It's up to you: drama for emotional health

Dramatic learning in the primary school

Shirley Brice Heath & Shelby Wolf

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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).

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It's up to you: drama for emotional health.
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It's up to you: drama for emotional health

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Drama for emotional health

Several four-year-olds sit with their Reception teacher Lesley Watson and listen to *Eat up, Gemma* (Hayes, 1989) – the tale of a toddler who just doesn't want to eat. She throws her breakfast to the floor, squashing her grapes one at a time and banging her spoon with a flourish. No matter the encouragement offered by her family, she refuses her meals. That is, she does so until the family's visit to church where Gemma pays rapt attention to a lady sitting nearby who's wearing a hat decorated with artificial fruit. Watching his sister's fascination with the hat, Gemma's clever brother comes up with a new idea for how to present Gemma with her food, and once the plan is set into action, Gemma eats with relish! When Lesley finishes the story, she asks her children "Why would Gemma not eat her dinner up?" She audio records their responses and adds her own explanations of the children's thinking in brackets below:

Demi: I don't think she was hungry [hadn't eaten her own lunch and gave this as the reason].

Ryan: She might have had a toothache [had been to the dentist that morning with toothache].

Mark: That's 'cause I've got a sore cough [competing with his twin brother's ailment].

Chloe: The tooth comes out the gums [has a baby at home who is teething].

Emma: She might have a bad head [had a headache that morning].

Psychologists include empathy as a critical contribution to the human capacity to use knowledge not only for one's own good, but also for that of others.

Rebecca: She might want to give it to the dogs [had been taking part in a training program for guide dogs and got a certificate for her dog the previous weekend].

Stephanie: She might have had a bad tummy [gets a sore tummy when she's unsure of situations].

Needless to say, Lesley's children may not be accurately assessing Gemma's motivations, but they certainly know how to identify their own emotions and behaviours under like circumstances. Their consistent use of "She might…" shows the four-year-olds' attempts to connect what they know from their own lives to the wiles and ways of a character in a book.

Another way of thinking about the suggestions of Lesley's children is to remember "contagion crying" (Damon, 1996). One baby in a nursery begins to cry, and soon all the others do as well. This empathetic reaction is said to be among the first bundle of moral tendencies that appear in human beings. As children grow older, such reactions have to sort themselves out in thought and behaviour. Empathy develops as one matures, and with a growing capacity for empathy comes moral awareness. This combination undergirds the sense of shared responsibility linking one individual to another as members of a community. Psychologists include empathy as a critical contribution to the human capacity to use knowledge not only for one's own good, but also for that of others (Staudinger, 1996).

In the story of Gemma, her brother spends less time on the origin of his sister's problem than on its resolution. Together, he and his parents have previously come up with an array of inventive solutions, but Gemma still won't eat. His clear understanding of Gemma, as he

Good mental health and the ability to maintain positive interpersonal relations depend fundamentally on having experienced the meaning of empathy.

watches her eye the fruit-covered hat in church, leads him to a successful way to engage Gemma's appetite. Gemma's brother is thinking hard not just about his own experiences or feelings, but he is mature enough to observe Gemma closely. By doing so, he gathers information that helps him reflect on how understanding the world of food from Gemma's point of view will help him find a way to solve her problem. As he grows older, his sensitivities through observation and reflection will expand his moral awareness and motivate him to use his knowledge for the good of others.

Literature, poetical, fictional, and dramatic, as well as that embodied in musical lyrics, brings listeners into the heads, voices, and bodies of others and invites new perspectives. In ways that parallel the hat of fruits that restored Gemma's appetite and switched on her brother's inventive approach to solving her eating problem, all art forms open our eyes and feelings to the emotions of others. We learn to see, think, and apprehend how others feel. Knowing the cause and course of their feelings deepens our ability not only to perceive their mental states, but also to view their feelings as similar to those we too have had and could certainly come to feel again under similar circumstances.

In her discussions on the power of literature, Rudine Sims Bishop (1994) argues: "Literature…offers opportunities for children to learn to recognise our similarities, value our differences, and respect our common humanity" (p. xiv). Narratives about the dilemmas of others, especially those enacted before us in drama, open windows on the range of circumstances and emotional responses that humans face. As children participate in theatre, they learn to play roles taken from children's literature or created through a dramatic script or improvisational activity. In doing so, they gain valuable practice in

sensing and speaking their growing moral awareness of the conflicts, confusion, and compassion the world may present them in their own lives.

Good mental health and the ability to maintain positive interpersonal relations depend fundamentally on having experienced the meaning of empathy – knowing what it is like to step into the place of another. Taking the power of literature to a new level, drama gives extensive practice in switching roles and talking about what it means to feel, think, and behave as others do. Playing a character verbally and visually brings the distanced and safe practice necessary not only to act out feelings, but, most important, to talk through optional responses to finding and solving problems. As explained in another booklet in this series – *Have a think about it: drama for mental agility* – the reading portions of the Key Stage 1 and 2 tests frequently ask young readers to enter the heads of characters in narratives. In fact, all Key Stage tests across the subject areas ask pupils to comprehend cause-and-effect relationships and understand consequences brought about through the actions of others. Scientists who study human development show us repeatedly that we do not reliably learn to foresee how one event might affect another unless we can gain safe distanced practice in doing so. Even more important, we most efficiently learn how to shape and articulate alternative courses of action and outcomes with opportunities to enter roles, taking on the power to make differences and talking about how we and others view the effectiveness of our doing so.

This booklet tells the story of how the Drama Clubs of Bexhill Primary School brought many of their children closer to understanding what it means to think and feel like someone else. Here we place emphasis on the heart as well as the head. As Jane Roland Martin (1992) suggests, schools should be places where "mind and body, thought and action, reason and emotion are all being educated" (p. 86-87).

Children who engage in drama not only reflect on the implications behind the lines they voice, but they also learn about commitment and collaboration.

At Bexhill Primary School, the Teacher Research Team (TRT) – Lesley Watson, Linda Nesbitt, Clare Moonie, and Rachael Dawson - encouraged by their Creative Partnerships School Co-ordinator Joy Lowther (appointed Headteacher in September, 2004) – worked to bring dramatic literature to their children. Rather than separate intellect from affect, they knew that drama, like life, weaves the two together – integrating mind and emotion within the experience and action of specific situations. For Dorothy Heathcote (1980), one of England's pioneers in drama education, the dramatic intersection of heart and head occurs when children in classrooms learn to "read implications"– to discover the meanings that lie behind words, meanings that affect the lives of human beings. The educators at Bexhill sensed their growing agreement with psychologists who value so highly the early developmental stages for building children's capacity for empathy, moral awareness, and narrative weaving.

In their search for meanings, children who engage in drama not only reflect on the implications behind the lines they voice, but they also learn about commitment and collaboration. A key term in the theatre is "ensemble" – an agreement that every actor has a contribution to make. As an accomplished director once told us, "When a performance is going at its very best, ensemble is the powerful feeling that each member of cast and crew, the entire company, is an integral part, no matter how small, of a beautifully functioning machine." Gaining such a sense of cooperation, even in the midst of the trials and challenges of a tangled set of problems of a given dramatic production, builds understanding of the need to share responsibility for a mutually satisfying outcome.

But commitment must follow observation and interpretation, as well as debate that explores options within cultural and individual

differences. Thinking together about interpretations of literature as well as working together to make a production a success is a group responsibility. As TRT member Linda Nesbitt told her Year Two children as they discussed their upcoming performance: “It’s up to you.” While she would be there to assist them at every turn, ultimately the responsibility for the performance belonged to the group. Thus, participation in all aspects of drama provides meaningful ways to practice fundamentals of positive mental and social health.

Listening for the subtle sense of character

On an early morning in July, the Reception, Year One, and Year Two children at Bexhill watched a performance of "The Story Store" dramatised by a local theatre company, the Team Players. The play centred on Belinda, the little girl protagonist, who had to write a story and did not know how to begin. However, she received help from sweet shop owner Mr. Fable and his assistant Percy, who taught her that she needed to first select a "genre" for her story. She might choose to write a "Star Wars" story as one example or a "fairy story" as another. Once she had chosen her kind of story, she needed to create characters. Percy and Mr. Fable explained that stories typically had at least one good character and one bad character, and they dramatised portions of *The Three Little Pigs* and *Cinderella* to help make their point. When Belinda finally set off for home, she had a solid understanding that in order to write a story, she had to begin with genre and then select characters. While the "bad" characters often cause problems for the good characters, the story's task is to work out a resolution in the end.

After the play, Linda Nesbitt and her Year One children returned to their classroom to do follow-up work on good and evil characters to build on the Team Players' performance. At the beginning of her lesson, Linda asked her children to draw characters and then list "words" to describe them. While the children did well in their drawings, they did not list many words. Linda tried to jumpstart their thinking, asking them how they might describe evil characters. Given the opportunity to voice their ideas rather than write them, the children suggested, "Gruesome," "dastardly," "sneaky," "mad," "bad-tempered," "creepy," "slimy," and "crafty." Linda dramatised their suggestions with small mimes or facial expressions that displayed the individual

Because language seems to come with the natural process of growing up, it is easy to forget that gaining fluency and versatility in the use of language requires practice.

characteristics. She then asked them for words for "good characters," and the children came up with "nice," "kind," "helpful," "beautiful," and "lovely."

However, Chelsea, one of the pupils in the classroom, thought that a good character would be "selfish." Linda considered and then asked the other children for definitions. They explained that when you were selfish you "were a baddy and not a goody" and that "you keep things to yourself." One child said, "You don't listen," and Linda expanded on this by saying, "Martin says, 'You don't listen.' And I think I know what he means. I think when you're selfish you don't listen to anybody else. You just think it's me, me, me, me, me. You're the most important person." She turned to Chelsea and concluded, "So you are a very important person, but you're certainly not selfish. You're lovely. So you're not selfish, 'cause most people would say that selfish isn't a good thing to be."

Here is a case of building from the children's experience with a single dramatic production. Linda expands her own and the children's talk about human characteristics in terms of their predictabilities and their contradictions. Because language seems to come with the natural process of growing up, it is easy to forget that gaining fluency and versatility in the use of language requires practice. Children rarely have extended opportunities to talk with adults about abstractions and the ways their qualities work in real people and their everyday lives. Linda does just this through the "real characters" in her own classroom, but she is able to do so because the children are now familiar with the world of drama. There it is okay to talk about characters who may not always be what they seem and how "evil" and "good" do not fall quite so easily into place as Chelsea may have been led to believe. Linda carries this negotiation of contradiction between drama and life back into the classroom discussion of character. She helps the children think and talk about the subtle sense of character that distinguishes between having self-confidence and taking it so far as to result in selfishness and an exaggerated view of one's own importance.

Even more important, Linda relies on her children to help her make this distinction clear to Chelsea. Rather than jump in immediately with a definition of selfish, she asks her class for their contributions. And when they offer possibilities, she expands on their ideas – stretching out the language – to make their interpretations even clearer. This kind of active engagement in learning – rather than passive listening – helps her children understand their responsibility in not only seeking out the subtle sense of characters on the page, but also their need to collaborate with one another to build on their own separately distributed bits of individual learning.

As Linda continued with her lesson, she demonstrated just how tricky seeking answers and building possibilities together can be for the very young. She asked her children to listen to some sentences. The first selection read: *Her kind eyes shone as she hugged the little dog. "Don't be frightened. I won't hurt you", she sighed.* Linda asked, "What sort of character would that be?" and the children immediately responded, "Good." But Linda nudged her children to expand on this one-word response by listening and picking out the words in the passage that "helped you to realise it was a good character." She reread the selection, and the children pulled out "I won't hurt you," and "Don't be frightened," and "Kind."

Her second passage was: *"Now where are those three little pigs?" he growled as he prowled through the woods.* The children picked out "growled," and Linda had them all growl, which they did with great enthusiasm! She asked them, "Why do you think he wants to know where those three little pigs are?" and the children quickly agreed, "He wants to eat them all up." The third selection was: *The queen smiled*

a cruel smile and her eyes flashed. She threw back her head and cackled wickedly. Linda's six-year-olds immediately recognised her as an evil character and identified "cackled," trying out the malevolent laugh for themselves. The other words they pointed out were "evil" and "wicked" and "her eyes flashed."

Linda then read the fourth and final series of sentences: *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?* This was a much more sophisticated stretch of language than the earlier examples, and the children struggled with the many embedded meanings. They found it hard to have a character that was happy in spite of ragged clothes and no money. They knew he was a "good" character, but they felt he was "sad, 'cause he hasn't got any money." Sara felt he was "unhappy," though Craig pointed out that he was "lucky." Linda read the sentence several times, asking the children to "look for clues" for why the character felt so lucky. She had them talk with partners and see if they could come up with combinations of ideas to the tough question calling for empathy with Ben's state of mind: "Why do you think he felt so lucky?"

Some children decided that he might find some money on the ground or he could go to the bank and get money. Linda moved among the groups, expanding on their ideas, asking for more explanation, and then brought them back to the whole group discussion, beginning with a comment she had overheard in one of the groups:

Linda: Danielle said that he wouldn't feel very happy if he had tatty torn clothes and it was in the winter *because*?

Danielle: He might be able to eat again. He might find some pennies on the floor.

Linda: But you said if it was in the winter, you'd get cold. So maybe he felt lucky because the sun was shining and – Because he didn't have lovely new clothes. His clothes were a bit shabby and tacky, and he wouldn't get cold. So he was quite happy with that. Rachael, have you got good ideas?

Rachael: He might find a pound on the ground.

Linda: He might find a pound. And what would he do with that?

Rachael: Spend it.

Linda: Spend it. Sara?

Sara: Our idea was because the sun was shining and the birds were singing.

Linda: I think everybody feels happy when the sun's shining and you can hear the birds singing, unless it's about 3 o'clock in the morning and they're nesting above in your eaves, and they wake you up in the morning.

Craig: Me and Liam thought of that one.

Linda: Did you! Very clever.

Aaron: Mrs. Nesbitt, I think he was lying down and a rich person came along and he said, "Are you poor?" Because he was lying in a box. And he said, "Are you poor?" And he said, "Yes." And he said, "I'm rich and you can have some of my money and you come along to my house because I'll count out all the money."

Drama-inspired play of ideas encourages fluent language use in substantive classroom conversation between pupils and teachers.

Linda: How kind! That's absolutely fantastic.

Chorus: [Clapping!]

Linda: He does deserve a round of applause for that. Well done! I'm amazed at how kind the children are in my class to come up with stories like that. 'Cause you've taken it further. You've developed a whole story.

In traditional classroom settings, children quickly recognise that their talk is not always welcome to the adults around them, and they must spend many of their hours at school silent. Yet this drama-inspired exchange in Linda's classroom shows that teachers can find considerable help in the "play of ideas" that dramatic productions demonstrate. Such playing and stretching of ideas in collaborative classroom discourse will stimulate children to use language that is heavily conversational and substantive in content. As Linda took her children through the progressively more difficult sentences, she asked for more and more talk. It was not enough to determine that a character was 'good'; instead, it was essential to provide justification by pulling specific language from the passage to provide evidence for this goodness. In this discussion, even with Aaron's helpful comment, the children were still far from fully interpreting how it was that Ben, though poor and shabbily dressed, could be happy. Living in a society where material goods are often equated with happiness, the children now had to enter a fictional world very different, perhaps, from the daily values they heard espoused in the commercial world about them. Yet Linda's gentle consistent stretching of their language pulled along their textual interpretation skills toward some empathy for a

The children's talk is filled with words that show their engagement with the mental work of trying to figure out the motivations for the words and perceptions of a distanced other.

character who might be totally unlike anyone they had ever met in person.

As a teacher who naturally takes to many of the devices of drama, Linda is willing to mime facial expressions and add gestures to characterisations of "dastardly," "slimy," or "evil." She thus opens the doors for her children to do the same as they growl like the big, bad wolf or cackle in the witch's role. Linda probes for the stories behind the spoken lines, and when her children bump up against a particularly difficult passage, she does not *tell* them its meaning. Instead, she encourages them to use language in pairs to try and solve the problem. She wants them to seek out the significance of the warm sun and the singing birds. As they do so, *she listens*. And when they come back to the large group, she restates bits of their language she has overheard and makes ample space for her children's conjectures now expressed through expanded language.

The children's talk is filled with words that show their engagement with the mental work of trying to figure out the motivations for the words and perceptions of a distanced other. They ponder ("I think"), take on an ensembled voice ("Our idea"), and use verb forms that project possibility ("He *might* find a pound on the ground"). The use of such forms as a matter of habit builds internal voicing that supports the mental ability that must be exercised in problem-finding and solving, whether in interpretation of drama or within academic tests that set out narratives for interpretation. Piece by piece the children put together the clues of the passage Linda reads aloud, as well as the drama they have seen performed. In so doing, they construct a way for Ben, the boy in the story, to find a way out of his dilemma. Moreover, the children begin to realise that "good" and "bad" do not

rest only in characters and their stations in life, or on the values they themselves hear from the commercial world around them. Instead, they begin to grasp the fact that moral absolutes need debate when we try to apply them to all conditions of life and the ways that different individuals choose to face these conditions. Aaron, perhaps wrestling with this subtlety, takes Ben's "story" (generated by a short series of sentences) to the next level by bringing in a "good" and powerful character, who has resources and the will to share. Aaron creates an entire scenario, introduces a new character of the "rich man," and provides dialogue as well. He has two characters discuss and then resolve Ben's plight.

Aaron's script was a success, for Linda's children burst into a spontaneous round of applause (a behaviour learned from watching dramatic performances and observed to be a way to support the unfolding of a good story). In the small theatre of their classroom, the children came face to face with a difficult piece of language, contesting absolutes of "good" and "bad" as existing only in individuals. They took in the sense that sometimes it is situations that are either "good" or "bad," and certain kinds of individuals can intervene to make changes. The children then moved forward from the minimal information of Linda's original passage to take it apart and put it back together in a new scenario, which provided, to be sure, an ending they could understand (that is, one which now provides Ben with money to purchase his way to happiness). Nevertheless, the children have achieved vital practice in the kinds of mental and verbal work they will repeatedly face not only in academic tests but also in accumulating circumstances of life. Their joint puzzlement and empathetic entries into Ben's perceptions brought them through numerous alternatives before they reached a conclusion that satisfied them.

Shifting sensibilities in age and gender

Linda's six-year-olds could often empathise with someone they assumed was a child of their age and, at least for the boys in her class, of their own gender. But shifting sensibilities away from one's own established roles in life – particularly those of age and gender – becomes harder for children the more distanced the character is from their own everyday lives. For example, working with her Year Five children, Clare Moonie conducted a drama lesson from her Personal, Social, and Health Education curriculum. She had the children do some drama activities to warm up their voices and bodies, and then settled them down on the rug to read a story. Clare read with panache – raising her voice in anger when the children in the story squabbled and mimicking a worried tone when they lost their ball in the yard of a neighbour – an old woman they had always assumed to be a witch. As the tale unfolded, however, events took a more innocent turn, for the 'witch" was only an old woman who liked watching the children play football. When she emerged from her house, she smiled and pitched the ball back to them. At the end of the story, Clare opened the conversation:

Clare: How did the opinion of the children change of the person that lived in the house?"

Jordan: It's kind of an anticlimax.

Clare: Yes, we've been studying that term in literacy – where something is built up and we think something terrifying is going to happen…but then it's an anticlimax. The woman who lived in that house wasn't an evil witch at all. She

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was just a sweet old lady who actually enjoyed watching their games. What made them think that an evil witch lived in that house?

Kyle: Because the curtains were always shut.

Clare: Yes, and that's a bit mysterious. Makes you kind of wonder who's behind it.

Rachael: Because they never saw anybody.

Clare: And if you don't see someone, you might start to build up a picture for yourself if you don't know someone. What was her house like?

Daniel: Old.

Peter: Shabby.

Clare: Yeah, it was shabby. The garden was really shabby. It was an old house. The curtains were always closed and nobody had ever seen who lived there. So they all made up this story that a witch lived there. But it was a sweet old lady after all. How do you think that old lady feels when she's living in that house? How do you think she actually feels? Have a little think about it.

Kyle: She might think that she wants to tidy the house up a bit.

Clare: Yes, she might want to tidy up her house a bit, but how do you think she actually *feels* living in that house?

Jordan: Lonely.

Bethany: She likes watching them play football.

Clare: Yeah, she's actually been watching them play for a long time. She looks out her window and watches them play probably because she's got nothing to entertain herself with. Has there ever been a time when you felt lonely?

Amy: In the playground when I've got nobody to play with.

Clare: In the playground if for some reason you've fallen out with your friends and nobody's playing with you, you can feel lonely, can't you? It's not a nice feeling. Can anybody else tell me a time when they felt lonely?

Kyle: Once when I was playing football, all me friends went away. And I was playing by myself.

Clare: That would make you feel lonely, wouldn't it? Jordan?

Jordan: When I'm upstairs and my parents might go out.

Clare: They might do. Yes. Sometimes if you're on your own, especially when it's cold and dark outside, you can feel a bit lonely, can't you? You want to talk to someone.

Laura: Miss, once when I was little me and me mum and me sister went into town, and I got lost and I was crying.

Clare thought that they would have an even better understanding if they could take their speculations and act them out.

Nicole: When I was in the shops, and I got lost from me mum.

Chorus: [The chatter really begins with this comment since many of the children have had similar experiences of being lost.]

Clare: That makes you feel really lonely when you get lost from your mum or your dad. Now, I want you to have a short discussion about why you think the *old lady* is lonely and what makes her lonely.

The children broke into small groups of two or three. One group of girls speculated that the old woman "might never have had children" or her "friends might have died." In another group, one child said she knew an old lady who had a nurse come to the house to deliver food. Many groups talked about their grandparents – some who had died and some who were alive but quite old. When Clare asked them why they thought the old woman never went out of the house, the children suggested that she might be "disabled," "ill," or "afraid."

While the children were clearly on the right track of the character, Clare thought that they would have an even better understanding if they could take their speculations and act them out. She said: "Now, find a space, and you are going to imagine that you are the main character – the old lady. What I want you to do is think about what this old lady's day might be like. Stuck in her house all day. What sort of things might she do? What sort of *everyday* things might she do? And I'm going to ask you to mime one of those activities. So for example, if she is just making a cup of tea, you would mime making a cup of tea. And then, when I say freeze, you'll freeze in whatever position you are, and then we'll ask what you're actually doing." One girl mimed walking with a cane. Another mimed watching TV and changing the channel with the remote. Still another mimed opening the curtain and watching the children in the story play football.

Clare then called for a couple of children at a time to perform their mimes and explained: "When I tap you on the shoulder, you have to continue in that character." Kyle pretended to be watching TV and when tapped, he scolded the programme on the telly: "Oh, you call this comedy? What a load of rubbish." This prompted a boy in the audience to say: "That's what my granddad used to say!" Stephanie mimed crossing the room with her cane, and when tapped she froze and said, "Oh, my back is aching doing this." At the end of the performance, Clare gave positive feedback: "I liked the way you really thought about how that character might be feeling. For example, Stephanie actually bent over and said, 'Oooooh, my back is really aching.' Is there any way that those performances could have been made even better?" One child suggested that Stephanie might have used a taller stick so that she wouldn't have to bend over so far. Clare agreed, but explained "sometimes you have to use what you have around." She continued, "What about the use of their voices?" One child suggested, "They could have made their voices sound like an old lady." Clare agreed and expanded the idea to a "Croaky kind of a voice to make it sound like an old lady."

When a group of boys went up to perform, one ran to the computer and began typing madly and several boys followed suit. Clare asked them to freeze and explain their actions in character, and several said they were playing action-packed computer games, an unlikely activity for the elderly. Kevin followed the pattern set by the other boys, but he devised a better reason for sitting at the computer, for he was making an online appointment to see the doctor. When Clare tapped him, he cleared his throat croakily and said, "I'll ask my doctor to see about this cough." Clare picked up on his unique response immediately, "Kevin thought about the kinds of problems the old lady might have – a bad cough or a sore throat. So she's thinking, 'I'll just go to the doctors about this cough.' So he really put himself into the character and thought about what kinds of problems that character might be having."

Boys *can* do drama

Kevin's willingness to think like an old lady rather than a ten-year-old boy was relatively unusual in the early months of drama at Bexhill. The boys who played action-packed games on the computer, forgetting the character all together, were far more common. Indeed, in the application for Bexhill's Silver Artsmark award, Joy Lowther pointed out how hard they were working to engage the boys in extracurricular activities other than football. Lesley Watson, who ran the Year Two Drama Club with Linda Nesbitt explained, "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." She felt it was brave for boys even to join a Drama Club.

However, several features of drama at Bexhill helped to turn this situation around. First, a number of the actors that came to do performances and conduct workshops with the Bexhill children were male. Rachael Dawson, who ran the Year Five Drama Club, said that in their initial planning for Theatre Cap-a-Pie's first workshop, several of her boys were sceptical. But when Mark Labrow, Jez Arrow, and Ian Dowson showed up introducing theatre games and working with the children to create a play in a week, the boys' doubts disappeared. Rachael discussed one boy in particular and how his attitude shifted when he saw that the drama leaders were men who were "cracking jokes." She felt that Mark, Jez, and Ian were "positive role models" who showed how drama offered roles that males could take up with ease.

Secondly, whether the professional artists were men or women, they never hesitated to approach gender issues in a matter-of-fact manner. When a dance artist came to help the Year Six children prepare a performance of *CATS*, the choreographer had both the girls and the boys up and dancing in no time. In a discussion with

It's even difficult for the boys to go to a Drama Club. The dads are very: 'That's not something lads do.'

Shelby Wolf, the researcher on site, the TRT expressed their surprise over the shift in the older boys:

Rachael: The Year Six boys did a lot of the hand holding for the dancing, and they seemed to get on, without having any –

Lesley: I was surprised at *how much*, because in the dances there was a lot of what *they* would term "very effeminate" things to do. And there are a lot of macho lads in there!

Linda: But both the Year Six teachers said they thought having a professional dancer and choreographer made the difference, because she stretched them. So yes, there were some fairly effeminate moves, but there was a lot of very physical, athletic things that she gave them to do as well. So the fact that they were leaping on and off the stage –

Rachael: And it was the way she asked it as well. In our performance, the choreographer said "Jack and Adam have to hold hands and then turn around from each other so they end up back to back." Now Jack says, "I'm not doing it!" But the choreographer didn't say, "I *wonder* if you could do…" She just said, "Right. So now you need to hold hands, turn around." And then she just walked away and completely ignored Jack!

Chorus: [Loud laughter]

Shelby: Sometimes the straightforward route is the best way to do it.

Rachael: So she didn't make a big deal out of it. She was just like, "That's what you need to do. I want you to hold up the sets there. You do that. You do that. You hold hands and then turn around. And then you need to – " So she just did it! He still pulled his face, but –

Clare: I think it does make a difference seeing the professionals, because with the *CATS* thing again Sue [a Year Six teacher] was saying that when they went to see the production of *CATS* and they watched the video, and they saw all these big, macho men –

Chorus: Yeah.

Clare: You know all these professional dancers in *tights*. So, if they can do it, we can do it.

Even the littlest boys in Bexhill began to engage more in drama, and not just because of positive role models from adults. In our booklet on the Student Research Team (SRT) – *What could happen if? Drama for learning from others* – we talk about the helpful roles the SRT provided for the Year Two Drama Club – showing the children and their teachers the power of critique. But the willingness of the SRT boys to take on any role worked to enlighten the six- and seven-year-old boys as well. Their research experience enabled them to distance themselves from their everyday identity into the roles they had to play. They had taken on the responsibility to ensemble with the group, enter the voice and character of another, and, in essence, assume the role of expert as they helped guide the younger children. Lesley Watson speaking of her Reception Year children

The magical-switch power of drama enables children to gain a distance from the stresses and strains of everyday peer relations.

explained how the magical-switch power of drama enables children to gain distance from the stresses and strains of everyday peer relations:

> A problem with this age is that the girls don't want to be boys and the boys don't want to be girls. But with the Student Research Team, the boys are near eleven-years-old and they've got to think of their image now! Yet, they're very happy to take on the role of the queen. They're quite happy to do it. So the boys of our age say, "Oh, well there's no problem then. I'm okay then." And then they do it as well. So, I think that's definitely an important thing.

The SRT members carried a double role – that of dramatic player and that of researcher. Thus their experiences brought them increased security in stepping aside from the usual limits of their roles as pupils or as "just lads."

Learning to commit to drama

While Lesley Watson characterised the boys' willingness to come to Drama Club as a brave act, as the months progressed, the lads not only showed up, but they, like the girls, showed up in droves. Rachael Dawson's Year Five Drama Club was particularly popular. The first year she began the club with her colleague Anna Young, more and more children joined with every session. When the numbers finally settled down, several members of Rachael's class realised that only about five of their mates were not involved and asked Rachael, "Can they join the Drama Club too?" She agreed, and soon everyone in her class was a member of the Club. She also found that they were willing to go to special lengths not to miss a session. One child told her, "I know I could go to the youth club, but I'd rather be in Drama Club." And another told her about the special arrangements he'd made so as not to miss: "My mum couldn't pick me up today, so I asked my Nan if she would."

There was similar high attendance in the Year Two Drama Club. Linda and Lesley stressed how it was sometimes difficult for the children's parents: "It's a big deal to them because it means the parents have got to...arrangements have got to be made to pick the children up. So obviously, they want to come because it actually puts the parents out." Still, many parents didn't view the arrangements as an inconvenience. Of the 25 children enrolled in the Year Two Drama Club in summer 2004, 16 children's parents came to talk to Linda and Lesley to ask if they could possibly enroll their children in next year's club. Linda and Lesley had planned to continue the club with a Year 2 emphasis, but in light of this overwhelming demand they decided to expand their club to include Year 3 children who wanted to continue.

Such engagement in drama became evident in the classroom behaviours of older Drama Club members as well. Clare explained that she noticed a growing sense of commitment with her children.

I know I could go to the youth club, but I'd rather be in Drama Club.

Some children, initially extremely shy and reluctant to take part in drama activities in class, began to ask to join in. Rachael added that her own sense of empathy with these children meant that she would never ask children to do something that she herself might not have done at their age. As a consequence, she tried to model the attitudes that might lead shy children to consider taking part. The tale of one child illustrates the power of her empathetic stance and also the spreading influence of the Drama Club work throughout the school community.

As Rachael worked to prepare the Year Five children for the Christmas production, she was aware of the need to be especially alert to the worries of one particularly shy boy. She reassured him that he would not have to speak if he didn't want to, but she wanted him to participate in the dancing. He refused, so Rachael came up with the idea that he could run the CD player behind the curtain. She continued:

> So he had done that for five or six weeks, and it was only the day before the final performance that he realised that he wasn't going to be seen by the audience. He was absolutely devastated. He came to me and said, "Miss, can I tell you a secret?" And I said, "What is it?" but there were teaching assistants still in the class, and he looked at them and shook his head no. So we stepped out of the classroom, and I said, "What's the matter?" He said, "Well, you know tomorrow, the play? Well, since Joe's going to be out, would I be able to take Joe's place?" And I told him that I don't like making last minute changes, but I said "I think I can see if we can't make a special mention of you in the announcements because of all the important work you've done with the CD." And he just gave us a cuddle, and he ran out! And he was just absolutely over the moon because Dave [Smith – Headteacher until July, 2004] gave him a special mention in front of the audience.

This path of empathy from Rachael modelled for the boy's classmates and for him the need not only to be understanding at one point in time, but also to be aware that the emotions of others will change, and the call for a new kind of empathy may come at any time. Creating a climate of "I am not only with you now, but my respect for your feelings will also acknowledge the new you as you grow and come to see yourself differently" opened the world of drama for this young man. Less than a month after the Christmas production, Theatre Cap-a-Pie returned to work with Rachael's Year Five pupils to prepare a Bexhill version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This same boy volunteered for a part, learned all his lines, and delighted his peers by adding humourous gestures to enhance his character.

Creating an ensemble

In drama, commitment is critical, but it extends far beyond showing up, arranging with your mum and dad to be picked up after rehearsals and volunteering for more visible roles. In drama, the most important commitment is to peers in a production. Theatre experts define the sense of ensemble in this way:

> Theatre arts are, by definition, a group undertaking. As opposed to many of the fine arts, where one person can paint a picture or throw a pot, a play requires a playwright to imagine the idea, a director to interpret the words of the playwright to a cast of actors, and a host of technical creators to bring the vision together. By the time even a small play is "put up," a program is required to give credit to the many people who have had a hand in its creation (Mandell & Wolf, 2003, p. 33).

Constantin Stanislavski (1963), actor and artistic director of the Moscow Art Theatre, would agree. He even questions whether an actor *has the right* to do a mediocre job or, on the other hand, an exquisite job, especially if he or she takes all the credit. He argues that since the actor "was not alone in producing the play, he is not solely responsible for the work put into it. In such an enterprise one works for all and all for one. There must be mutual responsibility" (p. 57). Indeed, Stanislavski went so far as to say, "whoever mars [the] ensemble is committing a crime…against the very art he serves" (p. 57).

While the children at Bexhill did not need to take their productions to the level of seriousness that Stanislavski ascribes to that of the professional actor, the children became very aware of the idea of "mutual responsibility." When Linda Nesbitt's Year Two children performed their *Sugar Plum* (Corbett, 2003) play in the Christmas

In drama, the most important commitment is to peers in a production, for "theatre arts are, by definition, a group undertaking."

production, they took their roles – all their roles – very seriously. Linda felt that because her class in 2003-2004 was unusually independent, they were particularly well-suited for drama.

> This drama-based approach has helped because they are independent. They want to take control when it's appropriate to what they're doing. And because they've been given the chance to make decisions that affect them and they've got choices, they really respond to it. And they don't take the Mickey – choosing something ridiculous. They actually think about it seriously. They can make choices, but they're realising the responsibility that goes with it. 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. There was very little interference on my part, though I did try to interfere! [Chuckles] But they wouldn't have it. And I think this is something: They see the possibilities. I don't think they think they've got limits. I think it's just the idea that the children have got to learn social responsibility, but with that you get choices. They are the performers. It's their production.

When Linda first introduced the *Sugar Plum* play, she asked the children to sort themselves out as to whether they wanted speaking or non-speaking roles. Then the children signed up for and auditioned for parts. During their auditions, the rest of the children served as audience. But rather than watch passively while Linda decided on the final list of roles, the children offered critique.

…children have got to learn social responsibility, but with that you get choices. They are the performers. It's their production.

> They asked the actors how they felt on stage. Did they feel nervous? And then they said, "You know we couldn't hear you. Do you think you could speak slower?" And then a couple of them asked, "Could you put your script down and just speak into the microphone?" I was amazed! And when they saw something that didn't work, they said, "You know, you're not going to be able to do that on the stage." So then it really sorted itself out, and the ones that didn't get the part they wanted were quite happy to then audition for another part. So it was a process of elimination. And there were no hurt feelings. I think they accepted the critique from the children more readily than from adults.

The children actually allowed Linda to "interfere" more than she might admit, for her talents as a teacher/director came through in her willingness to offer her children choices, make ample room for their opinions, and most important, value their ideas. Linda told us, "The best thing about my class is their company. It's a pleasure to come to work, just to speak and listen to them."

As we discussed in the booklet *Have a think about it: drama for mental agility*, Linda's group had another choice to face when Linda asked them to repeat their *Sugar Plum* performance several weeks after the big public show. She gave the children the power to decide whether or not to do the performance for Shelby alone or to invite another class as well. After careful consideration, they decided to include their mates.

However, a dilemma that no one might have predicted ensued. Josh, one of the children who held a key part, was absent, and during the performance for Shelby and the invited class, his partner, Abbie,

refused to go on. She huddled behind the curtain, and when she wouldn't move forward, Linda's children had no choice but to slip past her and take up their positions on stage. Abbie came and sat in Linda's lap for the rest of the performance, and though she appeared upset for a short while, she was soon singing along with the children on stage. When they returned to class, they debriefed the performance, and Linda raised the issue of Abbie's refusal to play her part. Rather than being upset, Linda's six and seven-year-olds were understanding: "They said, 'She probably didn't feel happy because Josh wasn't there.' And they said, 'But if she had gone on we could have helped. We could have done this. Sugar Plum could have done that.' So all the time they're looking for ways to make it work. They're always looking for ways to make it right."

Summary

This kind of commitment – always looking for ways to make it work – is at the heart of *ensemble*. Children engaged in drama have to learn early how to carry empathy into concern demonstrated through expression, gesture, and affective dimensions in speaking. Often sympathy is confused with empathy. Whereas sympathy consists of feelings of sorrow or concern for another's welfare (Eisenberg, 1989), empathy brings the child to share another's feelings and to trigger that concern into other-oriented behaviour. In such an extension, the child grows toward intersubjectivity that enables one child to know what is appropriate for meeting the needs or concerns of another.

Altruistic goals and intentions often follow, as the children illustrate when they state firmly how they could have helped allay Abbie's fears and fill her needs: "We could have done this."

This sense of together "we could have" imbues democratic as well as drama-oriented classrooms. Betty Jane Wagner (1999), expert interpreter and publicist for the work of Dorothy Heathcote, reminds us that democracy may be viewed as "legislated empathy" (p. 148). Understanding the point of view of another through empathy is often reflected in the use of "modal verbs." These express a sense of *must, may, can, might, would, will*. The children of Bexhill, during their months of working in drama, came to use such verb forms expressing themselves as capable agents: "We could…" "How might I?" or "Can we do this other plan?" These verb forms lie beneath rational argument and debate (Johnson, 1987). As the children became more and more accustomed to taking the "hot seat" and explaining their reasons for portraying a particular character in one way or another, their arguments using modal forms grew more complex in grammatical and logical expression. They supported their assertions of *will, could,* and *can* with facts and plans into which they collected props, responsible participants, and plausible courses of events. Often they launched

This kind of commitment – always looking for ways to make it work – is at the heart of ensemble.

into full narratives of planning once they had given their overview arguments for events within a play or particular interpretations of passages such as those Linda read to her children.

Why won't a toddler eat her breakfast? Why might a small beggar boy in tattered clothes still feel happy when the sun is shining and the birds are singing? What might a lonely old lady do in her home everyday, and why is she so alone? The ability to empathise deeply with character is essential for professional actors, for as Stanislavski (1963) suggests, "The actor may feel the situation of the person in a part so keenly…he actually puts himself in the place of that person" (p. 56). Metaphors abound, as does the sense of power that rests in calling on the imaginative: "Sugar Plum could have done that." The use of such metaphors within hypothetical or dramatically imagined situations (the rich man comes along to help Ben) shows how children develop the ability to relate three critical realms of their own consciousness of taking on certain roles: *capacity, permission,* and *obligation*. Together these constitute what philosophers see as the basis of moral reasoning – the ability to handle meaning so close-up as to act within a role that shows the ability to put oneself within the situation of the other (Johnson, 1987).

To take up such roles based on empathy requires first an assessment of one's own *capacity* (Can I really do a speaking part? Will it be possible for me to speak loudly enough? Will I be too frightened when all the people come to see our play?). This sense of capacity is critical to ensemble work, for one must think ahead to ensure that the capacity of each individual is such that the group project will not be endangered. From an honest assessment of one's capacity follows a consideration of *permission* (Is it appropriate for me to step in to play Josh's part? Will my doing so help Abbie?).

Philosophers see capacity, permission, and obligation as the basis of moral reasoning.

Finally, do I feel and do I have an *obligation* to do this? When the children in Rachael's class realised that only a few of their mates were not in Drama Club, they took on the obligation to ask her if she would take in all members of the class. This reaching out came from a combination of the children's growing consciousness of their own pleasure in being members of the Club and their sense of the deprivation others might feel. Their awareness led them to think not only of their own capacity for asking their teacher, but also whether or not they felt as current members, it would be appropriate for them to ask to expand the size of the Club. Finally, their sense of obligation as members of Rachael's class and their judgment that the ensembled membership of the Drama Club could take in new members resulted in their request to Rachael. Consciousness and rationality link together ever more closely in the maturation of empathetic understanding.

Bexhill teachers give credit, praise, and attention to their young actors learning their lines and watching dramatic productions with engagement. But they often express their greatest pride in the evidence they collect about the increased empathy of their children. The TRT looked deeply into the power of drama to make the children feel the "collective creative effort" that lies at the heart of drama (Stanislavski, 1963, p. 57; see also Hoffman, 1984). As the children grew more capable of seeing and expressing how others felt and responded to circumstances, they increased their skills in setting up claims, providing evidence, and assessing appropriate props, plans, and critique. These were precisely the skills of speaking, writing, and thinking their children needed not only for effective navigation of their own daily lives but also their growth of confidence in themselves as academic learners.

Developing empathy for character as well as in ensemble helps children grow in their own emotional health.

The TRT also felt that developing empathy for character as well as in ensemble helped the Bexhill children grow in their emotional health. As the children learned to think of themselves in the context of others' thoughts and feelings, they seemed more capable of internalising questions such as "How does the way I see myself compare to the ways that others see me?" The need within a growth of empathy to undertake self-assessments of capacity, permission, and obligation stimulated thoughtful ways of reaching beyond the self as individual actor. What can we offer to a lad who feels threatened when asked to take on a female role? Would positive role models in both adults and children help? What is it like to be too shy to volunteer for a speaking part? When limited physical abilities or psychological hesitations are present, learning mentors – teachers, professional artists, and the members of the SRT – need to assess, devise, and adapt the context to recognise different kinds of contributions. To do so, they have to model actions based on internalised questions such as: How might it feel to miss your partner and refuse to go on stage? And how can we work together to help this person know that even in these circumstances, we will all try to make this dramatic production both successful and safe?

Most drama advocates today know that the process of learning to create drama is far more important than the product or the performance. While the benefits of drama go a far way in helping children's mental agility – their quickness of mind, their willingness to engage in problem-finding and problem-resolution – the benefits extend themselves immeasurably into emotional health. As Smith and Herring (2001) conclude:

> Drama can provide learners with developmentally appropriate instruction through processes such as physical movement, speaking, socialising, and decision making. The acquiring of individual self-esteem is pivotal to a student's potential for academic, social, and psychological well-being. And drama…creates natural opportunities for each student to participate actively. When students are encouraged to join in the learning, they will have greater chances to construct an affirmative sense of self. (p. 10)

The teachers at Bexhill came to know all these claims for drama well. But they also had their own special claims that related to the contexts they and their work with drama created for the children's maturation of empathic understanding. Rachael explained that she would never expect her children to do anything she wasn't willing to do. Clare nudged her children to think beyond their own very real roles in life to imagine the possibilities in other roles. Lesley chose not to step in to make all the decisions in her classroom; she instead led her Reception children to ask questions and suggest possibilities. Rather than ask them to "cotton on" to her ideas, she wanted her children – as young as they were – to think for themselves and in doing so to learn the many ways of thinking that can surround a single situation. Lesley agreed with philosopher Maxine Greene: "The principles and the contexts have to be *chosen* by living human beings against their own life-worlds and in the light of their lives with others, by persons able to call, to say, to sing, and – using their imaginations, tapping their courage – to transform" (Greene, 1995, p. 198).

Thus when Lesley worked with the Year Two Drama Club, she emphasised how important it was that "When we come to do drama, you're not just going to say these lines or just copy this format. I want you to think, 'If I were this character, what would I want to say and do?' So the thing is to broaden their ideas about what a character is as opposed to this *flat* thing."

Because when you've got the right atmosphere, the right relationships, the actual teaching in the classroom or leading of Drama Club is a doddle!

To help her children move beyond flat interpretations to fully rounded productions, Linda gave her children multiple opportunities for collaborative choice as well as critique. She wanted them to have a sense of their own power to transform – situations, themselves, and their relations with others. Linda emphasised the need for adults to guide and model learning, but also to be willing to step out of the way:

> A lot of the time adults just interfere and make things worse. *You might solve the actual problem at the time, but you don't resolve the issue.* My role is to provide stability and security and consistency. I may not always be happy and jolly, but they always know what they're getting, so I think that's an important role for me. I hope I model social skills, general behaviour, how to deal with all sorts of people and all sorts of situations. Because a lot of our children, if there's conflict, or if they're not happy, they lash out either physically or verbally. In classroom teaching and in drama, I see my role, very much, as showing them alternatives and helping them to practice these alternatives. And once you've established that side of it, the teaching is the easy bit. Because when you've got the right atmosphere, the right relationships, the actual teaching in the classroom or leading of Drama Club is a doddle!

Drama offers children and teachers the chance to create worlds together, not just the world on the stage, but social worlds where they can collaboratively choose, create, and critique in a comfortable atmosphere. Such worlds concentrate on resolving issues, not just solving problems. Thus, the words in the title of this booklet – *It's up to you* – extend beyond the individual to the collective identity of groups of children engaged in drama through the transformative quality of teaching and learning for emotional health.

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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 Art*Show* (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 though 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.

It's up to you: drama for emotional health

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."

Drama offers children and teachers the chance to create worlds together, not just the world on the stage, but social worlds where they can collaboratively choose, create, and critique in a comfortable atmosphere. Such worlds concentrate on resolving issues, not just solving problems. Thus, the words in the title of this booklet – It's up to you – extend beyond the individual to the collective identity of groups of children engaged in drama through the transformative quality of teaching and learning for emotional health.

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