

## NOTES ON DRAMA

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*These notes were originally published in the Resources section of Collected Writings. However, their clarity and simplicity of expression has made them extremely useful and popular with teachers. As well as outlining different modes of drama, they anticipate Heathcote's further development and elaboration of Mantle of the Expert.*

### What is drama?

Drama is the selective expression of human interaction in which codes and patterns of behaviour may be examined because:

1. The area can be selected for review. In life it cannot, for we are busy living.
2. The theatre has developed over many years the different styles and modes that can be employed to review people's dilemmas and problems.
3. The actual moment in time can be isolated, tried again, turned around, and replayed with different solutions, because we can accept the conventions.
4. The theatre does this constantly. It shows life in action, the way people fill the spaces between themselves and others – it can appear to show what the *reality* of life is but *seems* to be the opportunity of art, to *distort the view productively*.
5. Theatre can uphold the moral code or challenge it with equal facility.
6. We can learn through theatre because we can measure our own experiences against others in an identifying way.
7. We can identify our experiences with those selected ones we are shown.
8. Using a process of identification can we employ this 'looking at life' for teaching?
9. Can this change behaviour patterns?
10. Can we learn how to identify? If so, with what do we identify and how?
11. Can theatre and drama help us examine ourselves, our own codes, our own patterns of thinking and behaving?
12. When drama is used in learning establishments what has to be present to make it succeed?

13. There is no moralizer present in the room, only the circumstances. Old jaded views must be given a new look of shocking proportions. Somehow prejudice must be bypassed to let in new light upon old matter. So these elements must come into play:

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|------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| A A problem must be seen in action.                  | It must be interesting for the participants.                                      |
| B The new element.                                   | Old familiar matters appear in new forms to 'shock' into awareness.               |
| C Decisions must be called for.                      | There is an active commitment to action and the solving of problems.              |
| D Experience is employed productively not passively. | Relevant previous experience comes into action.                                   |
| E Getting feedback – not to be avoided!              | There is no escape from the immediate outcome and results of decisions.           |
| F Conscious examination of changes, if any.          | Reflection – a standing back from the action to review present conceptualization. |

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### Drama in education

The word drama seems to explain one kind of activity – it looks as if it is about the reconstruction of life. In this form it is familiar to us on TV and in theatre and film. When we see it, we can recognize human behaviour, sometimes like our own and sometimes shockingly different. We are usually outside this drama, so we are in a position to predict to a certain extent what is going to happen. To a certain extent we can enjoy the agonies, joys and pseudo-agonies of those whose 'lives' we eavesdrop on. We can also anticipate, and this is an important part of the pleasure.

So when teachers say they teach drama, we tend to think that we know what is going to happen. But actually using that blanket term isn't much use to us in school, because blanket words are not much use to a teacher. The elements of an activity have to be discovered first, before teachers can put this activity to use meaningfully.

What are the elements in drama that make it a possible learning tool? How does drama work?

1. People have to work out together the lives they are pretending to live.  
*Drama demands cooperation.*
2. People have to employ what they already know, about the life they are trying to live.  
*Drama puts life experience to use.*  
*Drama makes factual experience (information) come into active employment.*
3. People have to be able to live in two worlds at once and not get them mixed up.  
*Drama uses fiction and fantasy but makes people more aware of reality.*
4. People have to agree to sustain a common understanding of what they are making together, no matter how separately they may appear to be thinking. Footballers have to do this too – they don't end up all playing different games!  
*Drama stresses an agreement among participants to sustain mutual support for each other while allowing everyone a chance to work differently – to bring personal ideas to the whole.*
5. People have to express thinking, feeling, and actions to each other. If they don't do this, then no one in the group knows what is going on.  
*Drama makes people find precision in communication.*

6. Drama uses objects but often in a symbolic way. Chairs have to become thrones, but also these 'thrones' become the symbol of the king when he is absent.  
*Drama stresses the use of reflection. Symbols become ordinary, but the ordinary also is seen to be symbolic.*
7. People have to interpret the actions of others but often in unfamiliar circumstances. You don't meet dragons every day; you don't have to be skilled goldsmiths; you don't have to battle with kings – or hospital matrons! You don't have to argue with warlocks; you don't face the rigours of great journeys or cope with enemies who seek to take your life.  
*Drama allows you to live out crises in a testing kind of way. It tests attitudes and present capacities.*

What use are all these to teachers? The least usable part of the picture is the 'making plays up' bit. That is for making plays – all the rest is about developing the skills of being a person in a community. To make this work in teaching will demand that new forms are used in schools. New outward forms that is, where the play is not seen publicly but inner demands can be made on the class. We have been experimenting with some of these forms:

1. One class teaching another one by the ways they simulate events and stress a certain problem, perhaps to avoid the confusion that occurs when too much information is given at once.
2. Using one person in role to meet the class – Julius Caesar, Florence Nightingale, a tramp. Know your students' need and devise the role to meet it.
3. Setting up 'working as' rather than 'learning about' situations in other subject areas. (A group of Year 1 children who collected antiques might then run a museum service in the school – it *isn't* crazy and they *can* do it.)

### Types of drama

You can approach learning through drama in various ways. Each way makes a different journey, a different kind of demand on your planning and a different kind of demand on your students. Each approach makes a different kind of learning happen.

1. *Roles*: where a person is the challenge.
2. *Mantle of the Expert*: where the class is set a task in such a way that they function as experts.
3. *Analogy*: where one problem, a real one, is revealed by an exact parallel to it.
4. *Text*: where interpretation of someone else's work is the means of learning.
5. *Dance forms*: where emphasis on non-verbal signals, experiences, and explanations are the means of discovery.
6. *Simulation*: where a simulation of life is made.
7. *Games*: where the rules lead and control the play.

All these outer modes are 'respectable'. What makes them 'shabby' is the quality of the interior experience that is planned into them. Good 'interior form' can never have a 'wrong' external pattern.

## ***Roles***

When you use a role you gain:

- a person for the class to respond to;
- a lifestyle which comes into the room;
- a holding device which attracts interest;
- something to inquire into that acts as a focus;
- a specific example of emotional/intelligent life and attitudes to challenge;
- a pressure exactly where you want it.

But you must decide:

- what that pressure is to be;
- exactly how the role will exert the pressure on the class;
- which symbolic objects will be essential to communicate the lifestyle;
- exactly what you want your class to experience through meeting the role.

You can't get away with 'shabby' planning ever! Using a role can:

- teach facts;
- challenge attitudes;
- pose questions;
- demand understanding;
- help you question yourself;
- modify class behaviour;
- make students want to read the book/play again.

## ***Mantle of the Expert***

'Mantle' meaning: I declare that I will uphold the lifestyle and standards of my calling.

'Expert' meaning: Furthermore I will undertake to take seriously the acquisition and using of those skills deemed necessary in that lifestyle I have entered because of my calling.

When you use this approach to drama you gain:

- A commitment from the children to learn the information and skills they will need, for example an expert mariner must function within a framework of the sea, journeys, and the tools and skills of the seafarer. Because of the need for information it allows the teacher to use drama directly to run alongside and feed off the curriculum.
- A discipline for the class that provides a framework in which the attitudes are contained without the teacher imposing rules and demands. For example, a mariner must obey the laws of the sea; a mariner must obey the pressure of the oceans' ways; a mariner must obey the social hierarchy within the vessel; a mariner must learn the trade.
- A task-orientated situation, where the job in hand must be done first. So, doing the job and fulfilling the task are the vehicle that starts creative ideas flowing. Children

employ what they know and no information will be fed to them first. Which means that:

- Teachers can diagnose what children already know.
- Teachers can feed information when they see that the class needs it.
- Teachers are forced to demonstrate that they can differentiate between 'force-feeding' facts and creating a climate where facts, skills and understanding can grow together.
- Teachers who 'know it all' can't teach well through the 'Mantle of the Expert'. They can't wait for real learning to happen. They can't recognize real learning when they see it.

### **Analogy**

You can't use this mode if you won't decide:

- exactly what you want to teach about;
- what aspect of your theme or concept you want to parallel;
- how to make the connection ultimately between the real situation you need to open up for consideration and the analogous one;
- exactly how to parallel the *inner form* and not the storyline.

Every theme or concept is capable of having an exact parallel if you understand that it is this inner form that is important. Analogy is the best way of making something fresh and worthy of consideration when it has become too cliché-ridden, too familiar and too full of prejudice because of memory and past weariness. It provides a new face for old material.

### **Dance forms**

This mode can be used when you decide your statements are complete without the need for words. You have to be prepared to interest yourself in:

- which concepts and ideas truly do not need words;
- which statements are clearer because the dance/movement form is employed;
- the labour of clarity and precision in thought and act.

### **Simulation**

Simulation means holding the mirror up to nature. You gain:

- an exploration of interaction, and a chance to see the results of your action on other people;
- an opportunity to work with feeling and thought simultaneously;
- a chance to form your ideas into some kind of order.

The problems are:

- Everyone can bring in any idea they fancy – this may make it difficult for the inexperienced teacher.

- All these ideas have to be sorted out into working patterns.
- You have to be able to make the rules of theatre work immediately.
- You have to be able to win belief in the big lie, the Art Form, the agreement to pretend.

### Games

Every lesson needs a spine – the central idea to suggest the task and the actions flowing from the task. In using games:

- Rules help the teacher to avoid being the arbiter of behaviour.
- Rules allow the teacher to be an equal player.
- The task is clear.
- The goals are clear.
- The method of doing the task is clear.
- Rewards and punishments are formalized.
- Status – at any point – is related to task, chance and rules, not to individual stature in the group.
- There is an end product to be seen.

Games formalize life interaction processes and can allow a problem to be seen clearly so that another look is possible because the game allows us to sidestep. Thus a temporary relief from emotion and muddle can reveal the spine of the problem. Out of this insight comes energy and clearer purpose. Like *Analogy*, games work best when the central spine of the game opens up the central spine of the real problem exactly.

Whatever mode of drama you use, the first central part of each lesson is the *focus*. Out of the *focus* the task can be found and set. Out of the task arises all the potential learning on which the teacher can focus for further tasks. The task provides the opportunity for assessment of needs. This brings modification of the task. The teacher must decide how to use the focus and the task in terms of:

- social learning;
- factual learning;
- reflective learning;
- curriculum pressures.

The progress of the drama lesson can be described metaphorically:

1. The ship = the teacher plans how to make the focus work.
2. The tidal currents = the class behaviour, knowledge and understanding dictate the teacher's ongoing function during the lesson.
3. The voyage and discovery = these are made according to the way the teacher steers within the tidal currents.
4. The map = the map is not the plan; it is the outcome.

In every drama lesson there will be a general idea which will lead to the focus out of which must be brought *Reflection* and the *Universal*, without which there is no learning from the experience.

It must be remembered that:

- It is not the doing – it is the considerations underlying the doing.
- It is not the saying – it is the effect of the saying.
- It is not merely telling people what you want them to learn – it is the experience arising out of the action that enables them to learn.

### Aims in drama

During any first session my aim is threefold: first, I want the children to recognize that I am putting the onus upon them to have ideas. Second, I want them to realize that I am prepared to accept their ideas and to use them and make them work. This decision-making, where children watch their own choices worked out in action, seems to me to be one of the important services which drama renders to education, where we are trying to encourage children to think for themselves. Third, I want the children to work from the very beginning within a true drama context, that is not a vitiated art form watered down for them but the real thing with the real disciplines which drama requires, for example group problems jointly worked out in the present. All too often drama presents children with a story form with the emphasis upon events – whereas in fact drama reveals events through the feelings and attitudes of people. We would not ask children to paint with wrongly mixed pigments. The same applies to other art forms too, so, while accepting the ideas of the children, I am also 'mixing' these ideas so that they are usable by the children.

It is important from the start that all the children's needs are respected as far as possible, and therefore I must give those without confidence the opportunity to hide and be reserved, and those who are too confident the necessary challenges to make them work more thoughtfully. Some children learn most at this stage by being 'onlookers', rather than 'ideas people', that is, responders rather than initiators, and I must respect this.

Finally, I regard the *effort made* to be of more importance to me as a teacher than the resulting drama, but at the same time the children are working for *their* result, which may be great personal pleasure, or the satisfaction of their play needs, or many other things including the achievement of having made something happen.

### Questions to consider

What *precisely* do I want the dramatic input to do for the children, the learning area and me? It cannot be a *general* answer. It can usually be quite clearly named as a skill, for example 'to enable children to realize that old-seeming documents often deal with the same matters modern people are concerned about' or 'to realize that things like books are *still* written slow and hard'.

Am I aware of how I use my *voice* in teaching? Can I feed information while apparently asking for it? For example, 'I'm looking for some marble but I'm not certain if the Carrara quarries will be best – have you any Carrara in? They say the green is very good, but I like the rose myself.'

There is *no need* to think I must know everything about the subject in hand before I start the work!

Have I clarified the simplest starting point? And have I considered the stages in building belief in the *authenticity of the task*?

Have I divided the task suitably?

Have I thought carefully about how symbolic material will be used? For example, *charts* of plans, designs, maps, etc. No work can *actually* be done, but it needs authentic record keeping. For example a herbalist needs reference material, diagrams of a garden, ways of *recording* measurement, receipts, recipes, drawings of shelves and jars – all the last five will be made as the work progresses – plus lists of ailments and charts of the body, etc.

People must be given the opportunity to work in small groups – because *talk* about the work is most essential for development. And groups need to cross-refer as the work continues.

Can I tolerate *not* giving direct instructions and answers before people have a chance *not to be told*?