

Analysing what we and the children are really doing when they play and do drama

‘The Play’s the Thing...’

Amanda Kipling

Drama is essentially learning through the medium of pretend. Theatre is the communication of what is learned. Drama in Education engages both of these in isolation, and, for the most part, dances in an overlap of the two, making both happen at once.

That is my ‘in a nutshell’ definition of Drama and Theatre. Teachers have tried long and hard to find a line between the two and most have concluded it is unnecessary – children instinctively know and understand the difference and are fluent in the areas which overlap. All arts depend on an unspoken connoisseurship and students in schools acquire this gift quite naturally. Why is this?

Play – a human birthright

There are certain universal truths: that children play is one. We all learn through playing, as Froebel, Piaget, Bruner and Vygotsky agree. Drama has always enjoyed great popularity at GCSE and A level and examination results are good. Why is this subject so successful? Simply, drama has at its core natural learning through play.

It is no coincidence that the word play is part of words like *player*, *playhouse*, *playwright* and so on. Developmentally we have the ‘baby puking and mewling’ imitating his mother’s sounds and facial expressions in play at the start of life. Then we have the plays of Shakespeare, still relevant 400 years on, presenting man engaged in the universal problems of the human condition. In our own way we are all doing the same thing in our nursery play with Wendy houses and toys and *playmates*. Theatre and drama – however one wishes to define them, both and together sit on top of the fundamental universal pattern we all follow: play.

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Isn't it just child's play?

This chapter traces the development of play through the early and primary years and offers insights into the implications for secondary drama. I am indebted to Lesley Hendy and Lucy Toon for the way they have tracked the natural developmental stages of play and playing up to what we might term 'drama'. But because their book is entitled *Supporting Drama and Imaginative Play in the Early Years* (2001), secondary teachers might not have come across it.

The current position of play and drama

The arrival of the National Curriculum (1998) and the Literacy (1999) and Numeracy (2000) hours brought about a steady return to whole class teaching throughout primary schools. The Foundation Stage Profile (2003) caused a misfit in terms of continuity and transition: 'learning through play became sidelined. Children's choice of play-based activities was limited to perhaps a tongue in cheek 'golden hour' on a Friday afternoon' (Anning, 2005:19).

And with play went drama. Learning in all areas which had been skillfully accessed through play during the progressive years of the 60s and 70s disappeared in favour of a more deskbound approach.

In 1992 Joan Sallis wrote that

the greatest danger we face is that our primary schools will lose confidence in the very reforms which have brought visitors from all over the world to see them, and will be afraid to stray from the paths that will lead to the tests. (Sallis, 1992:19)

How true her words have turned out to be.

At present, consciousness of play is high in early years – as might be expected. In Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, where dramatic play thrived in accessing challenging issues and exploring the dilemmas of mankind through problem solving and broadening empathetic awareness, all we might now find is some hot-seating in history or random freeze frames. Isolated examples of good practice can still be seen but twenty years after Sallis' comments, teachers skilled in the use of dramatic play are fast disappearing from our classrooms.

Nationally there is a trend for non specialist teachers to have responsibility for drama development at Key Stage 3. The specialists appear as late as Key Stages 4 and 5 – just in time to boost GCSE results for league tables. However, fast track strategies need to be used to gain good results when the foundations are poor. Without the steady, natural organic development which used

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to permeate teaching and learning, the nature of teaching at this level has changed enormously with spoonfeeding becoming shockingly more and more common.

What about the future?

Early indications from the 2010 Education White Paper do not bode well for play as an important building block for learning or for drama and the arts. Education is an electoral football.

There had been encouraging progress, beginning with *All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education*, the 1999 report to the UK government by the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education. The report made clear, as Brian Wolland pointed out, that 'Creative and cultural education are not subjects on the curriculum, they are general functions of education' (Wolland, 2010:xvi).

The *Every Child Matters* Green Paper in 2003 and in its subsequent revisions were humanising additions to the debate on creativity. Prof Alexander's *Cambridge Primary Review* of 2009 reported positively on primary education, endorsing many of the changes that creative teachers had been eager for and paving the way for primary education in the future. After the original National Curriculum was dissolved some scaffolding remained to anchor and stabilise the New Primary National Curriculum, due to start in September 2011.

It recommended sweeping away SATs and the boxed curriculum, favouring instead twelve aims including some familiar echoes from ECM (wellbeing, engagement, empowerment, autonomy, encouraging respect and reciprocity, promoting interdependence, citizenship, celebrating culture, exploring, fostering skills, exciting imagination and enacting dialogue). There would also be eight domains which include broader subject areas such as arts and creativity, language, oracy and literacy, and science and technology. The actual content employed to embrace these aspects is to be left to the school to select. Alexander profiled the opportunity for an integrated curriculum and flagged up the importance of the role of drama, indicating for the first time in many years the pivotal role this subject could play in providing the perfect vehicle for the integrated or semi-integrated curriculum.

In April 2009, Jim Rose carried out a review on behalf of the government. Unusually for such a government report, much of the original spirit of the Cambridge Review was kept and these recommendations were welcomed as the underpinning to the New Primary National Curriculum. Teachers could be released to do what they had long wished to: start teaching in a multi-

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layered fashion, ensuring plenty of contact with the material in as many different ways as possible, with children learning several things at the same time. The laboured, non-efficient boxed curriculum would be left behind.

The vast majority of these primary school teachers had had no experience themselves of an integrated curriculum, so this was certainly not a case of teachers being nostalgic for the good old days. On the contrary, these teachers were arriving at the need for this change through their experience in the classroom, both those in which they had learned and those in which they now taught.

In addition the new curriculum holds that a semi-integrated curriculum should continue into Key Stage 3. This would allow drama to continue to play a core role in teaching and learning right up to the options stage at the end of Key Stage 3.

Teachers are frustrated that the Alexander and Rose reports did not come earlier, so that this new curriculum was established and working before the election. As it is, untried and untested, this long awaited release for learning and opportunity for drama and play to reclaim their rightful profile in learning is a politically vulnerable issue.

Will it make a difference?

Whatever the politicians decide, the pattern of the development of play and its relationship with learning will continue into Key Stage 3 and beyond – no government can change that. Teachers everywhere have been pressing for change and to reverse it would be to court unpopularity – which no party can afford. Experienced and insightful teachers everywhere will continue to do what they have been doing: finding ways of progressing good practice and remaining true to good teaching philosophy, while meeting whatever the inconsistent demands of central government might be in these uncertain political times.

Now is a good time to re-examine play and its role in learning throughout formal compulsory education. We have the hard-fought-for opportunity to establish what can be achieved when the curriculum is appropriately shaped to harness children's natural learning patterns. At last drama has a recognised key role in linking the play from early years through the lost Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 to the GCSE years of Key Stage 4.

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Play The Beginnings

A baby of about five months old, being held by his father, looked at his mother and shook his head at her. She immediately made a laughing face with wide eyes and giant smile and shook her head back. The people around them looked on, smiling. The little interaction went on over several turns until a man close by decided to join in and imitated what the mother had been doing. The baby, instead of responding, looked both puzzled and worried and gazed at the strange man, then back at his mother, then at the man again and so on.

What has this to do with play? I would suggest that the mother and baby have developed a game with rules (your turn/my turn; you do something which I copy; I watch you/you watch me; I am quiet when you do your turn/you are quiet when I do my turn). Each time they enact this turn taking ritual they reinforce the strength of their relationship and the baby builds communicative competence. When a stranger tries to join in this very personal ritual the baby (less than six months old, remember) does not respond but looks to his mother as if to ask 'Who is this person and what right does he have to expect me to respond to him when I have never seen him before?'

Smidt 2010 http://www.tactyc.org.uk/pdfs/Reflection_Smidt.pdf

Sometimes action initiated by Smidt's baby meets matched action; sometimes it provokes a different response. Life is getting complicated and only experience will help sort out the 'what will happen if...?' In this example the baby eventually works out that the game can continue regardless of which adult is playing.

When, however, baby copies daddy who puts the tea cosy on his head when pouring the tea, baby's head disappears into the tea cosy and he cannot see. He cannot match father's behaviour exactly and we laugh. Baby laughs with us. Baby is learning that although there are general patterns and rules, these are likely to break at any time and the result is usually funny. A comic is born – he is laughing at the jokes for the first time, we can see them coming. He goes on to share the same joke with his children.

We need look no further – the basic features of all the favourite and most successful activities in our secondary classrooms are here. Classes will play games like *Simon Says*, *Follow my Leader* and *Mirror Games* because they are deeply rooted in an innocent past, a time when the game was all that

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mattered, a time when no one was 'out' and everyone could have a turn if they wanted to. They smile and laugh and focus, as there is nothing to interfere – the space to concentrate on the interaction is there and that is sufficient. When playing games in the lesson the pupils' more complex selves are left behind, all unhelpful clutter has been shed for a while and the group is able to bond unhindered. At this point a class will surprise us as they hold hands, sit back to back, work in mixed pairs and so on. We are safe. Other teachers stand aghast and cannot understand why the students 'don't do that for me'.

Of course this is not for you, it is for them – the children – and this is why drama, which is all about the self, can be harnessed so the most productive self can be brought to the fore, leaving less helpful alter-egos in the wings.

The implications of imitative play for primary and secondary drama classrooms

The games based around imitative play plug directly into a part of the self which was uncluttered and happy and where the game was everything. These games need not remain at Early Years level; they can grow up. Follow my Leader becomes a shadowing or sequencing exercise, and Shoal of Fish involves larger clustered groups where the leader is whoever is at the front, and changes each time the shoal turns by as little as 45 degrees.

Mirror Game becomes more complex as one half of the body leads the partner and the other half mirrors. Copy Cat can be made more complex by the class copying the leader one move behind the sequence. All the vocal warm-ups using repetitive chanting are based on copying and imitative play – even the army uses this technique!

The most familiar improvisation exercise example is the Shadow, where one person is the shadow of another. The result is often quite existentialist as the shadow insists it has no choice – its destiny is to stalk its owner and witness all their doings.

Most secondary lessons require some form of re-cap near the start and imitation activities are a good way of doing this in a productive way. A good example is, 'copy a line and a move from last week – either yours or someone else's'.

Drama lessons which try to start with group improvisation or a continuation of a piece of script work often succumb to distraction and inappropriate behaviour. Even theatre companies like the Royal Shakespeare Company, Trestle, Frantic Assembly and the National Theatre begin their rehearsals with preparatory exercises – however short – that entail imitative play based activi-

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ties. Unsurprisingly, they follow with the next stages of play, accessing a deep rooted bank of skills and knowledge, reinforcing the foundations for the on-coming work, clearing the mind of recently acquired clutter and refreshing and re-invigorating the group with shared strengths.

The kinds of play

Psychologists have defined five different kinds of play.

Symbolic play Everyday objects become 'other' objects

Role play Being 'another'

Socio-dramatic play Using child versions of real things to enact social situations

Thematic-fantasy play Using imagined items and places to explore situations

Play with rules Games on own or with others

(Hendy and Toon, 2001)

Symbolic play

Moyles (2005:1) offers this description of two young children on safari using an upturned table in the garden.

The boys have no problem whatsoever in using the same item as an imagined other item. They are on safari as themselves, in a different place and in different circumstances.

Jack (6 years old) and George, (nearly 3 years old) are playing 'safari' in the garden. This consists of mainly chasing visiting cats, stalking various bird inhabitants, speaking in squeak language to a couple of resident squirrels and generally stomping around the garden with magnifiers hunting a range of mini-beasts. They suddenly decide that this imaginative game is worth extending: Jack thinks they need a safari vehicle and George wants a picnic! Together they plan what they need and ask an adult to help them. The partially written and mainly oral lists consists of a tent, compass, a safari vehicle, biscuits, chocolate buttons, jam sandwiches, orange juice and water, a camera, animal books, and paper and felt pens. Having acquired all the small items in self-selected old ice-cream tubs they rush out to the garden again and requisition the upside-down garden table as a vehicle. Somehow however, this does not suit the current mood and the adult is asked if she can think of a way of 'making this (the table) better'. The table is set upright and covered with two old sheets. Suddenly, transformation for the children: the table becomes both vehicle and tent.

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In the secondary classroom this capacity is readily recognised at exercise level: passing a pullover around a circle and inviting it to be something else is an old favourite. It takes time so you can extend it by having two jumpers, one going in each direction. This can easily develop into a comedy drama, with the teacher reading a narration (keeping an element of control) and the class in pairs or small groups having to use anything they can find to make the various things they need for the story. Quick thinking, vast imagination, speed – therefore no time for arguing – all ensure the class is working with fun and focus and making new working relationships. Their stronger, less cluttered inner selves aged about four are functioning well aged twelve. They have transformed themselves from a negative group identity into a happy creative one and have thus turned a corner.

At the same time the students are engaging in Brecht's theatre, where the audience has to suspend disbelief and immerse itself in a pretend world where a broom becomes a rifle and a smudge of red paste a war wound and one soldier represents an army. Brecht's style of theatre needed much explanation to the adults of the time. Not so to the children: they had always done it this way.

Role play – being another

The boys on safari were having an adventure not as scientists, not as photographers or film makers but essentially as themselves. They knew they needed a make-believe vehicle but they took real chocolate buttons on their journey.

By Key Stage 4, students are expected to be able to work away from the self – adopt another gender or race, and exist in different time and space contexts. 'This is me going shopping in the nursery corner', eventually becomes, 'I am the ghost of Hamlet's father'. This steady growth away from the self – a fine example of the de-centring stages explored by Piaget (1950) – is complex and highly pertinent to the Early Years classroom. What is sometimes overlooked is that it has significant implications for the secondary classroom too. Looking at role in relation to socio-dramatic play allows us to unpick these stages more deliberately.

Socio-dramatic play

Strictly speaking this involves children using child versions of real things to enact social situations. So in the absence of a pedal car, our two safari explorers employed symbolic play and used a table. We too can be flexible over the realness of the props and instead focus on what is happening in terms of role.

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Greta Fine (1984) produced this model to help examine the stages of socio-dramatic play.

- Level One** Children are in pretend situations as themselves
- Level Two** Children are in pretend situations as another
- Level Three** Children are in pretend situations with another
- Level Four** Children are in pretend situations with another playing both parts

Level One – as themselves

We have seen the young child is most often the self in another situation. Instead of being on safari, the boys might have been playing separately, one imitating someone digging the garden, the other in the pedal car going to the shops. The stretch gets more demanding with the skilled assistance of an adult who explains that the digger has been digging in the wrong place or that the car has gone missing from the car park at the supermarket. A skilled nursery nurse can assist in structuring a dilemma which needs collective resolving. 'What will you do with the big hole you have made?' and 'how are we going to manage without a car?' By entering the play, she is offering a bridge into the further levels which we would recognise as akin to Dorothy Heathcote's 'Man in a Mess' model. There are problems which need solving – and the children have to solve them.

In the secondary classroom the parallel can be clearly seen. After a short burst of imitative play activity, we can move onto activities such as, 'in a space on your own, pack a case – you are leaving. Why are you leaving? How do you feel and how does this make you pack? You have too much, something has to be left behind.' The suitcase is symbolic, the role is the self in another situation – but closely known.

Brian Way held that re-defining the group was an essential process for the start of a drama lesson. We can see that finding a space on your own and tapping into early imitative play in warm ups, fulfils precisely that need.

Writing about Way's work, Gavin Bolton observes:

The baby discovers and lives most happily in a simple form of isolation until it is about three years old; it then enjoys ... sharing with one other person; then with two others and so on into smaller groups. Integration within a social unit is a sophisticated and later stage of development, very much dependent on full opportunity for experiencing the other stages... (Bolton, 1998:153).

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Level Two – as another

The next stage or role is often being mummy or daddy (or being the self doing what mummy and daddy do), imitating the behaviour, opinions and language of these people. Household activities like driving – or planning a journey as in the safari example – are seen in play areas in the nursery. Here we might see daddy kicking the car tyres before a journey, and mummy looking in a cupboard and biting her lip as she realises there's no milk. The beginnings of character work are emerging, and parents squirm as they hear their own words and see their own attitudes presented before them.

In the secondary classroom, Stanislavskian study with the copying of another's behaviour through observation bears close resemblance to this play stage. The last activity progresses to, 'now you are your mother/sister/friend packing – they are leaving for entirely different reasons'. Depending on the context of the group, the stretch, having been prepared in a previous lesson, might be further challenged – it could be Anne Frank packing her case, or a stowaway trying to get onto the Titanic. Both the nursery child and their sixteen year-old intellectual sibling are still alone in their respective drama worlds.

How children being in role as self and as other can be seen in the following example.

A class is in role as a group of town planners who have talked to locals about a proposed road. One reports back as the mouthpiece for the group, unsettled on her chair, pencil in mouth, smiling at her friends, focusing on the work, clearly aware of the 'what if' of the situation but essentially presenting as herself in class.

She is doing what is asked of her – she has listened to the group and is reporting back but she is not in role as a reporter. In contrast, a boy plays the part of a man of 80, clearly immersed in the role, not thinking about what this elderly man might see but empathetically seeing it.

Both he and the girl in the drama could be described as being in role but there is a tangible difference in the distance of the roles. Both are clearly getting what they need from the situation. This is a good example of quality differentiation by outcome, though some drama teachers see it as an unconsidered cop out.

(DES Film (1978) *Early Stages*)

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Level Three – with another

So far the drama has been active in the well established basic and known self and known others. Now it has reached the end of the comfort zone, and students are invited to step over that threshold.

In the safari setting one child can see the possibilities of the tent being a vehicle as well, but can he be sure that his co-player can do the same? The imagined world of the individual is to be put to a dramatic test when they enter an imagined world together.

It is in this leap that the drama can often experience difficulties. In the nursery the drama might collapse and rebuild as play is the normal genre of the day for them. 'It's not a car? Okay ...it's a boat!' 'You're not on safari with me? So what are you doing?'...'Okay I will have some tea as well!' (before the chocolate buttons disappear).

A skilled adult might assist this by asking where the vehicle is or how she might get to the other side of the rain forest. Personal observations have provided many examples of how the drama can be resolved in nursery by perhaps becoming a dog, or killing off a character one does not wish to play or have in the drama. The player resurrects herself and becomes another and the play continues. On safari one can become the lion and then, once slain, can return as the other's safari co-partner. We see the multi-role begin to emerge. Cohen and Cohen give this example

Simon pretends to be a captain on a boat ...To attract attention he yells, 'I'm a dead captain – I've got an arrow in there,' pulling up his vest and poking his tummy. 'Let's take the arrow out,' says Christopher. 'Let's leave him till he gets better,' says Mark. However Simon does not like being left alone and announces he is a shark.

(Cohen and Cohen, 1988:184)

For the young there are all kinds of ways of getting into and out of situations. Later on however, embarrassment might set in after one or two failed attempts, as adolescent self-consciousness over the play going wrong can override developments at this vulnerable stage. Drama teachers instinctively place safety nets on the situation: keeping girls as girls, altering the period of the action from the present to the time of their mothers, offering stepping stones for them to use if needed. The teacher might keep the class in role as students of their own age but take them back a hundred years and use teacher in role to maintain the drama impetus by presenting a new angle which can invite a new direction to a slipping drama.

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Others will recognise that they support this delicate transition by using pictures and copying them into freeze frames to appropriate music. They might use visualisation, they might set some research and have imaginative ways of accessing small details from this to form the basis of a meditation type journey into the context. (Again we see Stanislavsky's patterns as the sixth form bring in an object the character might possess.) Essentially this is the same bridge we all had to negotiate years ago in the early years.

Level Four – with another playing both parts

This is the most complex and interesting of stages to observe. If our nursery child is suggesting going to rescue the trapped baby tiger and his friend carries on playing with his car, you might see the parent imitation in action. 'You can drive the car afterwards, this tiger is important.' This may be followed by in role direction, 'come on, hold my hand and we'll go together,' which might be taken up or rejected. Children will know when the response, 'I don't want to rescue a tiger. I want to play with the car,' is in role – whether it is provoking a drama conflict or a real desire to play bricks and not pretend safari rescue.

Sometimes a friend does not know how to join in with the proposed drama and here you will witness a vast array of perceptions and languages being employed at the same time. Take Fleming's example of two children playing doctors. Intermittently a child

...steps outside the drama to direct the action. 'Then you tell the little boy ... then you be the little boy ... tomorrow you are very, very poorly ... then you phone up...' Despite being completely absorbed in the activity there is a full awareness throughout that this is a fiction, being consciously crafted by the participants. (Fleming, 1998:81)

Secondary and primary teachers alike will recognise that this is the stuff that group improvisations are made of. Here the students are providing bridges for each other by offering their own views, metaphors, even providing models to copy in order to keep the group in the shared imagined environment and make sure no one slips away from it. Once this stage is reached, they have assumed the role the teacher was playing in the previous stage as drama rescuer/reinforcer and doing it themselves. The class can manage the complex group dynamics which are both pressurising and easing, feeding and starving, resolving and complicating the drama which now resembles a microcosm of man's dilemma. We have now reached the stage which is recognised as ripe for Dorothy Heathcote's 'Man in a Mess' being explored together. Heathcote used Kenneth Tynan's definition of drama to arrive at this model.

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Good drama ... is made up of the thoughts, the words, the gestures that are wrung from human beings on their way to, or in, or emerging from a state of desperation. (Extracted by Heathcote from Tynan, 1973)

Young nursery dramatists do not shy away from death and suffering. If the teacher goes into role she may join them and work from within, feeding support and challenge as required, or, as Heathcote was known to do, stand back and let them resolve the drama's dilemmas for themselves.

We move towards her famous Mantle of the Expert model, simply but beautifully captured in the BBC Omnibus documentary *Three Looms Waiting* (1971). Here we see a child with special needs slide in and out of role with ease as he pulls his teaching assistant away from the 'fire' to reassure him: 'they were only pretend matches.' He is deeply involved in the drama, but worries in case his assistant fears that he might be really burnt. He can be involved in role at the same time as appreciating that another might not be coping. He designs strategies to deal with that, and then returns to the drama. Within seconds he demonstrates all four levels of socio-dramatic play.

Thematic fantasy play

This occurs when a child essentially mimes the world he exists in. The development is similar and in many respects can go alongside the socio-dramatic play model, though usually realism is what we see first in the nursery, with fantasy and magic coming later when stories and films have had a chance to make an impact. Consequently the need for toy kitchens and cars begins to disappear, replaced by mimed, imagined people, monsters, space-ships and so on.

The following model enables us to recognise some of the examples already given and again to realise consciously exactly what we are doing when we design a lesson that goes well. The direct connections are evident in the context of what has been outlined before in socio-dramatic play. We can superimpose the next layer on socio-dramatic play as here we have the development of what might be seen as more akin to theatre.

Smilansky and Shefatya (1990) offer a developmental model

Imitative role play	Child assumes a make-believe role and uses imitative action/verbalisation
Make believe with regard to toys	Toys and materials are moved around as characters/ 'other' things

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Verbal make believe with regard to actions or situations	Narration substitutes action and situation
Persistence in role play	Maintains role play developmentally for at least ten minutes
Interaction	At least two children play together within the context of the story
Verbal communication	There is dialogue related to the play

Imitative role play

Here comes the imaginative use of language, such as the squeak language, our intrepid heroes used while on safari. With it comes stylised movement – the stealthy creeping up on the animals and taking of photographs. The other supports this by wincing as a footstep is heard or signalling with exaggerated silent panic when a tiger is seen. In the secondary drama classroom we recognise this as the fabric of mime skills. While we might not teach mime separately, we do progress its use. Moving from making a cup of tea to being thrown across the room by a bomb blast are similarly rooted in this essential play skill.

Make believe with regard to toys

We saw earlier how the jumpers were used in a warm-up game and confidence continues to grow as secondary students use lengths of fabric to represent a myriad of things and feelings, such as white silk for a shroud, red net as rage. We take them to see productions like the National Theatre's *A Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1997), where broom handles created the famous broken bridge and also the flowing river.

Verbal make believe with regard to actions or situations

During the process of drama, directions will be given to others. 'Go on, get into the ambulance then!' 'No! Not like that, limp, like this....'

In addition, gobble-de-gook and made-up names for people (Mr Smelly Pots the plumber, for example) abound in the nursery and we have to think about how this translates in our secondary classrooms. It does happen when students are in role as someone far from the self and they use words they have heard but may not understand, or words they have not heard before, when depth of role forces the language out from an unknown somewhere.

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Persistence in role play

The children on safari modelled persistence over two hours. If another is involved, there are more opportunities for the child to explore relationships, issues of gender, status, identities and problem solving. Input can be equal. If alone, exploration is possible but play runs the risk of the safari remaining at the level of chasing next door's cat.

At secondary level we see the foundations of the requirements for GCSE as groups devise work that ensures equal exposure for each candidate and the evolution of democratic ensemble work.

Interaction and verbal communication

Children are using language in possibly more varied modes than their own or that of their parents and teachers, maybe utilising hero language from TV or villain language from stories. The repertoire is opening up choices and the skills required for exploring text work, such as about the ghost of Hamlet's father, are now in place.

We are familiar with certain recurring broad features of role:

Action – driving a car, making a drink, going shopping and so on. The human quality does not matter – the action is what is of importance.

Stereotypical character – the teacher, the policeman, the old lady etc. Their task or mission is what is important.

Fictional character – the super hero, big bad wolf, the prince, the giant, the fairy and so on. Their character, personality, values, philosophy take on importance.

Morgan and Saxton (1987) offer a more detailed model, designed to help teachers categorise the various ways in which children enter the drama.

Dramatic playing	As self in make believe situation
Mantle of the Expert	As self but with special eyes
Role playing	In role representing an attitude or point of view
Characterising	Representing an individual lifestyle, somewhat different from child's own
Acting	Selecting symbols, movements, gestures, and voices to represent a particular individual to others. (Presenting or performing)

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The first four examples are familiar and we can see how when these stages have been worked through, skills seen as theatrical become available to the pupils. Indeed some are already in use.

Games with rules

We tend to avoid these in schools as they are competitive and bring out differences among the students which we are trying to work against. They often involve players being 'out', letting the accumulating rejected children grow in antagonism in the corner while the teacher carries on with the winners. By the time the teacher is ready to start the first drama activity, a resentful pack of disinterested students has formed. Their negative selves have returned and festered while the rest have been playing. Consequently, games need to be used with care or adapted to bring about the success we associate with the imitative play games described.

Take, for example, Grandmother's Footsteps, which can be played slowly, with dressing up options as Trestle Theatre do as an exercise, so the focus is not on winning but on interacting increasingly creatively with the others.

What might we take into secondary from the primary play models?

Secondary practitioners can see how shaping the first fifteen minutes of a lesson, selecting elements of all the above in an appropriate order, can lead us to the openings we need to achieve depth and creativity in our lessons. These stages need not be followed slavishly, but the lesson plan should be evaluated for how well it follows these stages with classes we find challenging. If the first ten minutes of a lesson go well the rest is likely to do so too. We acquire insight into what works and why our fail safe lessons might be so successful.

We can see what the early practitioners' words of wisdom mean for us. A basic formula could look like this:

- a game/activity based on imitation with an element of re-cap
- find a space on your own – in role as yourself
- now as another – moving the self a little further away
- now in a pair – now sharing that otherness with another
- now teacher provides a story/situation and the structure replays swiftly and fluently into the secondary school drama lesson: the whole class is immersed in the drama and another world exists

'THE PLAY'S THE THING...'

Each element can be so disguised that it can take many years of secondary experience to spot this as a formula. Its variations are endless – in a sense it is not a formula at all. If we believe that play is the basis of drama and is innate, it makes sense to use something along these lines to assist planning.

This explains why drama lessons which consisted of 'get into groups and do a play about...' fell flat. Similarly any lesson starting in groups is likely to falter, likewise anything starting with 'come on, you remember where we were last week. Stop fighting and get into role,' or anything starting with dialogue. In life, our ability to communicate verbally comes after much other learning, so it makes sense for dialogue to come later in the lesson, even if only ten minutes later.

...over-teaching what they know already

I leave you with a poignant story.

A group of PGCE Secondary Drama students spent a day with Jo Somervell, a primary drama specialist and leader of the Barking and Dagenham School Centred Initial Training (SCITT) team. In the afternoon she taught a primary class. When telling the story of the minotaur, she touched the children on the shoulder and they got up and instantly became the trees, the minotaur, the king, the queen and so on. They instinctively acted out what was required. She never had to explain what a still image was, neither did she have to ask them. The lesson went on in the same vein when she went into role – they joined in with no need to labour what teacher-in-role meant. The lesson was seamless, rich and challenging. With no hesitation, they engaged and worked with diligence.

A student leaned over to me and whispered, 'I have just realised how much time we waste in secondary schools over-teaching students what they know already.'

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