd saved and saved to come to London to make his fortune. He entered his dream raring to go and it collapsed. He found himself in a situation very desperate. No money. No friends – He lost hope. He changed his feelings and character to survive. Life was hard and he has no room to be soft-hearted.”

This demonstrates a full and detailed analysis of the character in an objective and thoughtful manner. Another student reflected on relationships in a drama about Saxon England; analyzing what had happened and drawing conclusions from it:

“Most of the relationships developed out of respect not caring – and they lost a lot of this in the end so relationships even in families changed.”

Analysis can also be shown through the sort of questions asked to others in hot-seating and other activities. The reflection on their own perspectives allows students to ask complex and challenging questions of others. This first question is taken from a drama that had been set in a medieval castle and demonstrates an understanding about the nature of power:

“The Bishop was respected – was this because of his own power, or himself, or because he represented the pope?”

The next example is from a drama about Jack the Ripper where the clash between police and community had been one of the key focus points:

“In the Ripper case the police and community took different stances – who should have been more flexible?”

The student has identified the importance of the focus and recognises that 'flexibility' was an issue that was not resolved. They also reflect that the two sides took 'different stances'.

Often the best analysis is done *in-role* as historians, psychologists/psychiatrists, police, and criminologists etc. as part of a whole group discussion or smaller groups being interviewed/questioned on TV. This method places the students in mantle of the expert, where they really do have most knowledge about the topic, the drama and characters they have created. As a panel of experts they are questioned by the others students about events in the drama and their opinions/perspectives on them. This can also be done in a whole group or individually but a panel of four or five, each group given a particular theme or topic tends to work best, giving everyone in the group a chance to shine.

A Year 11 GCSE Drama group were asked to analyse their drama about an underground workers' community by splitting into 'panels of experts' to reflect upon the events and answer questions put to them by the rest of the class in role as the government trying to judge whether or not to close down the underground communities. The drama had explored how people grow used to lack of freedom and can be easily used and abused.

The first group were given the importance of the theft of money from the shop in the drama as a subject for discussion. The second group were asked to discuss the assault on a character called Sally. A third group the involvement of the FBI, who finally came in to settle the revolution/rebellion.

Since I had only observed one lesson out of this drama I was able to take part in this process with an objective perspective. I took on the role of chairperson and catalyst,

playing devil's advocate and ensuring the framing of questioning could facilitate analytical responses.

The students were asked to think of 'new' expert roles. In Group one they chose to be a person from the shop:

- A psychologist.
- A police inspector.
- A second psychologist who had worked with the receivers of the stolen money.
- A CCTV security expert who had studied the video footage.

The ability range was large as was the level of confidence and articulation, with one special needs student as the CCTV expert.

Having been asked to encourage all students to take part, the first question was posed to the CCTV expert, as to what were the direct results of the theft, and he was able to respond:

“The security was fake. They were stretched to the limit. The shopkeepers weren't really bothered. The security was corrupt. There was corruption and bribery going on.”

One of the key questions was about attitudes of the panel to the theft: -

“I can't say it was right but I am sympathetic.”

This led to a discussion of when law breaking can ever be said to be morally correct. The discussion was contextualised with clear points of reference, and in-role. The students were able to abstract from the drama in an objective way.

The second group were dealing with an assault by a guard on the character Sally.

They chose the roles of: -

- Behavioural psychologist working with the guards.
- Police officer

- Lawyer of the accused guard
- A guard
- Representative of Sally.

Questions generally addresses the issue of whether the behaviour of Sally provoked the guards violence and whether or not this is an acceptable excuse for his reaction. Responses to this varied but essentially the agreement was, as stated by the 'police officer':

“No one deserves to be beaten up like that – no one deserves to be beaten up even if they have done wrong.”

However the guard's position was thought through, as his lawyer commented:

“Sally was under a lot of pressure and hit out at the guard first but the guard was obviously under a lot of pressure as well.”

The corruption of the guards was analysed:

Q - “If he was innocent why was he immediately suspended?”

A – (Guard's lawyer)“It was routine to suspend someone accused of so serious a crime.”

Sally's character was reflected upon:

Q – “Does the girl's character and background not prove she was to blame?”

A – (Police officer)“She was a prostitute but that doesn't mean she's not a good girl – she needed money.”

The training of the guards and the implied responsibility of those in command were then discussed.

“They were not well trained they were just plucked off the streets.”

And the contribution of this event to the later collapse of the society was reflected upon, the 'psychologist reflecting': -

“People lost respect in the guards. They took advantage of that and started attacking the guards. The family of Sally were very annoyed and people took advantage of that to rebel.”

Whilst his lawyer added: -

“When he was suspended they lost one of their best guards – he had kept everyone under control.”

I believe the quality of analysis in the choice of question and answer demonstrates clearly the ‘deductive’ thinking and reflection skills developed, and how the content of the drama clearly enables the student to make relevant points of connection with the real world. I often call this exercise the “Historians” role play since I believe it has clear similarities to the way in which historians reflect upon previous events without necessarily being able to draw final conclusive conclusions and implications, the lessons to be drawn from the events; they are those points from the analysis of the drama, which will apply to other situations in real life. Again thinking skills are challenged, as students must apply their learning to real life situations and find the relevance of the drama content to their own lives. This is encouraging students to use ‘inductive’ thinking skills and in a framework where their hypotheses are being put to the test by the different ideas and perceptions of the other participants in the process.

They are drawing implications from their own work which: -

1. Explain what has been learned in the drama in a way that someone who did not see the drama can understand.
2. Are universal truths – true both in the drama and in numerous real life situations.

3. Are like morals, proverbs – good quotations. The implications become the point or basis of the content of what the students would be trying to communicate to an audience when/if they created a piece of theatre.

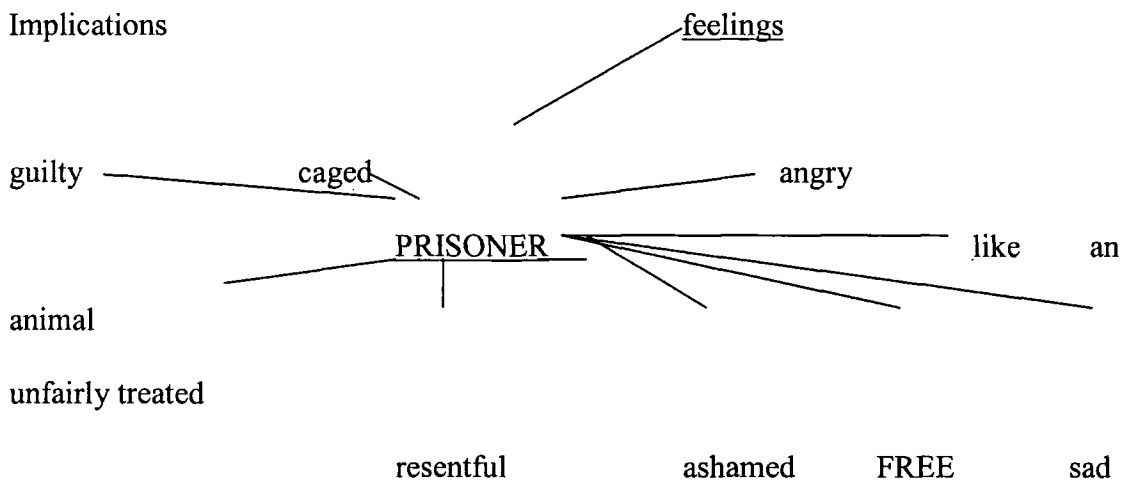
To draw the implications the student must: -

1. Decide what the main issues are in the drama.
2. Identify what their characters feelings were about this/these?
3. Transfer this information out of the drama and into REALITY.

An example from a drama about life in a prison done by a year eleven class: -

Issue: What it means to be a prisoner.

Implications



Implications: -

Being a prisoner can make you feel

- a) Caged
 - b) Guilty
 - c) Unfairly treated
 - d) Resentful
 - e) Ashamed
- Etc.

Students can make quite sophisticated statements based on their analysis of the drama work: -

- Treating someone like an animal in a cage makes them behave like an animal.
- Prison can make people behave worse by making them angry/resentful and bitter.

To clearly demonstrate this process in action I present research done with a Year 11 GCSE class. The group chose to do a whole group drama set in a village called 'Middlehaven', where NATO experimental scientists are testing new brainwashing microchip technology. They have chosen as guinea pigs criminals – hardened murderers and psychopaths, and spies trained to withstand 'psychological' treatment. These people have been placed in family units with totally fictitious background histories and life stories. They live in a fantasy world created by the guards. Each family unit comprises of a guard, a spy and a criminal. To make the test as hard as possible close friends, family relatives and archenemies have been put into unusual relationships e.g. Husband and wife have become father and daughter; sisters have become neighbours; archenemies have become loving sisters and so on.

A whistle that can place them in a trance like state, and the phrase "those who have walked in the darkness etc" controls the villagers.

Propaganda in the form of the town council, radio station and newspaper bombard the villagers with positive 'light'. The local pub serves all day, a non-alcoholic range of drinks the villagers believe are real. The Village Fete is a unifying activity to aid settling in.

The Mayor is a guard leading the activities whilst other guards function in key roles, police, radio, newspaper, fete events organiser and village doctor.

Flashbacks and a weaning off the effects of the chip were built into the idea, as was the presence of two spies sent to uncover the truth about the experiment. Added to this is the guilt of some of the guards, and a growing closeness by one towards his “family” and particularly his now pregnant wife.

The propaganda tools eventually become the tools of revolution as the radio station broadcast the truth, leaflets described the true feelings of a guard and the brain washing technology was turned on the Mayor.

However, turning a mixture of spies from differing backgrounds and criminals with dangerous backgrounds into a united force is not easy and the villagers tangle and argue, accusing each other of ‘power’ grabbing and manipulating. Some villagers argue they are better off here in loving happy relationships than out in a world that may not even remember them.

At the end the questions remain unanswered. Why were they brought here? What was the nature of the test? Did they volunteer as the controller suggests or is that another lie? Did N.A.T.O. intend bringing world leaders here? Were they expendable guinea pigs to be exterminated at the end of the experiment? Was the ending itself simply part of the test?

The group explored a range of responses both in role and out.

They all agreed, however, that the key themes had been:

Trust

Deceit

Loyalty

Happiness

Brainwashing

And that the village had many similarities with normal life! The group discussed implications they felt had to be drawn from the work and I here present a sample as evidence of the level of thinking employed as a result of the process of whole group drama:

- ❖ *When you trust someone you're gambling on it and you don't know whether it'll come off but we all need someone to trust.*
- ❖ *You have to give people a chance to see if they'll stay loyal to you as a friend.*
- ❖ *Who's to say what's in the best interest for someone else? No one knows what's best for you till it's happened – it could be wrong or right!*
- ❖ *Some people live a lie because they can't handle the truth. The truth hurts more than a lie does.*
- ❖ *You can't control the emotions to make people happy but you can control the thoughts that make you have objections to it so that you become happy.*
- ❖ *Forgetting mistakes you've made is to lose a major part of your life – you need to learn from your experiences.*
- ❖ *But people must be willing to forget parts of their past in order to begin their future.*
- ❖ *People say forgive and forget. If you just forget you're not happy with it you must forgive in order to truly put it out of your mind. If you don't forget you can never be truly happy.*
- ❖ *You are your own person. Your strength determines what happens to you. You decide what influences you. It's your strength as a person that dictates how easily you're roped in!*
- ❖ *We're all pre-programmed as children by being put in different situations with different memories to look back on.*

- ❖ *We listen to our parents as we grow up – we're brainwashed by them into believing what they tell us.*
- ❖ *It's nature and nurture. Nature allows us to grow, nurture is the influence of the environment around us. No one is actually an individual – we're made what we are – through genes and influence!*

In the whole group drama model the outcome/product cannot be predicted. As Evans/Deehan(1988 p. 198) suggest is essential in a creative task, students are

“confronted with a task which allows them freedom to arrive at a non-specific, non-predicted conclusion.”

But though they are not limited to ‘doing what they think the teacher wants’, they are given clear structure and shape for that creativity. Evans /Deeher (ibid.) quote Dr. Gehlbach:

“The problem in the design of instruction in creative processes has been one of finding a middle ground between the vagueness of total openness in task design, which renders creative activity by learners virtually “unteachable”, and detailed end-product specification, which closes off the possibility of creative function by reducing the opportunities for novel thought.”

I believe the whole group drama structure presents just such a middle ground and encourages imaginative and creative development within a clear context.

CHAPTER SEVEN: Crediting the Creativity and thinking skills in the whole group drama model

This chapter looks at the issues of assessing students and their work in the whole group model and comparing this, where appropriate with other models. I have developed a methodology for assessment purposes in school this but it is not the focus of the chapter to look at specific means, but rather the rationale underpinning that methodology.

The Drama teacher using improvisation techniques is constantly being challenged with 'why?' In the current economic and educational climate many colleagues have jumped onto what I describe as a 'materialistic' approach/philosophy' or rationale, by which I mean one that values only that which is objectively measurable, to justify themselves, and this has actually proven relatively easy to do; up to a point. For drama does develop personal and social skills. It cannot fail to do so if it is being done properly. It is a social art form, which requires individual commitment and participation. Drama does deal with issues, and inevitably will develop understanding of these concepts so can be used to tackle social problems like bullying and it is harder to justify in the long term I believe, but not impossible, that Drama should be taught because it is part of our culture as an art-form and that students have a right to know about it.

The materialist however, may not be happy with any of this because the learning achieved, they believe, cannot be 'objectively' measured, even though it can clearly be demonstrated as the transcripts show. We are not dealing with recordable facts. The learning though palpably real to the observer just cannot be satisfactorily quantified in simplistic terms. Our very best attempts to do so will always be met with derision by those who only believe in what can be seen concretely, and the very

nature of drama as I have discussed, goes against this since drama deals in abstract concepts like love, hate, fear and power.

Art, painting and drawing are bad enough to the concrete materialist but at least one can 'concretely' like or dislike a picture or an object. We have a notion of representation and we can return to the creation time and time again to judge its qualities. Music can be measured by how well someone plays their instrument, how correctly they design their harmony etc. Problems only start when Art and Music try to step outside boundaries like these. Drama seems to live beyond them and even classic theatre, like Shakespeare or Moliere is down to interpretation by the individual director or actor. Is it then not all too vague, nebulous and abstract for to be called educational? Hoetker writes (1975: 82)

“Nontrivial changes in perceptions, tastes and life styles that may be attributable to artistic experiences are qualitatively different from easily measurable (and often trivial) changes in knowledge, attitudes and skills... for most people the effects of an artistic experience...remain, as it were, a form of potential energy only, and have their effects far in the future, as traces of them are impinged upon and interact with other life experiences. The residue of artistic experience may have no observable effect upon a person's life until there have been enough other experiences for a sort of critical mass to be reached.”

Drama was recognised by virtually all who completed questionnaires or were interviewed, as an excellent way to develop self-confidence, yet this is rarely used to explain the validity of the drama experience in the classroom. As one parent put it to me,

“His inter-personal skills have gone through the roof since he started this”.

But is it simply 'performing' in drama, which brings this development? Clearly not. Many will balk at getting on stage and feel insecure "performing" to others. A large percentage reported that they preferred whole group drama because they feel less exposed. It is those who have 'confidence' that can take this next giant leap. And even here, some get by on 'performance confidence' in their level of skill to 'act out', but become self-conscious in everyday life.

So I mean a state of confidence in their self as a person with no self-consciousness. Self-consciousness is actually a state of consciousness that they are uncomfortable with their perception of themselves; they have low self-esteem, lack confidence to present a self that other will feel worthy. Kempe (1998 p.35) writes,

"Why professional actors appear to be confident on stage is precisely because they are competent at acting in a particular character",

Or to quote Fenella Fielding (Hodgson, T. p 385)

'in a play at least you know who you are supposed to be'

What students really learn in drama is the self-confidence to speak and be heard both by teachers and peers. They develop a lack of self-consciousness that comes from just 'doing' rather than thinking about doing, and from being 'an other' rather than themselves something robbed from the actor who has to analyse their every movement. The freedom of improvisation allows the actor/student to 'just do' without trying too hard, freeing up their imagination. In response to the question what does whole group drama give you the following answers appeared, which back up my argument:

- ❖ "You learn to have confidence in yourself and as time goes on you lose all shyness and can be a completely different character and work with people who you may not have ever met before."

- ❖ “Drama helps develop social skills as well as teamwork and coming up with solutions to problems.”
- ❖ “We learn how to handle different situations, how to act around new and different people.”
- ❖ “We learn the value of ourselves as individuals and that the only thing that restrains us is our self-restraint.”
- ❖ “It teaches us not to be ashamed of who we are and what we do.”
- ❖ “We learn to be confident in front of other people. To listen to others and see how other people act in the situations they are given.”

Claxton (1999 p.149) writes,

“It is in the field of creativity itself that the most dramatic benefits of not trying have been observed. Anecdotal evidence is not hard to come by.”

He observes (1999 p. 150) that

“Even quite mild degrees of stress may be sufficient to stifle creativity and inhibit learning.”

The potential effects of the stress of ‘performance drama’ on some student’s creativity is thus obvious, so what does drama offer to overcome these problems? Firstly the opportunity to lose self-consciousness by not being self at all but imagining they are someone else. Playing a role other than self allows the individual opportunity to escape that “self” which is experiencing those image problems. Of course some find this leap difficult, chiefly because the conscious minds places blocks to this suspension of disbelief. As Claxton notes (1999 p.169)

“But switching off the analytical mind may be easier said than done.”

I often find myself saying, "Don't think about it, do it". Only by closing down the conscious will and allowing the imagination to take over can the benefit of role-play being to work.

Evans and Deehan (1988 p. 190) regard self-image as a block to creativity and there are many cases of adolescent boys in this category, who are so busy "performing/presenting" a role already that suspending this to adopt a new role is doubly difficult, since it requires a three-fold process.

- i) Drop the role of X, which has been adopted to enhance self-esteem.
- ii) Accept own self without role.
- iii) Adopt new role of y.

The role of X has been structured within a social context of peer pressures and expectations, and is often associated with rebellious anti-school behaviour which add further to the level of difficulty in adopting a new role:

- i) Drop role of X, the rebel.
- ii) Accept teacher/drama environment.
- iii) Accept self within this context.
- iv) Adopt new role Y.

However, many drama teachers I'm sure will agree that such students encouraged and provided with safe environments to experiment will make the imaginative leap. A lot is to do with providing contexts and roles in which initially at least, they feel not only safe but also think the move from X to Y is relatively small, and possible Y is an extension of X or only a variation. In the video *Three Looms Waiting* (BBC 1969), Dorothy Heathcote works with young offenders in a detention centre who create roles as prisoners of war in a prison camp. The shift from X to Y is safe and comfortable, and they can then be engaged in dramatic exploration of themes of betrayal and

failure. Often school classes will be interested in dramas about school classes who are notorious or extremely badly behaved, because this allows playing out their fantasies.

Year 9 boys are often regarded as particularly difficult to engage in dramatic activity for the very reasons cited above and some will steadfastly refuse to cooperate with any activity, since their role is so extreme that it cannot be compromised. Particularly difficult are 'clowns' who have to ridicule and undermine and who will adopt role poses that allow them to do this. I will use the example of two brothers, each of whom had 'extreme behaviour' and each in clown 'role.'

The first, Robert, steadfastly clung to his role as disruptive class clown until I finally caught his imagination, with the help of Hollywood, when we did some drama about a group of terrorists at the F.A. Cup (based roughly on the Munich Olympics tragedy). Robert saw a link to Reservoir Dogs and himself as a gang leader. At last he was engaged and able to commit himself to the role of 'Mr. Pink'. He accepted the context and dramatic convictions. In the work we did next based on 1984, he was able to identify a role for himself as an anti-government rebel. Whilst there was little imaginative development, in terms of personal confidence he had shifted from 'self' into imaginative role-play, lost some self-consciousness and extended his self-image.

As Claxton (1999 p. 141) notes:

“Through acting out stories we are able to take on other roles and personalities, too loosen the bonds of too tight a self-image and expand the range of our 'possible selves'”.

Jamie, his younger brother began from an even more extreme 'clown' image. Refusing teacher suggestions he constantly chose inappropriate roles, which could be 'played at' in a manner that de-valued the activity and brought attention to him as

'clown'. He would adopt such roles in a sophisticated manner at times, but without ever 'getting into role', and was articulate in justifying his contributions. During the 1984 drama, Jamie briefly (one lesson) sustained the role of Government Spy betraying the group by working for the Controller (Teacher in role) in a government run 'thought-control prison/hospital'. For one lesson Jamie allowed himself to play out the role and 'switch off' his clown persona. Why? Because Y, the role he adopted, was close to his real-life performance (x) as class disrupter; he was acting out in another context his desire to betray the trust of and subvert the work of others. Unfortunately, once Jamie realised that the class saw this as 'cooperating' with the teacher and the goals of the lesson, he reverted to deliberate 'clowning' sabotage.

Whilst this may appear a total failure, it is interesting to note that in Year 10 Jamie did come begging and pleading to be accepted into GCSE Drama. He had recognised that there is a "mystery" here, which is not easily forgotten. Within that one hour, he had experienced a role other than X or the real Jamie and the freedom this had given him was new and different.

Once a student has accepted that "getting into role" is possible and that the role can be challenged and placed in different situation, without any risk to 'them', they can be encouraged to adopt an incredibly wide range of roles and attitudes. Through empathy with these characters, they are exploring "aspects of themselves".

A student once said,

"Drama has allowed me to explore different aspects of who I am"

She could exemplify easily from the wide ranging roles she had played such as: -

- Ku Klux Klan member
- Lady Macbeth
- Hitler's (imaginary) daughter

- Nun
- Princess dying of the plague in 15th Century Spain

Each one was clearly 'Claire' but also clearly not 'Claire'. By accepting Stanislavski's goal of adopting character 'as if it were her and she were it', and through the imaginative process of believing as if the dramas were real, she had experienced these roles.

Maxwell Maltz in 'Psycho Cybernetics' writes of the very real value of the imaginative experience in developing personality and self-image. To paraphrase the book, the human mind cannot detect the difference between real and imagined experience.

Claire on a level far beyond Jamie or Robert had experienced a series of roles which were 'variations' on a theme of herself and as such can come back to the real Claire, less self-conscious or lacking in the confidence to be Claire, since she is aware of the range of her own personality and has actively experimented and experienced that personality in a range of contexts.

Drama develops confidence because of the nature of drama. Its mystery is that of Psycho-Cybernetics (Maltz 1960), the imaginative experience registering as a real, true experience, which the participant has literally "lived through".

All too often this aspect of the drama experience is minimalised, trivialised and brushed aside in fear of appearing mystical or "un-examinable" but in terms of the real value of drama as perceived by parents it is often predominant and it is one which employers single out as drama's great contribution to a pupil's education!

But, and this is the problem, Drama can only be perceived as an external product. We cannot see inside the mind of the participant or determine their intentions in any way other than through our reactions to their 'performance'. We can only assess their

performance. How do we do this, by the clarity with which it communicates appropriate meaning or by the slickness of its execution?

It is a common bone of contention that critics may at times 'read into' a work, ideas that the author has not intended or, fail to see those that they had. But the work can only be judged on what it actually is, not what it was intended to be. It is debatable whether or not a dramatic performance that creates an unintended meaning is a failure of the creators. Surely the meaning that is communicated is the only thing that can honestly be judged. Conversely when an audience or critic finds depth in a piece, which belies the shallowness of purpose or lack of skill of its maker, we must nevertheless accept the work, as it is perceived. If it is an accident they will never again create work of that quality. If it is intuitive artistry then the talent 'will out'.

Bertolt Brecht was one example of the phenomenon. He complained bitterly that audiences and critics alike were sympathetic to Mother Courage (Esslin 1984 p. 212) when she was to be despised. Consciously he wanted a particular response to his character but intuitively he had created a character of depth and human frailty that the audience could not fail to recognise and respond to. We judge 'Mother Courage and her children' as a play not on Brecht's intentions but on the quality that we as audience perceive within it.

In film, 'King Kong' made in 1933 was the production of many separate creative talents working almost in isolation of each other. Their intention was simply to create a thrilling entertainment. Instead they produced a film of great beauty and power that had and still has layers of implications for how man treats the beauty of the natural world, love violence and power.

My point is that to assess Drama we must inevitably be concerned with content, subject matter and meaning. For what does the metaphor of the drama stand? What

does the drama imply for our lives? I am at a loss to understand the view of drama practitioners like Stephen Daldry (Hornbrook 1998 p.ix) who regard presentation higher than that which is presented:

“As it is, too much drama work with young people privileges content over form and sentiment over passion.”

I cannot think that Shakespeare, Chekhov or Ibsen would agree. Hatcher (1996 p. 11) writing about the art of the dramatist, observes that,

“What audiences crave in drama is an understanding of people and ideas through the forward-moving connection of incidents.....Drama examines human beings in extremes. Under pressure. In trouble. Within conflict.”

Lynda La Plante (Frensham 1996 p. 34) clearly disagrees with Daldry’s position,

“What’s the point of writing a beautifully structured script, with all the right technical points in it, if the writer has nothing to say?”

And whole group drama does have form of its own as the structured examples earlier have shown. Form is central to it and it could not be done without it. What we do not use are the theatrical forms, which have no relevance to the work being done. As May (1975 p. 119) wrote,

“It is not form itself that is being accused, but special kinds of form – generally the conformist, dead kinds which actually do lack an inner, organic vitality. We should remember, moreover that all spontaneity carries with it its own form.”

Of course, the drama may operate for an audience on a completely intuitive level. We may not consciously grasp all the ideas being presented to us. Stanislavski 's notion was that what was being 'transmitted' from the stage would through its sheer power of truthfulness be enough. This concept that the experience alone is sufficient however,

is only true if in the fullness of time we subconsciously analyse and draw upon that experience. In reality we leave theatres, cinemas and drama rooms after such purely intuitive experiences and ask each other, what was all that about? What do you think it meant? Did you feel sorry for X? And so on. Analysis and evaluation of a drama is inevitable. Gooch (1998 p. 16) writes that

“audiences are much quicker to seek out and seize on the ‘point’ of a play than is generally acknowledged.”

And Mudford (2000 p. xv) believes that,

“The theatre, even as it entertains, means always a search for meaning, a quest.”

Meaning is always related to truthfulness. We always evaluate the realism of events, their internal logic. Without a sense of cause and effect at character or story level we feel we are being cheated or lied to. We will dismiss the drama as 'low quality'. The poorest of critics can distinguish between 'exciting' on the one hand, and 'powerful' on the other. Good quality drama has power, achieved through a sense of truthfulness and realism. We are, of course, talking about the 'artistic' reality and truth, which has been essential to storytelling from ancient times. Behaviour 'rings true' no matter how fantastic or fanciful the context or plot.

The growth of social realist kitchen-sink drama and naturalism has tended to obscure the origins of drama and confuse audiences and some critics that realism is about factual accuracy and true-life situations. Sadly this has had the effect both of causing some people to lose sight of the 'metaphor', and secondly for some to assume that true to life realism is by necessity truthful. We are just as likely to get a lack of logical progression in characters and situations in a drama on a housing estate in Chester as we are in one about a winged chariot on Mount Olympus. What we fail to get in the

former is any emotional distance from the actual content. The housing estate is less likely to be a metaphor and more likely to be immediate.

Just as we have expectations about truthful, logical characters and situations in a quality drama, we also assume that the implications of the events will be addressed. So many action thrillers lose their credibility because the villain's armies are mindless robots that follow their often charmless, evil and unpleasant leader way beyond the point where there is any gain. (Even the charismatic Hitler was faced with armies that refused to obey once the war was obviously lost.) Shakespeare does not fall into the trap (e.g. Macbeth's men soon desert him), but so often Hollywood does.

Implications that are not addressed are like ripples on the pond, sending out waves of doubt about the truthfulness of the piece as a whole. In *The Rock*, with Sean Connery and Nicholas Cage, we have an almost perfect drama formula. The characters are flawed and contradictory, the issues and themes heralded and prominent. One can excuse the 'convention' that stolen missiles are left unguarded even though it is very doubtful, but when one of the highly toxic nerve gas missiles is diverted into the ocean rather than onto San Francisco, much to the jubilation of the heroes, the all too real implications for the future are not even mentioned! The story is brought down to comic book level and the potential of the film lost.

Quality drama then is about truthful, logical characters and cause and effect situations, with the implications of action addressed.

What about the judging of an individual's achievement? First we must be clear on the learning that has taken, or is meant to have taken place. The *Secondary Drama Teacher's Handbook* (2001 Ed. Kempe p.53) offers us the following excellent advice:

“Learning in the drama curriculum is spiral in nature, which means that the different elements of learning in drama are inter-related. Much of the work

will build on the students' aesthetic awareness, their understanding of dramatic form, their use of language and their ability to interpret ideas within the drama."

Professor John MacBeath, Director of the Quality in Education Centre, University of Strathclyde (NACCCE 1999 p.108) has this point to make about the changing nature of assessing the arts:

"Because behaviourist objectives had to be observable, attainment had become the only yardstick, thereby excluding concepts like creativity and understanding."

We must be careful not to lose sight of the fact that much learning through process will be 'implicit' learning. As Claxton (1997 p. 22) rightly points out,

"Recent research by psychologists in both Britain and America has re-affirmed the importance of ... implicit learning, and shown how it develops over time.....The ability to do the job develops relatively quickly, and in some cases quite abruptly; but the ability to articulate that knowledge emerges, if at all, much more slowly."

That is to say, that learning has taken place even though the student cannot explain the process. So the assessment must reflect this. We cannot look for one simple answer or response but must judge the individual on a number of levels. I would argue that we¹ may judge the individual performer within any drama or style of drama on their -

- Commitment and conviction – the depth and sustained nature of their work.
- The quality of their performance skills 'appropriate to the medium' (a theatrical style on film tends to be out of place, just as cinematic acting is too

small in theatre, and street theatre requires different skills to acting in a TV soap)

- Ability to demonstrate, bring alive or become the character and communicate their inner logic, emotional reality, motivations and aims.

These areas will overlap and are interdependent but each can be seen in isolation to some extent. An actor may be very committed to their role and act with utter conviction whilst lacking the skills to communicate effectively what the character is thinking or feeling; conversely they may know how to communicate but fail to understand the character, and so on. When all three operate in unison we know we have a performance of real quality.

I am only addressing acting here and if I were to focus on other theatre or film skills in the technical and design areas we could identify equivalent aspects, but I do not feel that these are relevant at this time, as the focus of my research is Drama in the improvisational model, and whilst some of these skills may be relevant the predominant skill will be acting.

Acting was once a dirty word in Drama in Education, and with some justification. Stanislavski (ed. Hapgood 1963 p. 58) was also wary that acting meant 'showing' and warned actors'

'Love the art in yourself, not yourself in the art'.

'Showing off', 'presenting' and other 'false' and stereotypical performance work are anathema to the sort of drama Bolton, Heathcote et al were aiming for, and unless they are being used for deliberate effect they are of limited appeal. 'Role-play' became the vogue description in the 70's and 80's but the model I propose returns us to the idea of acting and performance. Intuitive acting is the aim of the System and is what most of these DIE practitioners have sought, but their students would enter roles

without appearing to be really being aware of it. The illusion of reality could be created without the theatrical tools being visible. This 'teaching through' Drama has continued in many cross-curricula areas with versions of role-play and mantle of the expert but it does reduce drama to a 'medium', much as the computer is a medium. We all know that ITC skills and literacy are highly valued. We also know that they must not only be used, they must be understood. So too, with Drama.

In the drama of illusion students often produced excellent work but the teachers role of facilitator or 'manipulator' of that work was effectively that of a magician casting the right educational spells to put students through an experience. And much depended on the quality of that teacher as 'magician'. Some of us found that we did not have the charismatic presence of Dorothy Heathcote! Students may learn, may succeed within this style of work but they will never achieve mastery of subject. Without understanding how the drama operates, they can never truly be said to have ownership of their work, never be artist within the medium, for that role is the privilege of the teacher. And despite the rose-tinted spectacles view of the glorious past of DIE, the success rate in truth was low and many teachers trained in this style were quick to abandon the 'process' in favour of the new 'exercises' or so-called 'conventions'. With these formats and lesson plans based on 'hot-seating', 'conscience alley', 'role on the wall' and the like, there was little need to speak of acting or performance, but a body of knowledge could be learned and students could be put through 'experiences'. The changes in the educational climate have meant harder questions of 'what are they learning and can we do without it?' leaving many drama specialists anxious to prove the validity of their subject on the increasingly narrow timetable. Clear lesson plans based on issues or skill fill a void. The aim of some drama teachers in the use of these 'conventions' is not to slow down the drama

to focus on learning areas but to slow down classes to focus their learning onto the teacher's pre-determined, pre-conceived idea of what learning there should be. We are in a world of 'control' and have moved away from the world of 'facilitate'. Students taught through these conventions are less able to move into other types of drama, struggle with text and theatre. They are trained to be on a conveyor belt of progressive, pre-programmed processes. They quickly learn, like Pavlov's dogs to give the responses they know the teacher requires. This is not learning it is conditioning. With the new 'systems' and methods easily broken down into lesson plans and schemes of work, came a new breed of drama teacher. David Hornbrook is right to ask the question, how seriously has drama be undervalued by the notion that non-specialists can teach it from a book? As he rightly says (1998 p.14)

“One unfortunate consequence of this self-denying ordinance is the widespread assumption that drama is the kind of lesson anyone can teach.”

The alternative approach, which many drama teachers felt was 'truer' was to adopt the essence of drama more overtly and teach theatre skills and theatre texts, including some of the process into 'devising'. To some of the old guard of DIE it seemed the old enemy theatre was at last winning the battle. The 'other' and least popular approach has been to accept that in 'making up a play' in the whole group drama process model we are acting, performing, indeed directing, designing and creating a 'living' text. By sharing the process with the students and accepting the theatricality of their experience the students become partners in their own learning and teacher provides them with the tools and understanding to operate as artists within that medium. By sharing the process with the students we give them ownership and empower them. Many drama teachers have rejected the methodology of whole group drama because they have lacked the skills and knowledge to use it themselves, and so

they have turned to other approaches, which they consider easier, even though in some cases they know that the students cannot learn/experience to the same level as through the whole group process. I hope it is not unfair to comment that it is often easier for all of us to say that the students cannot do it, rather than that we cannot.

Many years ago 2D magazine contained an article called 'Why Drama hasn't happened' by Tony Delzenné (1982. p.13), then Drama Adviser for the Cleveland Advisory Service. So, where is Drama now? I began as a Drama teacher who taught some English, and it is with no intended disrespect I would argue from my experience running Drama Association meetings in the Tees Valley that 75/80% of drama teaching is done by English teachers. Many are self-professed 'non-experts'. Few Drama teachers I meet could tell you who Dorothy Heathcote or Gavin Bolton are, or even more worrying the impact of Stanislavski or Brecht on Twentieth Century theatre practice. So what exactly are they actually teaching? Increasingly, as I've said, the market for ready-made, boil in the bag, easy to serve Drama has been met by a stream of books and courses designed for non-experts, but they are often used with little regard for the validity of the learning or its quality. As the demand for accountability and target setting, goal orientated, outcome led education has increased, drama has taken the simplest expedient – 'let's put on a show'. How better to demonstrate quality than through conventions and skill based activities. Suddenly a glossary of techniques divorced from either 'living-through engagement' (Stanislavski's creative acting in the classroom) or genuine theatricality (Brechtian dialectics and complex seeing) has become the norm, because we can quickly judge the slickness of response, and "Johnny" can soon learn to say things he's sure teacher will approve of.

At GCSE I have heard students say ‘Let’s use conscience alley – we’ll get marks for that’ or at ‘A’ Level, “we can put some chanting in there, the moderator always likes that”. We have to give our students a range of devices they can use, but use to service genuine quality drama, which has for thousands of years has meant content conveyed through form, not empty form conveying surface meanings². We can always recognise quality when we see it, be it absurd, surreal, naturalistic, Brechtian or whatever because it has a genuine need to convey something – that is meaning.

A role-play on bullying I observed, accompanied by Forum Theatre techniques on how to overcome it, and earnest discussion of why it is wrong, has a place, but it is not always ‘Drama’ if it is not engaging pupils in ‘feeling in the unreal’ through engagement with fictional characters. Nor will it actually change behaviour if it hasn’t actually challenged or explored the contradictions within the situation. Importantly if it hasn’t required us to empathise with the bully as well as the bullied or to question how far the bullied’s behaviour has provoked it, or forced us to recognise that bullying can actually be enjoyable, or that it is widespread across society and relationships, then what has it done? It has told us what we already know, that bullying is bad. But how then do we cover all these other points? The age-old Dramatic method has been through metaphor and Brechtian distancing and pastness, through parable and narrative.

Shakespeare’s Macbeth is a telling and vivid exploration of ambition; Richard III of the love of power; Othello of jealousy and so on. Much Drama I have seen in classrooms has lost touch with this most basic aspect of Drama, that very aspect which makes Drama big business on film and TV, the use of metaphor to explore our lives in an exciting, enjoyable and often thrilling way through vicarious experience.

As the feedback shows, enjoyment is key to the drama experience and we should resist feeling guilty about this.

May (1975 p. 45) explains how the artistic process of engagement works:

“What the artist or creative scientist feels is not anxiety or fear; it is *joy*. I use the word in contrast to happiness or pleasure. The artist, at the moment of creating, does not experience gratification or satisfaction (though this may be the case later, after he or she has a highball or a pipe in the evening.) Rather it is *joy*, joy defined as the emotion that goes with heightened consciousness, the mood that accompanies the experience of actualising one’s own potentialities.”

It is this joy in the work that some observe and think of as drama students simply ‘playing’, ‘having a good time’ or even ‘messaging about’. Good education should be enjoyable and so should good drama. In fact good drama is good education. As Pinker (1997 p.539) points out,

“When illusions work, there is no mystery to the question “Why do people enjoy fiction?” It is identical to the question “Why do people enjoy life?” When we are absorbed in a book or a movie, we get to see breathtaking landscapes, hobnob with important people, fall in love with ravishing men and women, protect loved ones, attain impossible goals, and defeat wicked enemies.”

When I have done dramas about werewolves and vampires I haven’t needed to spell out the universal metaphorical implications, pupils have told me about how they perceive the meaning – homosexuals hiding in communities because they’re scared to reveal their true personalities for fear of prejudice; paedophiles posing as friendly characters to abuse; the security but inherent danger of mob responses and so on.

Hatcher (1996 p. 41) identifies the fact that the process is not a simplistic one; the balance is everything:

“I don’t believe Shakespeare sat around trying to come up with a play that would encapsulate his thinking on the subject of ambition and after a long period of diligent research and strenuous planning came up with something called Macbeth. Nor do I believe he blithely stumbled upon the story of a Scot’s murderer, wrote a blood curdling thriller’ and then looked up, surprised, as if to say, “Why I had no idea my crime story would turn into such a fascinating dissertation on the subject of ambition!”

Until Drama in the classroom re-defines itself in terms of Drama, the Art form of the world for over 3,000 years, then it is cutting off its roots. Drama-in-Education circa 1970’s/1980’s chiefly failed because whilst it aimed high and was bridging the gap, the whole weight of theatricality was thrown upon the teacher’s shoulders and there was a fear of theatre-skills as empty “presentation” techniques, so pupils should not be encouraged to think in those terms. The challenge for those of us who stayed with the philosophy but who wanted to sharpen the practice become one of letting the students know that in making a play up, they did indeed have artistic theatrical functions. They are actors; they do direct; they are an audience and will “create” the text even if it is never ever written down! As Heathcote/Bolton (1999 P.172) write about audience:

“ it is obvious that *any* drama activity must involve drama laws, because those laws are the very bedrock of the activity”

In the 1880’s the ‘well-made play’ conquered Europe’s theatres. Formalised, formula produced pieces both serious and comic which presented issues to the audience, could criticise society and seem very daring in theme but were essentially sterile because at

best they presented opinion rather than genuinely challenging an audience through dialectics, contradictions to explore, evil characters who we admire, good characters who bore us. The modern drama lesson seems to me to be in this same world of formula response and like the well-made play it must fade and die as more lively and organic forms overtake it. These forms, however, won't come from 'new' styles and theories, like Brecht's revolution in the theatre of the 1920's/1930's, it will come from a realisation that the Shakespeare's theatre had it right all along – epic drama on a grand scale full of sub-plots, sub-text and characters diverse yet all focused within the one theme. If the modern theatre is in decline it is because it has lost this in its desire to be intimate and relevant on a simple level and Hollywood has taken the form, (and superficially on the whole) but tremendously popularly turned it into blockbusters like the Star Wars films, James Bond and so on.

As Michael Taylor says in his introduction to 'The Taming of the Shrew' (Penguin Classics edition 1977),

“The necessary quality of all good drama, a delight in vigorous events subjected to the discipline of a coherent, well organised and significant plot”.

By rejecting the unnecessary illusion in whole group drama, and firmly accepting that it is imagination and pretence, the teacher and pupils are freed to act and perform within the 'drama-world' as equals in the learning experience. The teacher of this method may use the same conventions, deal with the same teacher-led dilemmas, teach the same skills, but do so within an understanding of a purpose, within the context of Drama. The rehearsal methods are returned to their real functions designed to give actors insight into their characters, and as such are far more effective and meaningful. They take on a fundamental preparatory function, which can deepen their understanding and appreciation of the characters, context and conflict.

A colleague who had moved from 'process' to 'conventions' based work once argued that she could never get her students to use mime or performance skills like mine did. I queried this. The assumption was based on the idea that my students were brighter, more affluent and intelligent. I asked her at what stage she taught them mime and performance skills. She did not. How can we expect our students use skills we have not taught them? Whole group drama is only possible if the development of a body of creative and thinking skills has taken place. The art of whole group drama requires skill, knowledge and technique in order to engage in the process. Whole group improvisational drama develops thinking skills, creativity and confidence. It also develops teamwork skills and a deeper level of concentration than expected in other subjects.

The key question in the drama or theatre debate is do I need to be watched by a non-participant in order to make my experience valid? If empathy is the deepest form of drama experience, then I can attain this more easily and to a deeper level if I am not being observed. In fact evidence shows that not being observed enables all students to participate more fully and develop the confidence to eventually be watched/observed. As part of my research a group of Year 10 students were observed, by the Head teacher, and myself being taught by another teacher. The performance skills they used and the depth of characterisation accomplished was outstanding. They were improvising in a whole group drama context but were obviously being watched by an audience. After the lesson I asked them about how they felt, and these are the responses I got:

- "I forgot about you."
- "I was in the play so I never really noticed."
- "We were in the drama in role so I didn't see you once we started."

- “The only time I noticed you was when you were both looking directly at me.”

I was surprised by this and challenged them as to whether this was always the case when operating in role. Their answers are illuminating:

- “No. You are adults. You won’t laugh if we do something stupid.”
- “I was less self-conscious with you there because you know what we are doing.”
- “I was concentrating on what I was doing – so I didn’t really think about it.”
- “All of us were responding totally in role so it wasn’t an issue.”
- “Adults don’t bother me but kids do – they can put you off.”
- “People criticise and that puts you off.”

It is clear that an audience is not a pre-requisite and can be a problem, but that students engaged fully will simply ignore observers, achieving Stanislavski’s idea of ‘public solitude’, concentrating totally on their role and oblivious to the audience. Participants in a whole group drama are learning to engage with characters and present them to others (also participants) in a believable and realistic manner. They are in fact developing a Stanislavski approach to performance.

The context of the dramatic situation enables an immediate and active involvement, where control of the material and responsibility for it are in the hands of the learner. The activity is always purposeful in attempting to resolve a problem. The level of empathy and engagement students can make with the drama cannot be attained through showing work alone, it must come from the developed ability to work in role, which only comes through improvising.

The students whose confidence is low can engage in whole group work at their own level, take a full and active part without the same level of skill as another student may have. The teacher working in role, also as participant is highly significant. As a

member of the team they can sometimes lead, challenge, contradict, and in many other ways help structure the work. Like the pupils the teacher is operating as actor, writer, director and audience and is offering a model for the students to observe and copy.

In the whole group drama, personal problems (which cannot always be overcome) can be overlooked. In a whole group scenario no one needs to work with anyone they don't like 'directly', whilst their continuous working in small friendship groups can be easily disrupted by teacher in role once the whole group work begins. In small group work these two problems soon become obvious and can become serious. They can of course be overcome, and there are many times within whole group drama work when you will want them to work in such small groups but my point is that A and B in a group of twenty can be encouraged to co-operate in a way that in a group of five may be impossible. Simultaneous improvisation in small groups/pairs is good and shares many of the possibilities of whole group work but there is a limit on what can be achieved.

As an example of what is possible two Youth Theatre groups I worked with concluded their Summer School week with 80 young people between 12 and 20 working in role simultaneously together for over two hours. After planning roles and characters and sub-plots, rehearsing and improvising in smaller groups, eighty young people improvised a dramatic story about the court of Queen Elizabeth 1st.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Whole group improvisation and other drama styles in schools.

I have unashamedly been arguing for a particular style of drama and whilst I have, as I stated, a great respect for other methods, it is the lost art of whole group drama, which I believe offers most students the greatest opportunities to develop their creativity and thinking skills for a greater amount of time. But it is not easy nor is it about to happen without preparation and skill development.

Without the necessary tools at their disposal students cannot be expected to make meaningful metaphor, or analyse meaning. Take the example of the 'anthromorphism convention' where objects can comment on a character. Where does it actually fit into a 'drama'? It essentially removes responsibility for thinking, creating and indeed acting from the individual and makes it a group concern. This may not be a problem, and certainly encourages teamwork and co-operation, but it can be limiting. In one lesson I observed, a boy playing a cross-dresser was told that the group would be objects in his room to,

“see what he is thinking and feeling”.

The very language placed the character at a distance from the individual and placed a variety of new ideas into the melting pot. The effect may be 'creative', but it also destroys clarity of purpose for the individual playing the man in the scene who the teacher says, 'need not' adapt to the ideas given but is effectively required to do so. It is an ideal way of challenging and stimulating ideas for the character 'initially' but requires an actors approach to those ideas, which essentially script (dictate) thoughts and feelings, which may not be genuine or personal to the actor. A talented actor can, of course adapt to the new information but the extra level of difficulty is unlikely to

aid identification with role and in most cases leads to a stereotyping and closing down of the individual response and acceptance of a group 'picture' which they then 'present' in the narrowest of senses.

The same is true of various 'forum' styles when handled in this way. Whenever we are 'telling' someone what they think or feel we are robbing them of the opportunity to decide for themselves or react spontaneously. In true Forum theatre as created by Boal, the actor has absorbed the character fully in rehearsal and so can react to what are effectively Stanislavskian 'magic if' scenarios, where the actor asks themselves what "if everything on stage were true? (Benedetti 1989 p.33); taking advice from the audience they can alter responses in a scene to gauge the effectiveness of new possibilities. This is a far cry from the style of forum theatre where anyone can tell an actor what he or she is thinking or feeling, or tell them what to say, which may be completely out of character for the actor, and so becomes untruthful. The 'magic if' is of course the basis of all acting in role.

In one school I observed a pseudo-theatrical piece of devising in which the actor was playing a man arrested and imprisoned in a fascist 1984 state, a rebel who did not agree with the rules. After the scene I asked to see the young man in an improvised scene. His thinking up to that point had been stereotyped and superficial. The scene I asked him to do was with a psychologist interviewing him and trying to break the spirit of the prisoner, with an intimidating guard present. After the improvisation he reflected that,

"I was a higher status than him – I could break him".

He realised, without being able to articulate it clearly that he was 'playing them' rather than them 'playing him' that he was not merely a 'pawn in their game' but that he was able to manipulate them by his responses and behaviour. This only came about

through the improvisation. His analysis did not fit any of the pre-determined or discussed facts, but was original, valid and exciting.

Interestingly in the same scene one of the actors introduced the idea that

“You had sex with Mary. She’s pregnant. You left her with two children. It was three years ago.”

The ‘prisoner’ blocked this. The drama had become a game where information could be put in to force a ‘result’. It had become an ‘exercise’, a game, and he wanted to stop an avenue developing which did not fit ‘his drama’. Was he being difficult or unimaginative or was the technique in fact at fault? It demanded from him a ‘thoughtful/logical’ response at a time when he was ‘emotionally’ engaged. The intention was to build a story but it was not ‘his story’ with which he was engaged. Had he known in advance, pre-decided this information he could have responded effectively but like the other ‘conventions’ this only served to place a block on his ability to identify fully with the role. Students in role who ‘want to win’ have placed me in this position. It is an uncomfortable and annoying proposition of information, which is intended to ‘catch you out’. A highly skilled improviser can most of the time take it on board and quickly deal with it, but it does even then cause inconvenience, and to a student achieving an empathy with a role it can be destructive of the imaginative investment they have made. In the whole group improvisation model most information is pre-determined and planned by the participants prior to the main drama, in the preparation stages. These stages may well include any number of conventions and presentations but these are aimed at preparing for the drama process, not being it.

Where spontaneous improvisation in pairs was being used to develop the skills of role-play and character development, the quality of performance and sustained

creative acting is noticeably different. The sustained nature of the work is vital. As Claxton (1999 p. 154) observes

“Sidney Parnes, one of the pioneers in teaching creativity, has shown that people tend to produce more creative ideas if they are required to keep thinking after the first flush of more obvious ideas has passed.”

The following examples come from a lesson observed with a Year 10 GCSE group. The actual scenes were performed for the rest of the class, but essentially were improvised based on the work they had just been doing improvising alone and unwatched. A son/daughter is telling their parent that the council social worker is insisting they go into an OAP home or go to live with them. In the first scene two boys, neither particularly enthusiastic students, both potentially problematic in behaviour, created an interesting if somewhat eccentric scene: -

“I’ve got some good and bad new. I’ve been talking to the nurse from the home. I’ve paid them. They’ve agreed to let you move in. It’s a good idea. You are going a bit loopy. It’s okay you can take your fish. I’ve got some documents – if you sign this it’s safe and you can come back. Sign on this page and the next one. You’ll like living in the home. If you don’t like it, well, I’ll be living in this one – I’m thinking of buying a council house round the corner. It will be better for you. It’s smaller. Look after the fish. Be careful with them.”

Throughout the scene, body language, facial expression, use of hand movements and gestures were fascinating. B accepted the obviously ‘dubious’ son in role as the slightly senile old man, where others may have gone into ‘game’ mode to argue or fight the manipulation. This was true of both performances, which had the necessary skills but also clearly were improvisation ‘in role’. The same was also true of two

other boys, (different personality and ability types) who created a scene with a very real sense of attitude that rang very true to me of my elderly parents:

A – I don't think you are coping anymore. You need to go into a home. You've broken your arm.

B – You could have done it. I've done it before. Every time you break something it's weaker.

A - In the home you'll be secure. You'll have people to do the shopping for you.

B - It's like a prison in there. There'll be a curfew.

A – Your house has rats in it, how can you like it?

B – I can call the exterminators in. Homes smell! They have that sick smell of TCP

A – They clean up the sick. You don't. You'll have friends in there

B -Most people in there are grumpy old farts.

It was a naturalistic, well-developed scene with good characterisations and a clear sense of development. Two less able and rather boisterous girls were chosen to 'show' their work:

A - Hiya Mam.

B - All right.

A – Tea? I need to tell you something. You're going to have to go into a home, mum. You can't walk the dog anymore.

B – It's a cat

A – You've got a broken leg.

B – It's only bruised.

A – Go and see a Doctor.

B – I'll go and see a Dr. but I'm not going into a home.

A – Who'll walk the dog?

B - You will.

A – Come and live with me then.

B – No. Your husband hates me.

A – I'm not married.

B – You take the dog then.

A – (sarcastic) Why not get it put down?

B – That's nice.

A – Won't you be lonely? Come and live with me and then I'll take it for a walk. You can't stay here with a bad leg. You can't even walk on it.

In this scene there was some blocking but it was used as part of the scene to suggest senility and was not allowed to ruin the scene. Their tone of voice and expression suggested they had known each other a long time and there was a sense of reality in the relationship.

Often in lessons using improvisation techniques like the above there can be a simple mismatch of technique at work because the teacher is unaware of the practitioner influence they are using. The intuitive process is Stanislavskian and draws upon the subconscious use of body language, expression etc. The controlled use of these performance techniques by definition requires pre-planned analysis of a role and a controlled presentation of ideas.

Brecht's notion of 'gest' is relevant here. Brecht's complex ideas of gestus are beyond the scope of this thesis but it is worth noting the main point. The actor uses a 'gest' to communicate explicitly the 'attitude' and social role of the character. Willett's (1991 p. 173) explains,

“It is at once gesture and gist, attitude and point: one aspect of the relation between two people, studied singly, cut to essentials and physically and verbally expressed. It excludes the psychological, the sub-conscious, the metaphysical unless they can be conveyed in concrete terms.”

The attempt to work in an analytical way but also to use intuitive responses is thus a paradox and can lead to lack of clarity, often requiring ‘teacher interpretation’ of what they see and hear. The intuitive process requires less interpretation because the character is clearer and the analysis is by the one actively involved in the performance. Interestingly in the Year 10 lesson I observed, the very next pair to ‘perform’ were a pair I had sat and watched in their initial improvisation. This had been excellent, a complex emotional minefield being created. I sat in anticipation of the scene only to be disappointed by what turned out to be a false, rather crass bit of overplaying and blocking of the most basic nature. It succeeded on a number of levels, but in comparison with the original work it was poor. I asked them why at the end of the lesson.

A – Oh I know it wasn’t as good.

B – You can’t concentrate on your role the same when you’re showing stuff.

A – We changed roles for the ‘acting’ bit to try and make it fresh.

B – I’d played the son before.

A – It wasn’t as realistic that time.

The shift in perspective between participant and performer is a vital one, potentially likely to disrupt learning altogether. The difference between “a child acting in the classroom and the actor performing in the theatre” depends firstly on the language and its intention. What do we mean by acting? If we mean performing a pre-prepared script to an audience – then there is no difference. However, if we mean a child acting

a character creatively and imaginatively through improvisation alongside others, there is a lot. The key element of difference between “acting” and improvising in performance and whole group drama improvisation is a large creative leap. Heathcote (1994) has suggested that attitude rather than characters are the chief concern but surely attitude derives from character and context, and it is false to separate them. A ‘given person’ is a character rather than simply a role or an attitude. Improvisation in the whole group is, I would argue a more highly complex activity than most ‘acting’, though not as technical a craft, relying more on unconscious psycho-techniques. The child acting their character is using a vast range of skills, and is performing, but they are less concerned with self-consciousness, not altogether freed from it, but because they are acting less consciously they are generally less ‘self-conscious’. There is little in common here with the role-play approach however.

“We are not interested, for instance, in getting people to *act*- but they are *rooted* in this one artistic characteristic of seeing something as significant.”

The difference here between what I mean and what Bolton/Heathcote (1999 p.ix) are talking about is obvious. The students in the classroom are ‘acting’ but not performing and that is the difference in approaches. Even Hornbrook (1990 p.7) recognises: -

“Conceptually there is nothing which differentiates the child acting in the classroom from the actor on the stage of the theatre. Each is simultaneously taking part in and making a drama; each implicitly presupposes the existence of performer and audience...In the classroom context, to speak of audience-less drama is unintelligible, for critical observers and listeners are always present, even if they too are participants.”

A group of Year 12 Theatre Studies students prove an interesting test case. Several students who had done improvised drama for years suddenly felt threatened and

insecure when asked to “perform” a nursery rhyme as a character. Analysing their difficulties it became clear that they felt self-conscious and, to quote “stupid”. They suddenly felt ridiculous. The accepted conventions of drama had suddenly been thrown into sharp relief and brought into consciousness in a way they had not experienced before. It may seem surprising, and indeed surprised me, but there was a heightened experience in their trepidations at ‘performing’ in front of people. This holds a key to the difference in the perceptions of acting. Suddenly the ‘audience’ became a very significant and intimidating presence. In whole group class drama this can occur for the very self-conscious students with very low self-esteem but can be overcome as they realise that others are more interested in their own roles and are not simply ‘appraising’ their worth.

Interestingly working through this process and helping students overcome their initial feelings of fear they often become the best actors, bringing greater imagination and depth to their performances, more aware of sub-text and producing more compassionate portrayals.

Even more basic problems can emerge, however. After a short scene I observed in another school a boy was asked, of the character he has been playing,

“X how does the mother feel about the way her kids feel?”

He replied,

“I think she feels quite sad”.

Then another member of the group answered,

“I think she would be angry. They have said she is not a good mother.”

In analysis of work that falls into this ‘no-man’s land’ the phrase ‘I think’ keeps cropping up because students don’t know. Their understanding even of their own

working role is basic. I heard another student reply to a question about her actions in a scene,

“I don’t have a reason why I really would. I don’t think I would do that”.

The thinking goes only as far as justifying how they have presented and constantly refer back to their level of thinking, which hasn’t been challenged because teacher is only facilitating presentation. They are learning to present their ideas not explore them. Planning is discursive but the drama is not.

The teacher commented on a scene they had shown,

“I would like to explore that because work should not be everything in your life.”

The group then created scenes to communicate that idea to an audience. In this case they were not even presenting their own ideas.

In analysis of this type of work a lot of the questions and need for reasons stems from the lack of clarification of context in the beginning. This results then in a debate and practical exploration of the reasons behind their own work, but what does that really achieve? A variety of alternatives as to why a character did something are devised, establishing through imagination the motivation behind a character’s actions. Whilst this may have some validity surely Stanislavski’s methods applied earlier would be more effective and importantly, more truthful.

Split character analysis is closer to psychodrama or schizophrenia than Drama-for-understanding. The idea of a soliloquy is that a character explains and explores their thought and conscience. Perhaps the thought and opinions of others would impinge on this, but would not dominate the individual’s own tempo- rhythm and superobjective. It is time we realised that empathetic realistic acting is actually a craft to be learnt, and a very valuable one. It can be employed in all styles of performance and gives a

truthful understanding of a role rather than conjecture and opinion because it is based on the reality of the 'what if this was you'?

As a Year 11 said to the class during a discussion of ideas,

“Drama is about people being put into situations. It is about characters and depth of characters.”

I think too often the depth is overlooked. One can dig little holes all over or one big deep one in one place. To dig deep requires adequate preparation of the ground and a consolidated effort in one place, rather than a scattering of effort over a large area, no matter how skilled the diggers involved. In depth one person best does analysis of one character and whole group drama allows every individual to explore his or her own 'character' in depth, rather than take part in the exploration of one or more in a superficial way.

To sum up my points about 'the lost art' succinctly I would simply say that sometimes the clarity of beauty is so blinding we cannot see it at all and look instead for something more prosaic. A quote attributed to J.R. Lowell ("My Study Windows") says it all: -

“The question of common sense is always “What is it good for?” – a question which would abolish the rose and be answered triumphantly by the cabbage”.

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