



A way of working: teachers in drama education

Dramatic learning in the primary school
Shirley Brice Heath & Shelby Wolf



Learning for
Creative Futures

hmm
Creative Partnerships

The series *Dramatic learning in the primary school* tells some of the many stories of partnerships that have increased school children's access to creative learning opportunities in 2003 and 2004. Oral language, strategic thinking and dramatic literacies were the focus of the research on which this series of booklets is based. The on-going study results from the collaboration of Creative Partnerships Durham Sunderland, teachers from Bexhill Primary School, and scholars Shirley Brice Heath and Shelby Wolf, supported through Stanford University (USA) and Brown University (USA).

PUBLISHED BY CREATIVE PARTNERSHIPS
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Charity registration number 1036 733

Creative Partnerships is a joint initiative between the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) funded through Arts Council England.

We would like to thank the Department for Education and Skills for its support for this publication.

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First published 2005
Printed in the United Kingdom
Photography by Keith Pattison
Design and production by Ripe www.ripe.uk.com

Shirley Brice Heath and Shelby Wolf
Dramatic learning in the primary school

Includes four booklets in slipcase:
Have a think about it: drama for mental agility.
It's up to you: drama for emotional health.
What could happen if? drama for learning from others.
A way of working: teachers in drama education.

Includes bibliographical references. 244 pages.

ISBN 0-7287-1069-2

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Teachers in drama education

The lights dim and the curtains part. You're here to see a play that's had one of the longest runs in the history of theatre – "Drama in English Education." It is even older than Agatha Christie's "The Mousetrap." That this is so should be expected. England is known throughout the world for its theatre. Nearly every school child in the English-speaking world comes to know the name of William Shakespeare; many others also become familiar with names such as those of Ben Jonson, Christopher Marlowe and more recently George Bernard Shaw, Noel Coward, Harold Pinter, and, of course, Andrew Lloyd Webber.

But drama education does much more than put the names of great dramatic writers, directors, and actors in the heads of students. Drama education works to bring dramatic texts, stage life, and critical review into children's awareness. From early childhood through the young adult years, learners whose lives include drama education take part in school plays, review the performances of visiting theatre companies, and read the supporting texts that surround dramatic production. Critical in this process are teachers who help make the workings of drama move into the thinking of students.

During the late twentieth century, England became the clear international leader in drama education, providing teachers throughout the English-speaking world with inspiration, professional development, and accessible source materials. Five pioneers in drama education became the fundamental reference: Harriet Finlay-Johnson, Henry Caldwell Cook, Peter Slade, Brian Way, and Dorothy Heathcote (Bolton, 1999). These leaders and other teacher educators (such as Teresa Grainger, 2004), who brought their work directly into the training of future teachers, saw within drama the power to expand students' language, imaginative facilities, observational intensity, and aesthetic sensibilities.

This booklet advocates a more in-depth and integrated approach to drama as part of a teaching and learning strategy.

Still, drama's entry into schools has not always been easy, for with drama can come the perception that only the outsiders – the professional theatre company members – are the essential experts. This series of booklets makes the point that all too often the intersection of drama and education occurs in one-off appearances. On such occasions, actors come, set up their scenery, play their parts, and leave in the wake of the children's applause. This booklet advocates a more in-depth and integrated approach to drama as part of a teaching and learning strategy. Here we highlight the means and benefits of an intense and sustained multi-party exchange among teachers, actors, directors, and administrators at Bexhill Primary School in Sunderland where the creative partnering of adult professionals brought children into expanded membership in the roles of the theatre world – especially those of director, interpreter, and critic.

Based on a recent survey of the arts in English primary schools, when schools turn to drama they tend to rely on outside sources of expertise, drama experts and theatre companies, to come and do the work (Downing, Johnson, & Kaur, 2003). Drama is rarely taught on its own as an arts subject. Moreover, drama almost never finds a sustained identity within those areas that future teachers need to study or that teachers enter during their own continuing professional development. Still, in the very popular Arts Council book, *Drama in schools*, Ashwell and Gouge (2003) suggest:

Well-planned partnerships between schools and local theatre companies are mutually beneficial, offering expertise that could not be otherwise provided. They also offer potential young audiences to the theatre. *Professional theatre artists can make a key contribution to the professional and creative development of teachers. They*

Teachers have to work centre and backstage, in the process of creation and critique, right along with the professional artists.

can provide theatre events/workshops that reflect cultural diversity, promote strong role models, introducing theatre forms and present practice that may be unavailable in individual schools. (p. 27, italics not in the original).

All this is true. Still, the italicised portion of the quote above reflects the issue this booklet addresses: the implied one-way direction of bringing professional theatre artists into schools. Instead, teachers have to work centre and backstage, in the process of creation and critique, right along with the professional artists. In doing so, their expert knowledge of their student and parent populations, goals for learning, and follow-through roles multiply the potential of drama education. While the quote above begins its argument with the notion of how partnerships among schools and theatre companies can be “mutually beneficial,” the rest of the text concentrates on what artists can give to schools, and makes no mention of what teachers and children can give to artists.

This notion of a two-way rather than a one-way street was the subject of *many* conversations at Bexhill Primary School between the spring of 2003 and the end of the school year in 2004. This period of time brought Shelby Wolf, a researcher, into Bexhill to consider with the Teacher Research Team (TRT) ways to bring maximal benefits to the children from intensive work with professional theatre artists. When Lesley Watson, Linda Nesbitt, Clare Moonie, and Rachael Dawson – encouraged by their Creative Partnerships School Co-ordinator Joy Lowther (appointed Headteacher in September, 2004) formed the research team with Shelby, they were determined to expand the experience of drama at Bexhill. But the question was “How?”

They had done the usual school-wide performance, often at Christmas time. But what began as a happy and hopeful “shared

experience” turned into something more directive than the teachers wanted as the day for the performance drew near. Even more problematic, the teachers initially held a view of drama as a set of prescriptive, sequenced drama activities that would take years of training, and they worried whether they would have the time in the context of their very busy teaching lives for such an endeavour. Still, as we have explained through the previous booklets in this series, the teachers *found the time*. They did so by layering drama into numerous other aspects of their thinking and talking with their children. Moreover, they began after-school Drama Clubs that they directed, engaging more and more of the children in the sustained creative learning of drama within their school.

Most important, they created new ways of working with their children. In one of our first meetings, Linda Nesbitt described her role in the Christmas production “nightmare” as a “general shouting out orders.” But less than a year later Linda explained, “The play we did for the Christmas production was the most complicated play I’ve ever done of a production for Key Stage 1 children. And they just took the whole thing over.... They are the performers. It’s their production.”

But how could such a shift come to pass? Joy Lowther, Bexhill’s Headteacher beginning in Autumn, 2004, explains:

When we first started with Creative Partnerships and started on the drama, we chose it because it was so closely related to the speaking and listening skills we were so worried about for our children and also because we thought drama was something we weren’t universally doing – apart from when we did plays and things like that. But the biggest worry for everybody was, “How do we fit it in?” and “Where do we put it?” “How do we find the time?” And I think that the message that came through was that it’s not necessarily something that you put on the end. It’s just something that becomes a way of working.

The teachers found that while they were not “drama experts,” they were experts on their children.

This booklet tells the tale of the Bexhill teachers’ experiences in drama, especially how they learned to work with professional artists and researchers. Through Creative Partnerships, Bexhill had many dramatic artists come through their school doors. Some were excellent and others, though talented, had a harder time communicating their art to children. The teachers found that while they were not “drama experts,” they were experts on their children. After working with a number of artists as well as sharing their insights and concerns with Shelby, the Bexhill teachers began to narrow the field – looking for artists who not only knew how to communicate with children, but who were also eager to learn from the teachers themselves. These artists were invited back for more sessions with their children, and in these cases, the creative partnerships of teachers and artists became true exchanges of expertise.



Where do we begin?

Let's begin at the beginning. When Bexhill first initiated their work with Creative Partnerships, they tried to follow the model described in *Drama in schools*:

Professional theatre in schools is most effective when teachers have made informed choices regarding which company to book, the visit is carefully planned and pupils are encouraged to appreciate it as a special event for which they have been prepared. An uninterrupted performance space should be provided so that pupils and their teachers can focus on the play. Theatre companies provide guidance on the maximum number of pupils for whom the performance has been designed and on how to arrange the performance space. It is essential that actors are given preparation time and that the whole school is aware of the visit. Teachers can get advice regarding which theatre companies to book by contacting local and national arts organisations and LEAs. (Ashwell & Gouge, 2003, p. 28)

Joy Lowther worked hard to contact companies and make informed choices along with her teachers. Indeed, her list of performing artists and upcoming events showed a staggering amount of work with regard to scheduling. Within a two month period, the entire school saw a pantomime of *Sleeping Beauty*, the Year Two children did a four-day drama workshop with a local company, another theatre company came to help the Year One children perform a role play with artefacts from an English Manor, yet another company provided a school-wide performance and then conducted a workshop with the Year Five and Six children, and still another company came to conduct a drama/narrative writing workshop for all the Key Stage 1 children.

Bexhill's teachers realised they had to find effective means of choosing only those artists who would multiply the children's learning.

The time it took to schedule these activities was compounded by the time it took to participate in the performances. For some less than stellar performances, teachers felt keenly a sense of wasting their time and that of the children. Studying the artists' brochures, reading actors' resumes, and even meeting with artists to set up a plan of action took vital time away from joint teacher planning, reviews of new teaching materials, or conference time with individual children. Bexhill's teachers realised they had to find effective means of choosing only those artists who would multiply the children's learning, communicate fully with teachers and children, and enhance awareness of the role of drama within the school community. How could they detect whether or not the artist as described on paper would be just as good in performance, not only as actor on stage but also as director, critic, and learning guide with children and teachers? [Several publications recognise the challenge of bringing teachers and artists together for maximal benefit to all; see especially Hickman, 2000 on special issues across art forms and LIFT, 2003 on the world of theatre.]

In addition, when the teachers met with artists face to face, they often felt intimidated, especially when the artists seemed too busy demonstrating their expertise to listen and to ask questions about ways they might tap into teachers' professional knowledge of children's learning needs. In one conversation with Shelby, the Teacher Research Team discussed their inhibitions:

Rachael: Joy said to me at the beginning of the year, "What sort of people do you want in?" And we had the chance to go to the Exchange Building [Creative Partnerships Durham Sunderland Event in December 2002 bringing schools

and cultural sector representatives together] and have a look around. And I looked, but I didn't know what I was looking for!

Chorus: Right! [Laughter]

Lesley: That was also right intimidating!

Rachael: I didn't know what I was supposed to do.

Lesley: I suppose we were supposed to browse and see what we liked.

Clare: And then it was all very big. Then we were just talking about the ARTS. We weren't sure if it was music or art or drama or –

Chorus: Right! Right!

Clare: We didn't know what we were looking for.

Linda: All these creative people! But I think everyone here – [Pause.] We felt intimidated by them because they were talking at the top, because they wanted to show themselves in the best creative and artistic light.

Lesley: And we were embarrassed.

No programme of sponsorship that advocates for more arts within schools wants teachers to experience intimidation or embarrassment. Nor would artists want to miss the opportunity for learning from teachers and children as they communicate their art. Thus, it is important to ensure that all parties involved in any partnership feel

confident and that appropriate time is allocated to plan and develop any long-term relationship. Many would argue that when a company is brought in to do a couple of workshops, there cannot be time to build in-depth plans or relationships of collaboration. Justifications of short-term or one-off appearances also come with the view that short-term connections cost less and are easier on management. Though both these points are factually accurate, the primary issue turns on the question of goals. If a school is eager to advance the learning of students and to deepen the intellectual grounding of the school community through a 'creative partnership', then long-term relationships are far more cost-effective than short-term appearances.

Research has shown repeatedly that sustained project involvement, in both the arts and sciences, results in arcs of learning that hold and that positively affect motivation and attitude (Heath & Smyth, 1999; Perkins, 1981). As a result, time and context for meaningful conversations between artists and teachers is essential [see LIFT, 2003 for more on the importance of working conversations and joint planning time]. Both groups – artists and teachers – should, on such occasions, review for the other an event or project they judge effective and the needs they feel were met. Through discussion they could review examples of previous work (especially through videotapes) or attend a current performance. Such occasions allow the setting of parameters and a framework of conditions that will meet a range of expressed needs. In this way, teachers have the opportunity to hear actors talk about how they attend to audience response, set goals, and assess their work in education. Professionals from the world of theatre hear teachers talk about learning goals, particular needs of their population of children, and special challenges, such as limited space and time, in the school.

When artists "talk at the top," teachers can feel their professional expertise squeezed out. If artists ask them no questions about their needs, hopes, and constraints, teachers feel shut out of any meaningful role in the work of learning through the arts within the life

of a school community. Equally, if a teacher fails to engage with the artists about the nature of the practice, they too run the risk of limiting the creative and professional impact offered by the artist. Teachers and artists must have common ground from which to build a shared programme based on bringing together the local needs of the children as interpreted by teachers and the particular expertise in drama of the artists. Such common ground is often established only when theatre companies have had extensive experience working not only in professional drama but also within education. While it is easy to assume shared goals, building these together goes directly to the heart of a truly creative partnership. At Bexhill, teachers found in their first months of visiting theatres, reviewing artists' portfolios, and interviewing theatre groups, that they had to learn to bring their skills and knowledge to the table right along with those of the actors and directors.



The need for a framework

After working with a number of artists throughout the academic year of 2002 – 2003, the Bexhill teachers knew what they wanted from artists: respect, a willingness to listen, sustained role-modelling, and strong communication skills off-stage as well as on-stage. Upon reflection, Rachael bemoaned the fact that she had not earlier been able to formulate what she later learned she needed and would come to expect from artists. She thought back to the time she and the other teachers went to the artists' showcase: "If I went back tomorrow, I'd be looking for drama-based activities that were going to fit in with my goals. And I could ask actual questions. But then I couldn't even ask any questions because I didn't know what I was asking!"

Therefore, while it is true that as the months of working with artists moved forward, Bexhill teachers learned most from the successful artists, they also learned a great deal from the less-than-effective exchanges. One theatre company had sent an actor to work with the Year Two children and teachers. Lesley, Linda, and Joy sat down with him and tried to communicate their children's needs. They thought they were clear in their expectations, but the experience turned out to be a catastrophe:

Linda: I thought of one thing Shelby has talked about – that drama needs to have a framework. And he didn't. There was no framework at all. In the discussions we had with him, we offered advice about the children, because we knew the children and he didn't. We said, "These children need things like character cards. They need the *scaffolding*." So this was why I was pleased when you said that drama is actually quite a discipline. I think we were quite specific, but he just didn't take this on board at all.

Shelby: You're absolutely right. Drama is never a free for all. It's not just open play. It's very guided. It's very structured.

Joy: It reminded me of somebody running a summer school. You know like summer school activities to –

Lesley: To *occupy* the kids rather than teach them.

Joy: Still, we didn't want to hurt the artist's feelings, and we thought maybe we didn't know enough about drama to criticise.

Lesley: So we sat back a bit and thought, "We can't really talk about something that we know very little about." But the more it went on, the more we actually realised we knew more than we had thought. We became more confident. Not being horrible, but saying, "Well, that isn't what we actually want." All teachers want is the bones of the technique or the method. Obviously as teachers you adapt everything, and of course, with every different class, you adapt as well. But you need that original framework. A lot of people who come in don't give you that, do they? It's like they steam in and do it and walk away, and you're left thinking, "What was the process there?"

The point made here about character cards may seem surprising to some, but teachers know the memory and experience levels of their children and ways to bring them comfortably into new experiences. Educational experts unanimously agree that scaffolding such experiences for children improves their emotional support for new kinds of learning and thereby increases their retention. Soon character cards are no longer needed. It is important to remember (as indicated in the booklet *It's up to you: drama for emotional health*) that

Within the world of the imagination, it is the rules, in fact, that drive the play and offer possibilities for taking on alternative perspectives.

teachers agreed that Bexhill children needed substantial work to enable them to enter into the head of another character. Having created their own Drama Clubs in Year Two and Year Five as well as conducted numerous drama activities in their own classrooms throughout the year, the Bexhill TRT well understood the very structured nature of drama.

Within the world of the imagination, often thought to be free of regulation, it is the rules, in fact, that drive the play and offer possibilities for taking on alternative perspectives (Wolf, 1994). And because the Bexhill teachers had grown tremendously in using critique as a constant for all their drama work [see the booklet *Have a think about it: drama for mental agility*], they were beginning to critique the professional artists as well. As Lesley suggested, "Not in a horrible way;" still, if they were going to invest time and money into these events, they expected considerable outcomes.

Ironically, the same day Shelby sat in on this conversation with the TRT, another artist was working with the Year Four students. From her opening conversation with this artist, Clare later reported that she sensed the approach being used lacked essential qualities she and the other teachers had come to expect from artists. Clare noted that the artist had insisted the children learn their lines "from the top":

They've got to learn their lines and just repeat them over and over and over again until they memorise them. Then they go the next bit, and they gradually build it up and up and up until by this afternoon they know the whole play, and they perform it. So I'm hoping that there are going to be more opportunities for the children to use their bodies and actually act. Otherwise it sounds very stilted. You know?

Drama is never a robotic repetition of lines; instead, it is an opportunity to discover the meanings that lie behind words, meanings that affect the lives of human beings.

[The TRT agreed.] So I'm hoping she's going to be giving them direction and "Well, what could you be doing here?" and "How should you be holding yourself there?" and a lot of that kind of drama work. Otherwise, I think it's going to be a bit dry.

In their own work, the teachers had come to appreciate that drama, while carefully structured, also gave children ample freedom within the frame. As we demonstrated in the booklet *It's up to you: drama for emotional health*, children who are *engaged* in drama consider choices and make decisions, use their bodies to communicate character, vary their vocal quality to convey motivation and intention, and develop empathy not only for characters, but also for the ensemble of peers working and playing together. Drama is never a robotic repetition of lines; instead, it is an opportunity to "read implications" (Heathcote, 1980) – to discover the meanings that lie behind words, meanings that affect the lives of human beings.





Creating our own frame

In their own attempt to discover the meanings behind critical words in drama, Joy Lowther and the TRT asked Shelby to create a framework that would highlight key aspects of drama in education at Bexhill. If they were trying to track how their children grew over time in drama, what might they look for? Might it be in the changes they noted in their special needs children? As Lesley Watson explained, “Children who have a hard time in literacy and numeracy, are often fantastic in drama. Maybe they have a hard time reading, but their expression is brilliant. It’s lovely to see them feeling good about themselves.” Thus, would it be in something the children said and *how* they said it? Could it be in their use of facial expression and gesture? Could it possibly be in their special arrangements with parents so they could attend Drama Club? Might it be in their willingness to engage in critique? In the end, what mattered to the Bexhill children was all of this and more.

Based on the data Shelby and the TRT collected – including observations and audio recordings of the children and teachers engaged in drama in their classrooms and Drama Clubs as well as in interaction with professional artists – they created a document entitled “The Language of Drama at Bexhill.” This piece went through several iterations and in individual as well as joint meetings with Shelby, all TRT members contributed their ideas, added additional categories, and suggested other examples. Together, the team decided to put the “Language of Literacy” in the centre of the framework, for their children’s growth in literacy was central to the decision to bring drama to Bexhill in the first place. Then the team surrounded literacy with the four largest categories of growth – the Languages of Commitment, Collaboration, Character, and Critique.



The language of drama at Bexhill

Commitment

Engagement (a willingness to participate in the activities, to listen, attend, & give positive comments):

"I like this play!"

"Could we play it again, miss?"

Volunteering (instead of being asked to do it):

"Can I do it?! Can I have a turn?"

"I'd like to be the wicked witch this time."

"And I'll be the judge."

Volunteering critique: "I have some ideas on how to improve it! What if they..."

Inviting other children to join in drama activities:

"Can they join the Drama Club too?"

Choosing drama over other activities: "I know I could go to the youth club, but I'd rather be in Drama Club."

"My mum couldn't pick me up today, so I asked my Nan if she would."

Challenging gender stereotypes:

"It's the sort of environment they come from. Really, it's even difficult for the boys to go to a Drama Club. Some dads are very, 'That's not something lads do.' So they've got to be very careful now. It's brave for the boys to even join the club."

"The boys don't want to be girls, but with the SRT because the boys are near 11, and they've got to think of their image now. They're very happy to take on the role of the queen. So the boys of our age say, 'Oh, well there's no problem then.' And then they do it as well."

Collaboration

Ensemble (spirit of an acting troupe or company):

"We can do this together."

"I'll help you."

Recognising children's strengths:

"Why doesn't Liam take this part? He'd be good!"

"Children who have a hard time in literacy & numeracy, are often fantastic in drama. Maybe they have a hard time reading, but their expression is brilliant. It's lovely to see them feeling good about themselves."

Overlapping talk and finishing each other's sentences:

"Because if someone came and ate your house up, you'd sure punish them, wouldn't you?"

Chorus: "No!"

"But why would you make your house of sweets?"

"Good question!"

Effective work with members of the Student Research Team (SRT):

"The SRT would look at what the children were doing and offer a way to improve it. It wasn't threatening at all for the children."

[In frozen moments] "they would go around and be tweaking the Y2 children's heads and saying, 'Now look to the audience.'" [While the SRT members have been busy with their own work], "but even in just a drop-in session there and again, they were very, very useful."

"They're role modeling all the time.... And they're so serious about their role, and they feel responsible. They're very caring in bringing the children round to what they're doing."

Literacy

Extending vocabulary (from written texts they perform & class discussions):

"Dastardly!"

"I'll receive it via the internet."

"I think 'selfish' is when you just think it's me, me, me, me, me."

Extending technical vocabulary of narrative:

"I'm drawing an evil character."

"In the fairy tale genre, the children always go into the woods, don't they?"

Extending theatre vocabulary (play scripts, cast, actors, scene):

"Freeze and ACTION!"

"Let's think about the first scene."

Seeing the author's or illustrator's point of view:

"I think he illustrated it so you'd hate the stepmother. He made her so greedy."

Understanding the more subtle aspects of text in terms of comprehension & inferencing:

Analysing the sentence, "Although he didn't have a penny to spare and his clothes were ragged and torn, Ben felt so lucky. The sun was shining and the birds were singing. How could anybody be unhappy on a day like this?"

Growing literacy skills:

Increased fluency in reading during repeated rehearsals.

Expanded verbal explanation and written expression in discussion & actors' journals.

Character
<p>Seeing the character’s point of view (pronoun shifts or character analysis beyond the lines): “I need me cigarettes. And I didn’t forget the children. I was just busy with me housework.” “Why does he want to know where those three little pigs are?” “He wants to eat them all up!”</p> <p>Acting beyond the parts with action (eye gaze, gestures): “Without much to do, all the kings became princes.”</p> <p>Building entire scenes beyond what’s given in the written text: “He was lying down and a rich person came along and said, ‘Are you poor?’ because he was lying in a box. And he said, ‘Yes.’ He said, ‘I’m rich and you can have some of my money.’”</p> <p>Vocal & physical expression (using voice, face, and gestures): While one enters with little physical indication of character, another enters as a witch with a grim look, rubbing her hands with relish. “Silence in the court!” a boy shouts with a stern look.</p> <p>Asking appropriate questions for the story and the character in hot seating: “If you’re so poor, how come you have money for cigarettes?”</p> <p>Comparing characters and story elements: “What if Queen Cinderella was an evil character?” “She’d be like the evil stepmother in Snow White.”</p>

Critique
<p>Hypotheticals (If...then...; I would; You could... Language that shifts you into what might or could happen): “Couldn’t he wear his roller blades through the whole show?” “If he did, he might have trouble getting up and down the stairs.”</p> <p>Mental state verbs (words that show what the child is thinking or feeling): “The stepmother said, ‘Why would I want my children dead?’ I think she’s innocent.”</p> <p>Looking for improvement (assessing what’s happened and seeking positive change): “The first time we did it, I said my lines too slow. I think I should speed it up in the middle.” “When they get married, they could link arms.”</p> <p>Audience awareness (understanding the play from the audience’s point of view): “We’ve got to be quieter on the stairs. If we don’t, the audience won’t be able to hear the actors on stage.” “We have to speak in a Level 4 voice.”</p> <p>Teachers’ modeling of drama: When Rachael played the role of the stepmother. When Linda expanded on her children’s interpretations.</p> <p>Teachers’ skill in critiquing artists: “It reminded me of somebody running a summer school to—” “To occupy the kids rather than teach them.”</p>

Under each of these larger categories, the TRT and Shelby created smaller subcategories with examples from the data they collected. For instance, in the booklet *Have a think about it: drama for mental agility*, we discussed Rachael and her Year Five children's stepmother trials. The children's discussions around the story of *Hansel and Gretel* (Brothers Grimm, 1981) demonstrated their growing understanding of the "language of literacy," as they discussed the intentions of the authors as well as those of the illustrator, Anthony Browne. The children also demonstrated their growing ability to use the technical terms of narrative – discussing typical patterns in the genre, for characters in fairy tales often go "into the woods."

In addition, the children reflected their growth in understanding the "language of character" as they tried to discern the stepmother's motivation for abandoning her children in the forest. They used stern looks and loud voices as they played the judge and shouted, "Silence in the court!" And as members of the jury, they asked appropriate as well as tough questions of the stepmother: "If you're so poor, how come you have money for cigarettes?"

As they questioned the stepmother/witch and watched their peers' performances, the children also moved into the "language of critique." When the children and their teacher first began their courtroom dramas, the children declared any and all stepmothers guilty, no matter how well the child playing the role of stepmother answered the judges' questions or justified her choices. But as the children watched trials over time and as Rachael reminded them to think about the *acting* and not just the *character in the story*, they became more reflective. They even found one or two of the stepmothers innocent. Rachael explained, "It just kept getting better. In the beginning, even though the character portrayed herself as innocent, they just said she was guilty. But by the end they were starting to think carefully about 'Well, have they done a good job of defending themselves?'"

The "Language of Drama" framework clarified the criteria the teachers hoped professional artists would meet when they came to work at Bexhill.


Creating their own framework for tracking children's language growth over time in terms of literacy, commitment, collaboration, character, and critique helped the TRT tune into the specifics of drama. The process also highlighted features that they wanted to push further as they worked with their children. They now knew that they wanted to encourage more vocal and physical expression of character and that if they were willing to model these forms of expression and ways of thinking, their children would soon follow suit. They understood the benefits of discussing character intention and motivation, even if doing so meant spending time discussing the significance of a single sentence. And they grew to value the power of constructive critique, for weighing choices and debating alternatives often led to a better performance. Ultimately, the "Language of Drama" framework clarified the criteria the teachers hoped professional artists would meet when they came to work at Bexhill.



Creative Partnerships

Shelby's first visit to Bexhill coincided with a workshop conducted by Theatre Cap-a-Pie with Rachael's Year Five Drama Club to create a play in a week. Cap-a-Pie is a professional theatre company specialising in work with young people. Three members of the company – Mark Labrow, Jez Arrow, and Ian Dowson – conducted the workshop, and the TRT and Shelby were able to observe them in action on the final two days of the week, which included the children's final rehearsals and performance for the school.

The teachers were impressed with the actors; Mark, who served as the main director, especially drew their attention. In conversations with Shelby, the TRT noted ten key features of the learning environment he created through his directorial language. These features appear in the box below and reflect the close integration of thinking, planning, observing, and articulating that the TRT wanted their children to develop. Essential here is the sense of *learning environment*: all members are included and all help sustain the learning life within.



- **Demonstration**
- **Technical Terminology**
- **Collaboration in Ensemble**
- **Constant Thread of Reminders**
- **Critique as Companions**
- **Focus on Observation**
- **Permission for Errors, Accidents, & Retries**
- **Incremental Direction Giving**
- **Directions in a Funnel**
- **Children as Actors**

Mark emphasised “ensemble” with comments about how critical it was to be “sensitive and give space” to other players.

- 1) **Demonstration:** Mark demonstrated and modelled possibilities from which the children could build or which they could imitate. For example, he demonstrated shifts in intonation to model vocal characterisation and provided possible gestures to accompany changes in mood or emotion. “Try it like this,” he called and then took on the angry tones of a mum and dad in disagreement or bent his back like an old lady.
- 2) **Technical terminology:** Mark brought the children into the world of theatre through his use of technical terms. He showed them – demonstrated in context – how terms such as “scene,” “resolution,” “improvise,” “blocking,” “cue,” and “upstage” make up the building blocks of the world of the theatre.
- 3) **Collaboration in ensemble:** Mark emphasised “ensemble” with comments about how critical it was to be “sensitive and give space” to other players. In addition, he asked for constant awareness, not just of the children’s individual responsibilities, but for the performance as a whole with comments like, “We’ve got to work as a team. All right? Each player must be cognisant of what the others are doing. Being aware of every aspect of the performance is the name of the game.”
- 4) **Constant thread of reminders:** Mark provided what might be thought of as a thread or rope of reminders that the children could pick up in order to hold onto their sense of being within the world of theatre. He narrated what he was interpreting from their actions to show *why* their characters were taking certain actions and *how* they were feeling. Without introducing the

While Mark used abundant praise to encourage the children, he did not shy away from critique.

technical term *dramaturg*, he modelled the work of a dramaturg by interpreting how the scene was being seen or felt in his head. He asked the children to do the same with questions to focus their thinking in this direction: “How are you feeling?” and “What’s your reaction?” His reminders served to keep all members of the company within an ongoing feedback loop.

- 5) **Critique as companion:** While Mark used abundant praise to encourage the children, he did not shy away from critique. He focused on what “worked” and what didn’t. For example, in the play, the “mum” and “dad” characters argue. Mark asked the young actors to improvise a conversation where they would attempt to patch up their fight. He turned to the mum and asked, “What *could* you say?” The child playing mum offered up a rather convoluted statement about “How are we going to keep from fighting?” but the wording was more complicated. Mark listened with a thoughtful expression and then requested, “Try and word that in a different way.” The boy playing the dad then produced a statement that included a focus on the “relationship,” of the mum and dad. Mark again listened carefully, repeated the boy’s words, and then *built* on it to suggest a set of ways that the two young actors might further demonstrate their relationship through physical movements.
- 6) **Focus on observation:** Throughout his interpretations and critiques, Mark emphasised opportunities to *say it and see it!* He asked the children to verbalise their thinking about what would happen in a scene with comments like “At the end of that, what happens?” After the children responded verbally, he’d say, “Let’s see it.” Or “Okay, let’s take a look at that.” In this way, the children looked, considered, and then reshaped what they had

Mark's directions were analogous to a funnel.

seen into verbal expression. Only then did they act on it. This chain of look, consider, rethink, say, and then *do* mirrors the essence of good habits for planning not only in academic work but also in career and interpersonal pursuits.

- 7) **Permission for errors, accidents, and retries:** Throughout Mark's work with the children, he reflected a strong sense that accidents and mistakes were occasions for learning that sometimes turn out to be more productive than just "getting it right." This feature of the learning environment around drama enabled even the shyest children and those with special needs to step forward, enter the negotiations about possible ways to work a scene, and then step back and look at what unfolded. Mark helped the children internalise the idea that if what they were trying did not work, they could step back in and change it again. Attending closely to what was happening before them helped the children realise that within theatre, the uninhibited move or glance or inflection to a line of text can sometimes be the tip-off to a more subtle interpretation.
- 8) **Incremental direction giving:** Mark provided instructions that grew in complexity and layering of meanings. He did not begin with all the moves, emotions, and steps possible, but he unfolded these in response to the ongoing work of the group. His clarity of language revealed how the children could assess alternatives in terms of the effects they wanted to achieve. In one directorial comment, he asked that the dad move closer to the mum and, of course, he gave the because – including "You're making up. You're closer now. You wouldn't be so far away at this point." Then, in a subsequent direction, he asked the dad and mum to look at each other. He said, "Try and make

eye contact together." But, again, he explained the *why*, holding to his constant focus on motivation and character intention.

- 9) **Directions in a "funnel":** The TRT and the SRT (see the booklet *What could happen if? drama for learning from others*) picked up on Shelby's characterisation of Mark's directions as analogous to a funnel. In the beginning days of rehearsal, he gave broad open suggestions and asked open-ended questions. But as the final day of performance approached, he offered clear ideas and directions, asking questions that contained no ambiguities. As the rehearsals progressed, Mark stressed that there had to be an agreement among all that "This is what we're going to do." By closing rehearsals, the scene must be set, in order to ensure that the performers felt secure in the context in which they were to move and communicate. If the children knew firmly the specifics of the stage blocking as well as the line interpretations, facial expressions, and gestures of their fellow actors, the performance would not only be more predictable but also more polished.
- 10) **Children as actors:** Mark's directing never sounded reduced or elementary, as if he were talking down to the children. Instead, he treated them as actors. He set the tone by explaining that he was an actor, and he expected the children to think and act like actors as well. He constantly reminded them of their new position, explaining that the technical vocabulary they would use, the theatre rules they would follow, and the ensemble they would create were "the kinds of things that real actors do."

As the TRT discussed all the features of Mark's directorial language, they had little critique, for they were clearly impressed. However, a few ideas emerged that served as the impetus for further discussion. Joy was very concerned that in their initial negotiations with Theatre

“Theatre companies provide guidance on the maximum number of pupils for whom the performance has been designed....” However, both sides of this recommendation have to be considered.

Cap-a-Pie, the actors had set a minimum for the number of children they would work with – fifteen. After some negotiation, they agreed to work with twenty, but they would take no more, and this limit proved to be difficult for Joy. If the actors worked with only fifteen students, others in Rachael’s class would need to have a teacher with them.

Drama in schools makes clear that, “Theatre companies provide guidance on the maximum number of pupils for whom the performance has been designed....” (Ashwell & Gouge, 2003, p. 28). However, both sides of this recommendation have to be considered. If bringing professional actors into the school means hiring cover teachers to be with the pupils who are not included, then the school has not only budget matters to consider, but also the imbalance in experience with drama among students that may affect the teacher’s ability to integrate drama intensively into the curriculum. Early negotiations between teachers and professional actors have to work through compromise, always with the consideration that once the actors have gone, teachers and children will have the on-going responsibility of sustaining drama in creative and productive ways in their classrooms.

Shelby raised two additional issues. Although she very much admired the improvised play-in-a-week format, she wondered if choosing a specific text and providing a script might be a better choice since the TRT had emphasised that they wanted drama to help the Bexhill children with their *literacy* skills. Though improvisation brings improved practice in rapid thinking, spontaneity, and coordinated looking and listening, work with written scripts carries other values. Thus the ideal combination for advancing children’s language learning

and understanding of the interdependence of verbal and visual attentiveness in drama comes through deep experience in both improvisation and script-reading and interpretation. Literacy skills advance as students work with written scripts and embody the words from the page. Such work deepens the memory of the specialised vocabulary and phrasing of dramatic texts and enables children to understand how speaking and acting written words demand full attention to character, plot, and theme development.

Shelby raised a further issue beyond that of the value of written scripts in her discussion with the teachers. She asked about the possible future inclusion of the Drama Club teachers directly in the work of the professional actors. The teachers – particularly Rachael who ran the Year Five Drama Club – had been more observers than co-workers in the production. In terms of their own professional development, the TRT had gained much from watching such effective professional artists, but would their growth have been heightened had they been invited into the process?

In the months to come, the TRT took up this possibility with devoted attention to its effects on them as teachers and on their pupils. When Rachael arranged to have Theatre Cap-a-Pie return the following year, she and Joy asked them to work with the entire Drama Club, which had expanded in size to over 30 children, and Cap-a-Pie agreed. In addition, at Rachael’s request the Cap-a-Pie players had written a special script called “A Bexhill Midsummer Night’s Dream,” which Mark Labrow and Gordon Poad (Theatre Cap-a-Pie) adapted from Shakespeare, while adding several modern and humorous bits. These changes came through the collaborative process of reviewing goals and effective techniques of the past year. Thus, although the acting company arrived with a full draft of the script, they demonstrated the process of revision throughout their work at the school. As they and the children came up with different ideas for the performance, they typed revisions into their laptop and then printed out new pages that included the changes worked out by the

This on-the-spot incorporation of the ideas from the children and the teachers validated a fundamental code of respect that underlies effective learning environments: all of us together can create improvement.

full group. This on-the-spot incorporation of the ideas from the children and the teachers validated a fundamental code of respect that underlies effective learning environments: all of us together can create improvement.

Finally, and perhaps most important, the Cap-a-Pie players agreed to come for a week to jumpstart the play, but they worked closely with Rachael in the process. After a week of work, the roles had been assigned, and the group had about half the play blocked and rehearsed. They took the risk of putting on a performance-in-progress for a few classes in the school to show what they had accomplished thus far. In addition, this sharing enabled other children to see in the final performance the effects of rehearsal, practice, revision, and growth of expertise over time. Moreover, these occasional infusions of the work of the Drama Club sent a clear message throughout the school that working in drama was normal, on-going, and very much a part of the learning life of Bexhill's culture.

After the departure of the Cap-a-Pie players, Rachael took the leadership to work on completing development of the play by the Drama Club with a final performance deadline still over two months away. However, once again the Cap-a-Pie players showed their sense of mutual accommodation in collaboration. During the weeks of rehearsal, Mark and Gordon returned for two full-day visits to collaborate with Rachael to continue to raise the level of performance. In addition, Mark returned on several Drama Club nights to give an extra boost. His commitment, collaboration, and flexibility indicated his understanding of shared professional roles.

While the children and Rachael found it at times less immediately motivating and more challenging to work from the complex script

(which contained long speeches and much Shakespearian language), Rachael felt that the rewards for persevering paid off in her pupils' increased engagement with the text as well as their heightened feelings of self-worth when they brought the play to final performance.

From an administrative point of view, Joy explained that now Cap-a-Pie is "asking us advice about projects they're thinking of doing. How would that work with a school? You know, trying to get the background on what schools will or will not do. And what's going to be useful for schools?" Furthermore, six Bexhill children were selected for a collective ensemble of children from local schools, and Joy was pleased with Cap-a-Pie's willingness to take these pupils "further down the drama road." Bexhill had reached a sense of exhilaration through their achievement of true multi-party collaboration in drama education.

The Year Two Drama Club teachers – Lesley Watson and Linda Nesbitt – also worked closely with an artist they admired, Bethany Corlett, a Performing Arts Specialist. These Drama Club leaders had observed Bethany at work, listened to her use of language with children, and considered how she might work with them and their children to meet their needs and goals. Lesley and Linda determined that Bethany would be an effective creative partner in their work on language and learning with very young children. She asked them questions, referred to their bodies of knowledge, and indicated an attitude of wanting to grow together in the work ahead. The judgment of the teachers about Bethany proved to be correct. Linda discussed their collaboration:

She is very, very, very gentle. At first I was worried because she didn't have a lot of experience with young children, and she was nervous. But she settled in. And she was very well planned. She had a structure, but there was room for manoeuvre within the structure. She gave us activities and

Ensemble is a group endeavour that is marked by close coordination and sustained commitment to quality process and product.

ideas that I'm sure are pretty basic, and anybody who is involved with drama would know them, but we didn't know them! What was good was that she wasn't threatening to us because we aren't drama experts at all. We could work *with* her. You know if she were taking credit and saying, "Here I am! I'm your drama expert. And this is what we're going to do," that would be hard. Instead, she works *alongside*.

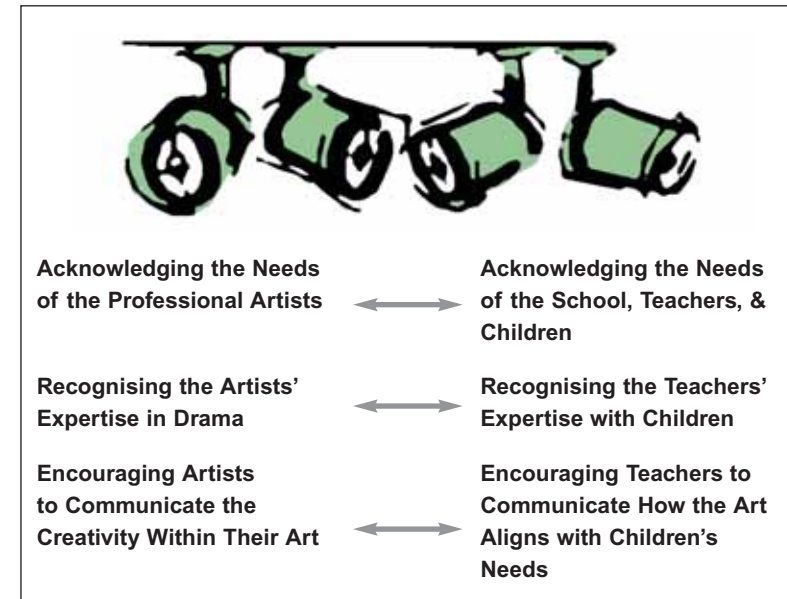
I think this has been a *partnership* because we were able to help *her* become more settled and more confident with the age of the children. I think this was why it was gratifying as well because you knew it was a two-way street. She was really receptive because she would ask us at the end how did we think it went. And she was *concerned* to hear our opinion. She wanted to know. She was evaluating her own work, but asking us our opinion.

In their work with drama, teachers Mandell and Wolf (2003) talk about the necessity of keeping central to the work of drama the concept of *ensemble*, a group endeavour that is marked by close coordination and sustained commitment to high quality process and product. These teachers and drama educators suggest that "a student is a good ensemble member when a balance is struck between volunteering to participate [and] encouraging others to participate, having the confidence to take risks [and] trusting others to help in risky situations" (p. 34) as well as several other dual abilities. Bexhill's experience with Cap-a-Pie and Bethany Corlett proves the approach achieved through ensemble to be intensely supportive in sustaining the power of drama within creative learning environments. The illustration below spotlights the back-and-forth

Only by a conjoining of professionals will the full benefits of drama as an approach to creative learning be realised.

give-and-take duo of abilities that need to be in balance in successful creative partnerships that work in ensemble.

Ashwell and Gouge (2003) suggest, "Professional theatre artists can make a key contribution to the professional and creative development of teachers" (p. 27). But the reversal of this statement is equally critical. No drama education effort within a school should proceed without ensuring that the areas of professional expertise of teachers hold full recognition by all involved. Only by a conjoining of professionals will the full benefits of drama as an approach to creative learning be realised.





Summary

Another creative partnership at Bexhill was the collaboration between the Teacher Research Team and Shelby Wolf, the researcher on site. Quite simply, Shelby's role was to support the TRT in defining their goals in relation to drama as an effective learning process. This meant that she gathered evidence on the impact of this approach in relation to children's learning and growth. She looked particularly at children's movement within the teachers' targeted areas of concern – language development, critique, empathetic maturity, mental agility, and confidence in group performance. From the many observations and audio recordings of children, teachers, and artists engaged in drama as well as multiple conversations together, the Bexhill TRT decided to put literacy at the centre and surround this key curricular concept with commitment, collaboration, character, and critique.

In our final conversation as the research came to a close, Shelby asked the TRT to talk about how things were going. Linda was unfortunately absent that day, but her Year Two Drama Club partner, Lesley, began the discussion:

Lesley: Our focus is on character and trying to help the children put themselves in the characters' shoes. And Linda's also trying it out in her classroom in literacy, and so it feeds into the way the literacy plan is this half term, for it's about characters and drama, which allows her to have a double push. And the Year Two Drama Club is really well attended. They're really keen and very, very attentive, and really positive about what we're doing.

Joy: The message that I've been getting from Linda is that everything's falling into place. She seems to know where she wants to go with drama and what she wants to get

out of it. And they did so well with the play that they worked on for Christmas to the extent that they seemed to learn so much about drama. In fact, that's what I've noticed about *all* the children.

Shelby: In what way?

Joy: They *talk* about drama.

Lesley: They're not just following instructions anymore. They're realising they've actually got some *control* in the performance. In the past it was, "Right. You stand there, and you say such and such, and then you go off." And they all did what they were told. But I think now they're becoming what we wanted. They're becoming more critical. They're saying, "Could we not do this?" And "I think it would be better if we did that." They're just volunteering these bits of information. They're having more input and realising that it isn't just something that the teacher knows as a prescriptive idea. They've got opportunities for feedback.

Joy: Yes, and even when we had a pantomime in school last week, I spent most of my time watching the kids watching the pantomime. And what I noticed is that the children were so much more involved, almost as if they were anticipating what was going to happen on the stage. In this pantomime, there were four actors and they were doing about ten roles. And in the past the kids wouldn't have been as aware, I don't think, of all the ins and outs of that. But they were very much so. And particularly Linda's class. I was sitting beside them. And they were really, really into that pantomime in such a

The Year Two Drama Club children have "become more critical participants and viewers of what's happening... It's becoming the norm for them."

big way. And in Rachael and Clare's classes they were doing news reports on the pantomime. The things they were doing in Year Five, watching the actors before the play went up, were really advanced. And the children were confident and competent.

Shelby: In my earlier visits we've talked many times about how important it is to engage your children in critique. And from what Joy's saying, in watching the children's faces in the audience, you can sort of see them thinking in a more critical way. Or is this not the case?

Lesley: Certainly with the Year Two Drama Club, I think they've become more critical participants and *viewers* of what's happening. It's not a negative thing. It's more like, "Well, I think they could have done this." Or "I would like to try that instead." And it isn't something you're having to prompt. It's becoming the norm for them.

Embedded within their reflections of the previous months of work in drama education, the TRT include the core conditions of learning that reinforce later language learning as well as competent interpretation of written texts.

- **Experience** in playing and examining a range of characters through different roles
- **Responsibility** for direction and control over the work of creating, interpreting, and critiquing
- **Interpretation** through meaningful roles of concrete actions and abstract concepts
- **Sustained observation** of work-in-progress
- **Direct engagement** with ensemble process toward public performance
- **Voluntary participation** with critique as a natural part of learning

As Joy watched the children throughout the year, she was consistently impressed with the quality of their attentiveness. She noted that a year ago in a pantomime, the children would have certainly *enjoyed* the show, but now they seemed to be taking in the production in quite different ways. They appeared to be evaluating it, looking for how the four actors juggled ten roles effectively, and anticipating the next plot point.

Though it is difficult to watch a group of children watching and to know what they are thinking, Joy's conclusions from her observations of the children were confirmed by evidence the teachers had collected. In both the Year Two and Year Five Drama Clubs as well as in their classrooms, the TRT members had seen their children move from passively waiting for the teacher or the professional artist to tell them what to do to volunteering thoughts, making suggestions, trying on roles and trying out ideas. They were more "confident and competent" even in more demanding tasks, for now they were not expected to be "mere" spectators or audience members. Instead, they took on the role of journalists, critics, future directors, or set designers, studying the

production with a more critical eye. This kind of critique was not something the teachers needed to prompt. As Lesley suggested, "It's becoming the norm for them."

Drama was becoming the norm for the teachers as well. In the spring of 2003, as our research began, each member of the TRT expressed some scepticism. They were worried about the additional time and training the project might involve. Fifteen months later, they found their inclusion with the professional actors in the process of drama education had meant something very different. Rather than a crippling addition to their workload, drama became *a way of working*. This way of working was, however, not just one they felt important to keep for themselves and their school.

Indeed, the TRT was adamant that one of the things they hoped would come out of our work together would be this booklet on *A way of working: teachers in drama education*. Lesley explained,

Lesley: What happens is if you say to other teachers, "Do this!" They'll see it as numeracy or literacy, and they'll be, "Oh, no! Another initiative." It's just too much. But if it becomes just a technique in your normal everyday lessons, then it's not like a whole new system that you're putting in. It's just that your delivery's different.

Joy: Indeed, it's something to get really excited about, so you want to do drama lessons. But it's this idea of using drama techniques in other lessons in the way that you talk to children and expect children to respond that could make a big difference. At the end of the day, how can we develop it so it becomes more universal?

Shelby: So it's not an "add on," but a push through in every part of your curriculum, especially in the ways teachers talk with children?

Teachers need to know that there are options and possibilities in drama.

Lesley: Right! We don't want this prescriptive thing like "Now, we're all going to teach drama, and you're going to do this and this and this." In the end, things like that are always scrapped and changed. It's another load of paperwork, isn't it? It's another load of videos you've got to watch and techniques you've got to learn. And what you want to say to teachers about drama is, "It's *not* going to be hard work. It's going to be fun. And you're going to get something out of it. You don't have to do this and this and this. But here are some options.

Joy: But drama's always been here in England, pushing its own way in, hasn't it? It's always been here, but it's people's lack of understanding and experience that's putting them off.

Lesley: I think when you say "drama," people think, "I've got to do a performance." That's the first idea that comes into their heads. And people don't want to do that. But you do want to say, "Try this." Or, "The kids enjoyed this." Or, "I found they *learned* because of this." It's just options really. Teachers need to know that there are options and possibilities in drama.

Joy: And our children have learned because we've *steeped* them in drama. We've taken them to the theatre; we've had loads of drama companies in. They've seen a lot more. And they see it as something they can reach out and touch.

A sense of accomplishment and conviction comes for teachers and administrators in any school only when the journey these professionals travel is arm-in-arm with professional artists.

While England is a country well steeped in drama education, the Bexhill TRT knew that many teachers would still have a tendency to cast it in terms of a schoolwide performance. Any new effort at school reform or innovative teaching can easily be perceived as an "add-on" – as well as a potential threat to time needed to reinforce learning within the national curriculum. Moreover, the constant pressure of test performance heightens anxiety over "wasting" children's time in learning materials not relevant to these measures of achievement. However, over the months of working together with their children and with professional artists, the TRT had learned that drama education brought them a host of resources for their own thinking, need for creative outlet, and ideas for sustaining the creative language and thinking the children gained through drama.

Such a sense of accomplishment and conviction comes for teachers, school leaders, and headteachers in any school only when the journey these professionals travel is arm-in-arm with professional artists. The travel together is planned and mapped jointly, and the roadway stretching before them is two-way. Ideas and expertise move in a give and take with respect and communication modeled for and with the children. If both teachers and artists have their eyes on the ultimate destination, they know it is the learning of children. Artists know their art and teachers know their children. Actors know the ins and outs of working up a script, planning performance techniques, taking on roles, and reading audience response. Teachers know the ins and outs of curriculum, instruction, and assessment as well as the gifts and needs of particular children.

Collaborative work enables drama to take up talents and interests of children that may lie hidden within the usual classroom approaches

It is in the coming together, the ensemble of teachers, administrators, and artists working collaboratively with children, that genuine creative partnerships become something to reach and touch and to remember.

to learning. Thus teachers may come to see children in entirely new ways through their participation in drama. In addition, artists may, through adaptations of their way of working that come from teachers' suggestions, find themselves armed with new strategies for involving reluctant learners or children with special needs.

Head teachers and school leaders can both benefit from and add to the collaborative work of teachers and artists. Often their abilities to put time, space, imagination, and inspiration together can be pulled into drama education. The involvement of these leaders is essential for sustaining learning environments that keep on creating and inspiring confidence in achievement and excellence. It is in the coming together, the *ensemble* of teachers, school leaders, and artists working collaboratively with children, that genuine creative partnerships become something that is significant in relation to enhancing, diversifying, and enriching pupils' learning. Most important, this work supports the development of key language skills – oral and written – and provides critical practice in interpretation across multiple means. Children have their ways of demonstrating and displaying what they know and can do stretched through participation in drama.

The power of play as well as “the play” possible through taking part in theatre moves through all learning stages. Though most of the emphasis has gone to the role of drama education in preparing children to read, the Bexhill experience in drama demonstrated foundational and structural supports gained for children's learning and teacher work. All the players of the learning community of a school benefit from finding ways of working that a journey through drama education brings. Most important, teachers and children collect along their way the essentials for many other kinds of travel they will surely face in the way ahead.

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Credits

John McGagh began working for Creative Partnerships Durham Sunderland at its inception in 2002 after several years working in literature development in the North East of England. Turning to his work on *Dramatic learning in the primary school*, John shepherded this series from beginning to end. Through multiple meetings with multiple parties – researchers, Creative Partnerships directors, and the Headteacher of Bexhill, Joy Lowther – John repeatedly demonstrated the essence of ‘creative partnerships’. His insights, expertise, and diplomacy helped guide the series through the myriad decisions involved in the creation and completion of any academic text. With an ear for editing, an eye for design, and the persistence needed to acquire necessary permissions, John’s contributions helped bring this series to life.

The authors would also like to thank the following people for their support in the development and delivery of this research programme.

Katherine Pearson - former Director of Creative Partnerships Durham Sunderland.

Dave Smith - former Head Teacher of Bexhill Primary School.

Lorna Fulton - Director of Creative Partnerships Durham Sunderland.

Anita Murtha - parent helper at Bexhill Primary School.

Creative Partnerships provides school children across England with the opportunity to develop creativity in learning and to take part in cultural activities of the highest quality.

Based at Arts Council England, Creative Partnerships has a unique approach to working with schools. It first helps schools to identify their individual needs and then enables them to develop long-term, sustainable partnerships with organisations and individuals including architects, theatre companies, museums, cinemas, historic buildings, dance studios, recording studios, orchestras, film-makers, website designers and many others.

Creative Partnerships aims to provide a powerful, focused, high profile and inspirational tool for change, genuinely capturing the imagination of children, parents and carers, teachers and communities. There are currently 36 Creative Partnerships areas in England.

Learning for Creative Futures is a series of publications, for general, arts practice, and academic readerships, that portrays how learning environments engage children and adolescents in sustained creative work and play. Assuming roles and relationships that bring close association with professionals who work in creative industries, young learners experience the vital mix of imagination, long-term planning, knowledge accumulation, skill development, and informed critique. The international research team of *Learning for Creative Futures* includes scholars from the disciplines of anthropology, education, linguistics, psychology, political science, and sociology. This International Enquiry Network is led by Shirley Brice Heath and Shelby Wolf.

All stories have behind them many other stories. The tales told in this series are no exception. Behind *Dramatic learning in the primary school* are the people and the contexts that give the qualities of character, time, setting, and energy to their narratives of creative learning.

This series documents a year of creative partnering through drama for language learning. Three groups made this work possible.

CREATIVE PARTNERSHIPS DURHAM SUNDERLAND

Creative Partnerships Durham Sunderland brokered the original relationship between the International Enquiry Network and Joy Lowther, Creative Partnerships Co-ordinator at Bexhill Primary School. This relationship then established itself and Bexhill became a vibrant and committed hub for the research work documented here. Other partners came to Bexhill and added expertise to this work – notably Mark Labrow of County Durham's *Theatre Cap-a-Pie*.

Creative Partnerships Durham Sunderland curates and commissions a creative learning programme that enables teachers, young people and creative practitioners to work in collaboration to explore ideas, generate new creative work and develop new approaches to learning, teaching and cultural production.

This is achieved by building long-term collaborative partnerships among schools (22 partnership schools: infant, primary, secondary and special schools) and selected creative/cultural partners.

The Durham Sunderland programme is driven by research and explores the impact of participation in, and the experience of, creative learning and engagement in cultural activities in relation to personal change (critical thinking, cognitive decision-making, learning capacity and motivation), structural change (schools and cultural organisations), community change (creative learning applied beyond the school gates) and the development of language and writing skills - as well as creative and cultural production in the cultural sector.

BEXHILL PRIMARY SCHOOL

In the year between the springs of 2003 and 2004, Creative Partnerships Durham Sunderland supported pupils and teachers at Bexhill Primary School to work intensively with the dramatic arts. Professional actors helped pupils create plays during several short-term residencies. Teachers began weekly after-school Drama Clubs – one for younger children and another for pupils in year 5. Teachers brought numerous techniques of dramatic production and critique into their own thinking about the entire curriculum.

Examination of Key Stage tests across the subject areas revealed that these tests expected pupils to be comfortable using language in ways not generally found in daily classroom life. In addition to the joy and pleasure of work in the dramatic arts, teachers at Bexhill saw participation in the thinking, creating, and critiquing that come with drama as a way to improve language fluency of primary-level pupils.

Bexhill Primary School is situated in a housing estate on the outskirts of Sunderland. Built in the early sixties, the housing has been attractively upgraded. Bexhill stands in its own green environment, characterised by tree plantings and ‘hides’ – in which both children and adults can relax. The school plays an important role in a community with high levels of unemployment, a wide range of family contexts and little cultural diversity. There is a positive community spirit, strengthened by links with the on-site library, community association and the local church. The school has a roll of around 350 3-11 year-olds and seeks to raise aspirations through close involvement with families. Speaking, listening and social skills are major foci for the early years. The development of oral confidence and facility remains a focus through key stages 1 and 2. While the school performs well in national tests, it strives to raise attainment. The school also holds the *Artsmark* Silver. At Bexhill, children are engaged in a range of quality arts experiences, which broaden their cultural experience and encourage them to develop skills and attitudes, which

could enrich their lives and offer them future employment and leisure options. The school is determined to build language and thinking skills through an innovative approach to the curriculum. The school believes that the development of drama-rich curricula can take children’s understanding beyond their own experience and encourage the development of higher order language skills. Bexhill is also a training school for Initial Teacher Training and is committed to sharing expertise with others.

The names of all the children mentioned or cited in these booklets have been changed to protect confidentiality.

INTERNATIONAL ENQUIRY NETWORK

An international research team studying community regeneration linked to the arts and creativity in several post-industrial nations worked with teachers and pupils at Bexhill Primary School to document what happened over the year of intensive work in the dramatic arts. Shelby Wolf, Professor of Education at the University of Colorado at Boulder, led the work with Bexhill’s teachers.

A core of four teachers (1 in Year R, 1 in Year 2, 2 in Year 5) took on roles as members of the Teacher Research Team (TRT).

Lesley Watson, Year R

Linda Nesbitt, Year 2

Clare Moonie, Year 5

Rachael Dawson, Year 5

This team worked intensively over the year to contemplate their classroom uses of language. Members of the TRT at Bexhill focused their attention on how pupils’ participation with visiting theatre groups influenced both teacher and pupil language awareness and use. After-school Drama Clubs became a way for teachers to engage pupils regularly in the work of drama – both interim performances and

preparation for the school's Christmas play. These teachers took on responsibilities for audio-recording within their classrooms and reflecting on ways in which Bexhill's work with drama influenced pupil learning and classroom culture.

In addition, a Student Research Team (SRT) worked with Reif Larson, a young actor and drama educator from Brown University's Arts Literacy Program in the spring of 2003. Throughout the spring of 2004, Gayle Sutherland, a teacher of Energetics and drama enthusiast, worked with an expanded SRT. These pupils, ranging from year 4 – year 6 learned how to audio-record and take notes on the language used by professional actors in their work within the school. The SRT group met throughout the year from time to time with the TRT to discuss what they had learned through their observations and analysis of the language of creating and critiquing drama.

The research: From the spring of 2003 through the school year 2004, two scholars, Shirley Brice Heath and Shelby Wolf, looked closely at how language, attention, inspiration, and collaboration within Bexhill Primary School changed through artistic partnership. Their work brought teachers, artists, and students into the research process as questioners, data interpreters, and readers and respondents assessing the results as set forth in this series of booklets. The research upon which *Dramatic learning in the primary school* is based includes transcripts and fieldnotes recorded and analysed during the year and reported here through thematic patterns. Academic publications of the *Learning for creative futures* series will report detailed comparative analyses of language and cognitive development in the context of specific features of creative learning environments.

Shirley Brice Heath, linguistic anthropologist, has studied how different kinds of learning environments support children's later language development. She takes as her focus within-school creative programmes as well as sustained interactions young people have in their work and play within families, peer relations, and community organisations. She is the author of the classic *Ways with words: language, life, and work in communities and classrooms* (Cambridge University Press, 1983/1996). Heath has taught at universities throughout the world – most notably Stanford University and Brown University, and currently as Visiting Professor at Kings College, University of London. Of emphasis in her research are the long-term effects of learning in environments heavily dependent on the arts. Within this work, she has given special attention to science and environmental projects, and those that encompass social justice concerns. Her resource guide and prize-winning documentary *ArtShow* (2000) feature young leaders in four community arts organisations in the United States. www.shirleybriceheath.com

Shelby Wolf, an award-winning teacher and educational scholar, is a professor at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Her research centres on children's language and learning through engagement in literature and collaborative as well as creative modes of expression – discussion, writing, the visual arts, and drama. Her most recent book, *Interpreting literature with children* (Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004), portrays her close work with teachers as co-researchers in the study of children's literary learning. She has worked within numerous school-change programmes to validate the perspectives of teachers who undertake enquiry into how learning works in their classrooms. She is a senior author of *Houghton Mifflin English* (2004), a textbook series devoted to helping children improve as writers. With Shirley Brice Heath, she wrote *The braid of literature: children's worlds of reading* (Harvard University Press, 1992). More recently, she and Shirley co-authored another series of booklets devoted to children's learning through the visual arts: *Visual learning in the community school* (Creative Partnerships, 2004). This series documents research carried out in one community school in Hythe, Kent. <http://www.Colorado.edu/education/faculty/shelbywolf>.

A way of working: teachers in drama education

When staff at Bexhill Primary School began working in collaboration with Creative Partnerships in 2002, they decided to add drama in a strong and meaningful way to the learning life of their school. Staff saw their choice as supporting the school's "focus on children's speaking and listening skills." Teachers particularly wanted their children to "think creatively as well as develop confidence in presenting their ideas."

This booklet tells the tale of the Bexhill teachers' experiences in drama, especially how they learned to work with professional artists and researchers. The teachers found that while they were not 'drama experts,' they were experts on their children. After working with a number of artists, as well as sharing their insights and concerns with researcher Shelby Wolf, the Bexhill teachers began to narrow the field – looking for artists who not only knew how to communicate with children, but who were also eager to learn from the teachers themselves. These artists were invited back for more sessions with their children, and in these cases, the creative partnerships of teacher and artist became true exchanges of expertise.



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