



You may be familiar with one or more versions of the story of the blind men (or men in the dark) and the elephant. Each man touches part of an elephant to learn what this creature it is like. Each is asked to say aloud what they think it is like. Of course depending on which part of the elephant they touch, they each have a very different impression of the creature. None of them have the full picture but each speaks from his own perspective, what he believes to be the truth. 'It is like a snake,' says the man holding the tail. 'No, it is like a pillar,' says the man touching its leg. 'It is very like a fan,' says the man who is touching its ear. They all speak the truth as they 'see' it but in reality, none are speaking the truth as they are coming at it from a solitary perspective and with limited experience.

Different versions of the story interpret each body part differently and in various versions there are differences in the levels of the violence between the men who cannot agree about what the creature is like. In some more positive versions of the story they listen to each other intelligently and are able to think and discuss their different perceptions together, to resolve and

**It was six men of Hindustan
To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the Elephant
(Though all of them were blind)
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind
*John Godfrey Saxe***

explain the apparent differences and then begin together to appreciate 'the big picture'.

For the last few years I have thought repeatedly of this tale when I have seen the many ways that Drama is emerging, often without even being called Drama. It is a confusing world out there for teachers and schools who don't know what the big creature 'Drama' looks like to begin with. They may buy in to just the tail or the trunk or the tusk and not even realize that they are touching Drama at all.

It has been unhelpful in England and Wales to have Drama placed inside another subject (English) and

then ignored. Teachers (and children) who only know the current national curriculum might be forgiven for mistakenly and genuinely thinking that Drama is no more than an aspect of speaking and listening or just a way of making speaking, listening and writing better. A few strategies appeared on a poster and were done to death (rarely within the context of a sustained drama lesson). Through the inappropriate national curriculum placement of Drama followed by the prescriptive national literacy strategies that virtually became the main curriculum, teachers were led into a darkened room and given one piece of the drama elephant to hold onto. The Rose primary curriculum would have given primary teachers more to see and hold onto with drama as an art, but it was sadly trashed.

A prime example of holding on to (or being shown) just part of the elephant is *Mantle of the Expert* (MoE). What was once part of every drama teachers' toolbox has been separated out over the last few years and teachers that have not come at MoE holistically through Drama do not always realise (or want to know) that what they are engaged in much of the time is whole class Drama.

Patrice Baldwin

Dorothy Heathcote (who established MoE first in the 1970s) is a founder member of National Drama and is first and foremost a drama practitioner. Schools may have invested heavily in this one part of the 'drama elephant' and want to believe that they have discovered some new creature.

A leading advocate of MoE in its own right (who was very reluctant to call it drama) said to me several years ago, 'What difference does it make whether it is called Drama or not? As long as children in classrooms are having good learning experiences then it does not matter what we call it.' I avidly disagreed then and still do. Drama as a subject and as a pedagogy and 'curriculum approach' fights for its very existence in the curriculum so when we are having success with drama, let us call it Drama and shout it from the educational rooftops to help secure its place holistically in schools. The opposite view is that the word 'drama' puts people off and that we need to get drama into schools by stealth as there is prejudice against it: many teachers recoil at the thought of doing drama but would engage unknowingly with it through MoE. However, I believe children and teachers have the right to know (and need to know) that they are engaging with Drama. Providing evidence of what Drama achieves for children's learning is important to teachers, children, schools and to advocating effectively for Drama as a curriculum entitlement.

The opposite view commonly holds that when teachers are, 'some way down the MoE path, there will come a time when they will find some drama training useful.' Surely teachers would do better to gain an understanding of *Drama in Education* or *Drama for Learning* before they explore MoE as one part of it? So maybe drama is not an elephant now, maybe it has become a horse with the MoE cart going



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before it in an educational climate that wants young children to become task orientated, entrepreneurial workers meeting deadlines for clients and achieving economic well-being. Personally I would not want too much of that for young children and would prefer a rounded drama diet where tensions are not always task focused.

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So now for something completely different, that is, *Dramatic Enquiry* as described in *Drama Magazine*: Vol. 17.1 pp8-13. (Note that it is now spelled with an 'e' not an 'I'). This is claimed to be a new invention. One of its 'architects' states:

Dramatic Enquiries learners are placed in the centre of a fictitious dilemma and they have to decide for themselves about the questions they need to ask and the rights and wrongs of the given situation.

This is exactly what Drama teachers have done for years.

Maybe Drama is a chameleon and not an elephant or a horse after all. What the drama world is very good at is making drama survive and thrive in any educational seedbed and changing its language to accommodate. This can be viewed as necessity or expedience. At least *Dramatic Enquiry* and *Dramatic Inquiry* are both drama-ish by name. Part of the wonder and power of drama is that it can be used, adapted, honed for any learning purpose in any context. It always involves thinking and it can easily provide meaningful contexts to develop and promote different types of higher order thinking skills. National Drama held a groundbreaking Conference called *Thinking Drama* in 2004 that brought together speakers and practitioners from the worlds of thinking skills and drama for four days to talk and practice together.

Well established drama strategies and conventions that many teachers are familiar with, for example, *Hot-Seating*, *Freeze-Frame*, *Conscience Alley*, *Thought-Tracking*, can individually be considered and used specifically as thinking and inter-thinking frames. The words 'thought' and 'conscience' suggest this direct link. When setting up an imaginary community, world or an imaginary 'enterprise' with children, the teacher can decide what types of thinking to most enable through the way the lesson is structured and the thinking scaffolded. This is expounded on in my book *With Drama in Mind* (2004).

All drama is story. Philosophy for Children (P4C) uses story as its stimulus. Story drama has always provided a possible context for actively supporting and developing creative and critical thinking (including philosophical enquiry). P4C involves the children working as a 'community of enquiry'. Whole class drama of course also works with the children as a community who may

also engage with modes of enquiry (including philosophical and dramatic enquiry/inquiry). P4C and Drama actively use story to stimulate reasoning and 'imaginative exploration.' Some of the best P4C work I have seen with children has been facilitated by drama trained teachers, well versed in selecting and actively opening up stories and story dramas with children. As in drama, P4C uses the stories to enable the children to maintain a reflective distance. The teacher as the mediator of the experience (as in drama) invites children to make safe and meaningful personal links with the fiction.

Drama has always been used as a way of bringing religious education to life. There is now a ritualistic approach being used in some schools, called *Godly Play* which was developed by the American religious educator and Montessori teacher, Jerome Berryman. Drama is clearly linked with aspects of it. Two adults, a story-teller and a doorperson facilitate the session. As they enter the room the children are welcomed by the doorperson and invited to sit in a circle with the story-teller who settles the group ready for the story which is told using props (usually 3D figures made of natural materials). Out of role the children are invited to wonder about the story and think about their connectedness to it (aloud or in silence). The children then decide on how to respond to the story and may use drama by retelling the story using the 3D figures or by re-enacting it in role. They may choose to respond in non-dramatic ways, for example through art, games, mind maps, and so on. Then everyone is invited to return to the circle and a 'feast' is shared (something to eat and drink). The session is concluded with each child being personally spoken to by the story-teller and by the doorperson as they leave the room. The space has become a rather dramatic place of rituals and reflection (rather like a

place of worship or a theatre).

Circle Time is another ritual taking place now in most primary schools and is rooted in Drama (although not many schools realise it is). Jenny Mosely is a trained drama specialist. She has successfully adapted the work of Jacob Moreno (founder of sociodrama and psychodrama) for the school setting. Much good practice in Circle Time may well have developed from this as part of PSHE but there are schools where Circle Time has degenerated into a stilted and repetitive activity. My advice is then to take Circle Time back to its drama roots, to use fiction and role to free and distance the children to consider issues and situations more freely. My further advice would be to get off those chairs more and let the children become more physically active and before you know where you are, you have a drama lesson going on! It is usual for circles to be used on and off

through drama lessons but being glued to chairs all the time is maybe limiting and for some fidgety children makes concentration difficult. A PSHE Adviser and I decided to work together on creating a Drama and PSHE course for teachers. Once she realised the many commonalities between Circle Time and Drama, she decided to attend a long term drama course.

Now let us consider the ongoing National Drama initiative *Drama for Learning and Creativity* (D4LC), which has formally been adopted since 2007 as an International Drama, Theatre and Education (IDEA) project. D4LC unequivocally is Drama. Since it started in Norfolk with the support of National Drama, NESTA, QCA and Norfolk County Council in 2005, hundreds of teachers have engaged with D4LC. It has now spread to other local authorities in Wales and England, as well as to Iceland. It has already been held up internationally as an outstanding example of networking, advocacy and research in many countries, eg. Greece, Austria, Germany, Turkey and at World Creativity Summits in the UK and Taiwan, as well as at an IDEA Congress in Hong Kong. With the Director of D4LC (Chair of National Drama) recently being elected as the new President of IDEA, it is likely to spread still further internationally.

D4LC is a fine example of a subject association (National Drama) working in sustained and true partnership with local authority drama and arts advisers and drama specialist teachers. It works with the existing drama infrastructure to strengthen it and is absolutely not a 'hit and run' initiative. It aims for a sustainable legacy. External and internal evaluation has provided evidence that active engagement in D4LC increase teachers' drama confidence and competence as facilitators of whole class drama across the curriculum.



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Pairs of teachers from D4LC schools firstly experience being participants in high quality, whole class drama (at a D4LC Conference led by National Drama specialists). They then are matched up to drama specialists (including ND consultants) who will visit them in their schools and work alongside them in drama lessons at least termly. The teachers and drama specialists also plan and evaluate some drama lessons together and D4LC teachers share best practice at network meetings and on the open D4LC website www.nationaldrama.co.uk. They meet with other D4LC teachers to share successes and troubleshoot difficulties with National Drama support. The teachers can elect to carry out action research (again with National Drama support). Throughout the year they have a focus that directly links to a school improvement priority of their choice and they assess the impact of the drama on achieving that priority. Most importantly, the head teacher is committed to D4LC and has to enable it and monitor the impact, as well as plan for the development of drama. D4LC now has an open, international Facebook group as well as its official website.

So D4LC is making sure teachers see the big picture (the whole drama elephant), and they know that they are doing Drama and call it Drama. Teachers who have been previously involved more ambiguously in drama-ish approaches excitedly begin to see how it all hangs together and suddenly makes sense. The drama elephant in the room is no longer shrouded in darkness, mantra and mystery.

Calling drama anything but drama might be politically expedient and commercially worthwhile but it is not transparent and it is not helpful to Drama or to teachers. Drama professionals should stay aware of current and evolving trends of course and articulate what Drama offers but

should not rename Drama and its associated terminology to fit the educational climate of the day. More charitably, maybe many of those who create or design these approaches that claim to be new and not to be Drama are just younger than me and so never were shown the elephant in the room before the lights were put out by the first national curriculum followed rapidly by the national strategies. Or maybe they just have bad memories. I 'unfortunately' have the memory of an elephant and can still remember first hand the development of drama (or lack of it) from the early 1970s to the current day.

Maybe there is hope and guidance to be derived from the poem *Elephant in the Dark* by Jalal al-Din Rumi (translated by Coleman Barks), in which the men are not blind, but just in the dark with only a candle each.

*Each of us touches one place
and understands the whole in that way.
The palm and the fingers feeling in the
dark are
how the senses explore the reality of the
elephant.
If each of us held a candle there,
and if we went in together,
we could see it.*

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Patrice Baldwin is President of IDEA, Chair of National Drama, Director of D4LC and Adviser for Arts Development and Improvement for Norfolk County Council Children's Services.

She is also a School Improvement Partner and a trained Ofsted inspector. She is an established educational author and was a BBC Education drama series consultant and scriptwriter. Patrice was the drama member of Sir Jim Rose's Expert Editorial group drafting the proposed new primary national curriculum that failed to get through Parliament just prior to the election. Her most recent book (2009) is *School Improvement Through Drama: a creative whole class, whole school approach* (Continuum). She works nationally and internationally as a drama keynote speaker, workshop leader and advocate for Drama. Email: patrice@dramaforlearning.eu vWebsite: www.patricebaldwin.com