



Dramatic learning in the primary school

Shirley Brice Heath & Shelby Wolf



Learning for
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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 in Sunderland 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 four 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.

This series is available in PDF form at
<http://www.creative-partnerships.com/>



Have a think about it: drama for mental agility

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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."

Rather than send their children into the woods of drama alone, the Bexhill teachers went along with them, exchanging ideas in their joint journey, pointing out features in the path, and listening closely to their children's own ideas for alternate routes. Most important, they charted for themselves and the children of Bexhill Primary School long-standing habits of "having a think about it."

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.



It's up to you: drama for emotional health

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What could happen if? drama for learning from others

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(with Reif Larsen and Gayle Sutherland)



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Students of years 4, 5, and 6 worked together as a Student Research Team (SRT) to observe, record, and analyse the language used by professional actors in their direction of primary children in dramatic productions. Engaged in new roles as *researchers communicating their findings to teachers*, the SRT gained technical vocabulary, oral language fluency, and reputations as good observers, leaders in dramatic exercises, and confident learners. Their work and assessments by teachers indicate just what *can* happen when students become inquiring observers, good recorders, and thoughtful co-learners with their peers and teachers.

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.



A way of working: teachers in drama education

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