

## **Drama : movement and meaning making**

MONKHOUSE, Jemma and SMITH, Laurel

Available from Sheffield Hallam University Research Archive (SHURA) at:

<https://shura.shu.ac.uk/36139/>

---

This document is the Accepted Version [AM]

### **Citation:**

MONKHOUSE, Jemma and SMITH, Laurel (2025). Drama : movement and meaning making. In: DANIELS, Karen and HELKS, Marie, (eds.) An Introduction to Diverse Literacies in Primary Classrooms. Routledge, 149-164. [Book Section]

---

### **Copyright and re-use policy**

See <http://shura.shu.ac.uk/information.html>

## **Chapter 11. Drama: Movement and meaning making**

**Jemma Monkhouse**

0009-0000-3789-4915

**Laurel Smith**

0009-0007-3427-0008

### **Abstract**

This chapter looks at the role of drama and how it supports children's meaning making. It examines the positioning of drama in relation to English as a subject domain and considers the affordances drama offers for learning and teaching. After considering a range of conceptualisations of drama in education, two case studies are presented of the authors' experiences of using drama to explore Shakespeare's plays with children in Key Stage 2. Throughout the examples, different ways in which meaning can be made are considered, including meaning making through bodily movement, speech as a form of movement, and interaction with physical objects. Different forms of movement are considered with a focus on children working both as individuals and collectively. These examples of children's experiences help illustrate the potential of drama as a powerful tool to open up opportunities for learning in English and give insight into how drama can support their developing understanding when exploring a challenging text.

### **Introduction**

In this chapter we explore drama as a diverse literacy practice and consider its wide-ranging potential in terms of supporting meaning making and personal and social development. We begin by presenting some key conceptualisations that position different perspectives on drama in education. We then share two examples from our own practice and research as teachers and facilitators of drama: one drawing on Jemma's doctoral research and another from Laurel's classroom practice. Both examples draw on extra-curricular clubs exploring plays by Shakespeare with children in Key Stage 2. Finally, we discuss themes emerging from these examples along with some implications for practice.

#### ***Prompts for Critical Reflection***

##### **Reflecting on your own conceptualisations of drama**

- What do you think of when you hear the word drama? How does that change if you think about it from the perspective of a teacher?
- What forms of communication do you associate with drama? How is this aided by use of the body? Use of the voice? Movement?
- How do you see it in relation to literacy or English? Do you see it as sitting within the subject of English or do you see it as a subject in its own right?
- What value do you see in drama in your role as a teacher? Do you see it as a tool to support learning or do you think of a performance to be rehearsed and shared?
- What do you see as the potential benefits of using drama? Do these relate to English specifically, areas of the curriculum more broadly, or to aspects of personal and social development?

## Considering drama within the English subject domain

Now you have reflected on your own ideas about what drama is, we will introduce the purpose of this chapter within a book about diverse literacies. Drama is positioned within the subject of English in the National Curriculum rather than as a subject in its own right. Within this chapter we will consider what some of the potential benefits of drama are, both within English and more broadly, and in so doing consider its affordances as a diverse literacy practice.

The perceived importance of drama to the subject of English was clear in key government reports prior to the first National Curriculum being published in 1989. John Dixon's *Growth through English* (1967) reported on the discussion of teachers from England, America and Canada at the Dartmouth Conference in 1966. This advocated a 'personal growth' model of English and spoke of the role of drama within this. These views were echoed in the Bullock Report - *A Language for Life* (DES 1975) and the Cox Report- *English for Ages 5-16* (DES 1989), both of which were influential in the development of the first National Curriculum.

Further iterations of the National Curriculum in England have continued to highlight multiple ways in which drama forms a part of the English curriculum. Broadly, this includes its potential for language development and how this might feed into oral and written communication. More specifically, it also requires learners to develop their comprehension of plays (and other texts), to perform them with understanding and to apply this understanding to the writing and performing of their own compositions. McGuinn (2014) has summarised the many affordances of drama to the teaching of English:

*'The attractions for English practitioners of the drama-as-process approach are many: democratic access- particularly for those who find written forms of literacy difficult- to a wide range of empowering language registers and structures; learning alongside the teacher through discovery rather than learning through transmission from the dais; exploration of one's personal and social identity within a safe fictional context; breaking down of the academic barriers that can place canonical literature beyond popular reach; the acknowledgement that sound, movement and gesture are important components of literacy.'* (McGuinn 2014, p72)

The value of drama within the English subject domain is therefore seen as wider ranging, with benefits relating to the key strands of reading, writing and oracy as well as affordances in terms of how learning in English may take place.

## Further conceptualisations of drama in education

Debates surrounding the value of drama in education have extended beyond its positioning within the National Curriculum. Over the past century advocates have argued strongly for a range of reasons for its purpose in education. Here we will outline some key perspectives that have emerged, drawing on the work of influential practitioners in the field.

## Process versus product drama

Thinking around drama in education has often been conceptualised as drama as process or drama as product (McGuinn 2014, Neelands 1992, Neelands and Goode 2015). Process drama conceptualises drama as a vehicle for learning (whether that be personal development, learning related to English or learning across the curriculum), whereas product (or performance) drama views drama as theatre and as an art form to be taught in its own right. As Neelands argued, drama in education practice is not always so clear cut and 'increasingly, good drama practice at all levels is characterised by a more holistic approach that seeks to capture the strengths of both the process and the product traditions' (Neelands

2008, p5). Howell and Heap (2012, p3) argued that while drama is a process that enables 'development of cognitive, emotional, social, cultural and creative understanding and skills', all drama work in an educational context is underpinned by elements of theatre and performance. They used a helix (Figure 1) to explore the relationship between drama form and content and how this leads to learning about drama or learning through drama. This demonstrates how the two strands of learning are always present, as drama has to have content and also requires performance skills to engage in, but that the focus of each may come into sharper focus at different times.

**INSERT FIG11.1 HERE**

*Figure 11.1: The Drama Learning Helix, Howell and Heap, 2012, p4*

Throughout this chapter we will outline some of the perceived ways in which drama can support learning both as a process and a product.

### **Drama's role in supporting learning through play**

Although their work dates back prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the work of philosophers Rousseau and Froebel in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries is worthy of mention as their work has been used retrospectively in discussion about drama in education (Bolton 1985, McGuinn 2014). Their thinking influenced a move in education towards more child-centred approaches which acknowledged the importance of children learning through play. This highlighted the active role children play in learning (contrary to opposing empty-vessel models of learning) and how children are actively engaged in constructing meaning from their experiences, therefore highlighting the significance of children's play to learning. They also challenged the idea of unequal power relationships between the child and the teacher, suggesting a relationship of learning together rather than the child necessarily having to learn from the teacher. Rousseau and Froebel also placed importance on children learning through the senses and by engaging with the physical world and argued that such experiences and play would lead to understanding of not only the immediate but also the abstract. From a drama practitioner's perspective, these philosophies support the role drama can play in providing such experiences and opportunities for children to learn through play and such potential for creating relationships in which the child is not reliant and subservient to the teacher (McGuinn 2014).

These foundations from Rousseau and Froebel are reflected in the work of Piaget and Vygotsky (McGuinn 2014), who regarded children as active constructors of meaning from the earliest age. They were each interested in the relationship between drama and play and the affordance of drama in enabling children to enter a fictional world from which they can make meaning. They argued that such symbolic play enables children to access higher order thinking skills as well as having the potential for moral development. Dewey also advocated the contribution play can make to learning, arguing that if it is facilitated properly it can contribute to learning in the form of mental and moral growth (Dewey 2012).

Peter Slade's drama work in the 1950s was also heavily influenced by a belief in the value of learning through play. In his seminal text, *Child Drama*, he argued that play is 'inborn and vital' (Slade 1954, p41) and 'one of the most strenuous and creative forms of work' (Slade 1954, p42). He believed play was central to children's developing understanding of the world, arguing that 'Play is the child's way of thinking, proving, relaxing, working, remembering, daring, testing, creating and absorbing. Except for the actual physical processes, it is life' (Slade 1954, p42). Slade distinguished between 'personal' and 'projected' play and the importance of flow between the two of them to develop both inner understanding and understanding of material things.

## **Drama's role in development of self and personal growth**

Many key drama practitioners have argued for the role and value of drama from a social and emotional development perspective, including the seminal work of Heathcote, Bolton, and Neelands. Dorothy Heathcote's work in this field was highly influential (O'Neill 2015). Her work valued the importance of providing learners with experiences from which they can reflect and build their understanding. She noted that this had the potential to develop critical thinking, reflection, responsibility, collaboration and communication and described the purpose of drama as being about 'developing the skills of being a person in a community' (O'Neill 2015, p44). Neelands (1992) recognised drama's value in exploring and representing human experience, arguing that by providing simulated experiences drama can help children to develop an understanding of themselves and others. He therefore saw drama as a useful tool for exploring children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, as well as citizenship and Personal, Social and Health Education. Bolton (1983, 1998) also recognised drama's potential for children to experience emotions and argues that through this process a child's view of the world may be changed.

## **Drama's role as a vehicle for learning across the curriculum**

Another way of seeing drama's role as a process is the view of drama as a vehicle for learning across the curriculum. Process drama techniques such as hot seating, freeze frames, thought tracking and writing in role can all be used to explore the content of a range of curriculum areas. A key technique developed by Heathcote was that of 'teacher in role'. This enables the teacher to lead the direction of the drama, and similar to Vygotsky's theory on the Zone of Proximal Development, enables the teacher to work in role to extend what the child is able to achieve in the drama. The potential for learning across the curriculum afforded by drama is so great that Heathcote and Bolton claimed they 'cannot think of a subject that cannot or should not be tackled through drama' (Heathcote and Bolton, 1995, p84).

While process drama methods offer a wide range of potential for learning across a range of curriculum subjects, for the purposes of this chapter we draw you back to the case potential drama offers to English as a vehicle for learning. This includes providing access to and rehearsal of registers of language; development of vocabulary; opportunities for presenting orally and in writing; writing of texts for specific purposes; reading for research; and developing rich comprehension of texts, to name but a few. In the spotlight on research section below, we consider some of the potential learning process drama supports in relation to working with challenging texts.

### ***Spotlight on Research***

#### **Drama's affordances in exploring challenging texts**

A number of research studies have looked specifically at how process drama can be utilised to support children's meaning making when working with challenging texts, such as the works of Shakespeare.

**Edmiston, B and McKibben, A (2011). Shakespeare, rehearsal approaches, and dramatic inquiry: Literacy education for life. English in education, 45 (1), 86-101**

Edmiston and McKibben's (2011) study looked at the use of dramatic enquiry to explore Shakespeare's King Lear with 10-12 year old pupils. This indicated the power of rehearsal-based approaches in enabling children to make meaning about complex texts that would normally be considered too difficult for that age. They also made claims as to

drama's potential for individuals to project themselves into situations that would otherwise remain inaccessible, thus creating possibilities to learn from the situations, relationships and themes contained within the text and to consider the moral and philosophic significance of Shakespeare's plays.

**Kidd, D (2011). The Mantle of Macbeth. *English in education*, 45(1), 72-85**

Similarly, the results of Kidd's (2011) study into using 'Mantle of the Expert' to explore Shakespeare's Macbeth with underachieving GCSE students, also suggested drama's power to increase understanding of a text and relate it to students' own life experiences. It also showed a positive impact on students' speaking and listening skills. Kidd noted the impact the project had on the students' confidence to rise to challenges and their perception of their own ability, as well as the absorption and commitment to tasks the project created and the participants' increased ability to work collaboratively.

### **Drama's role as a subject in its own right**

Having explored views of drama in relation to process and its affordances in supporting a wide range of learning, we return to the sense of drama as a subject in its own right: what could be considered as drama as product. The case for this has been put forward strongly by David Hornbrook (Hornbrook 1985, Hornbrook 1986, Hornbrook 1998a, Hornbrook 1998b), who argued that what is lost with the popular ideas around learning *through* drama is the sense of drama and theatre as an art form. While he acknowledged that learning through drama has value, he called for 'an appropriate balance between a knowledge of drama and the mastery of its practices' (Hornbrook 1998b, p9). Hornbrook's view of drama places it within the arts and establishes it as a subject with its own body of knowledge, including conventions and techniques that can be taught.

### **Examples from practice**

As the mapping out of the role of drama in education demonstrates, the potential benefits are multifaceted and wide ranging. However, from our experience in our current roles working in Initial Teacher Education, when introducing the idea of tackling Shakespeare with primary pupils it is usually met with a mixture of disbelief and utter horror! Initial discussions with trainee teachers at the beginning of our drama workshops, suggest that the negative views they hold of using Shakespeare in a primary setting are often deeply rooted in their own experiences of studying Shakespeare in their secondary education. It seems that the need to dissect, analyse and offer insight on Shakespeare's plays leaves little room for engaging in the rich ways in which he plays with language and makes fundamental connections with the very stuff of what it means to be human. Interestingly, the majority of these student teachers leave the workshop with a different perspective and much more energised and engaged than when we started!

Our own experiences of working with young children to explore Shakespeare's plays through a combination of process and product drama, were both inspirational and illuminating. In the sections that follow, we will apply thinking about affordances of drama to examples from our own practice through two case studies that examine the ways in which we have each used drama to explore Shakespearean texts with pupils in Key Stage 2. The first case study, from Jemma, provides a spotlight on her research and focuses on the affordances of drama through consideration of an individual pupil. The second, from Laurel, provides a spotlight on classroom practice and builds on key aspects of Jemma's research to consider affordances in relation to the collective group. We hope that these case studies will offer



some inspiration, first and foremost, but also reassurance that performing Shakespeare's greatest works with primary school children is not only feasible, but utterly magical!

### **Spotlight on Research**

#### **Jemma' research: drama and movement supporting meaning making**

My case study draws on data generated from an after-school drama club I ran with 21 Year 6 pupils as part of my doctoral research. The club ran for ten weeks and used drama techniques to explore Shakespeare's Macbeth. The aims of the club centred around process drama, as I was interested in how drama supported meaning making in relation to a text as well as its impact on personal, emotional and social development. However, it is worth noting that as the club progressed a product drama element emerged as participants expressed a desire to perform scenes from the play for an audience. Throughout the ten weeks the club ran participants explored the text, characters and plot of Macbeth using a range of drama techniques. They also played a range of drama games that served as warm-ups for each session of the club and fed into the drama skills needed when working with particular scenes from the text of Macbeth. Data was generated through recording each session using Go Pro cameras (one attached to me filming from the point of view of facilitator and another filming a more general overview from the back of the room); interviews with participants; reflective notes from me as a researcher; and collection of artefacts e.g. participants entries in their personal Actor's Notebooks and artefacts created collaboratively such as through role on the wall activities.

For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus on process drama elements. In particular I will explore how physical elements of the drama process seemed to impact on meaning making for a specific participant in the club. When using the term 'physical' I am referring to both physical movement of the body and physical interaction with objects. Such physical elements are arguably significant aspects of drama practice, opening up affordances in the way that the body represents and communicates, quite often in motion. I also include in my consideration of movement what I would term oral movement or vocalisations, in that the production of sound and speech (further affordances of drama) are produced through bodily movement.

I will outline three examples relating to a single participant in the club and explore how the physical aspects of the practice of drama seem integral to how she makes meaning.

#### **Example 1: Involuntary and spontaneous movement supporting ongoing meaning making**

The first example focuses on a sequence typical of a participant in the club in which their physical movement appears integral to their continuous meaning making. The sequence is presented below to exemplify such a sequence of meaning making. It covers a period of time when I was explaining and giving instructions to the club and the participant featured seemingly uses movement of her body and voice to support how she makes meaning throughout that sequence.

*The participant is sat cross-legged on the classroom carpet and is listening to my instructions as a facilitator of a drama workshop. The participant asks, 'What's a tableaux?' in response to me using the word in my instructions. The question is spoken seemingly without conscious thought as soon as the word 'tableaux' has left my mouth. It could be thought of as an involuntary oral movement.*

*The participant starts the sequence sat in a neutral cross-legged position, with her arms relaxed over her legs and her head and gaze angled towards me as she listens. I start to*

*explain, 'I am going to tell you a certain type of person I want you to be and you are going to use your body to show me you're that type of person.' As I speak she straightens up her posture as if becoming a character. She flicks her hair and reangles her head as if in role as that character. She then adjusts crossing over of legs and arms as if taking on the role of a sophisticated lady. She turns her head and pinches her lips in this imagined role while continuing to listen to my instructions. I continue, 'You don't need to use your voice. You just need to use your bodies and your face.' As I give this instruction the participant's body moves continuously reflecting the instructions. I add, 'You might want to try out some different things'. The participant's body moves continuously in response.*

The movements in this sequence do not appear pre-planned but almost emerge unconsciously in response to what is being spoken about or occurring at that time. The immediacy of the participant calling out 'What's a tableau?' when I first say the word suggests an automaticity of the oral movement rather than planning to ask it, suggesting the question is an automatic and involuntary part of her meaning making process when hearing the instructions. As the instructions continue, she moves physically throughout as if her processing of the instructions takes place through her whole body.

### **Example 2: Physical representation supporting understanding of character and plot**

As well as the seemingly involuntary physical movement that can be observed in the first example, more deliberate physical movements seem a key feature of the participant's dramatic representations and therefore meaning making about characters and plot. When rehearsing and performing a scene where she plays the character of Macbeth, she holds her arms and shoulders out throughout this time in what appears to be her representation of a male stance. This embodiment of Macbeth suggests her need to take on a character physically to become them rather than relying simply on the language of the play.

Another example of this can be found in her portrayal of the ghost of Banquo:

*The participant moves hauntingly as Banquo's ghost, eyes fixed on Macbeth. As she swings her hair about in response to Macbeth crying, 'Never shake thy gory locks at me', the 'gory locks' settle on her face, where she lets them remain while she continues in role. She later exits the scene and when she returns she has rearranged and positioned her hair deliberately across her face: the decision to do so seemingly integral to her representation of the character.*

The use of every aspect of her physical being, from body stance to positioning and movement of hair, emphasises the important role physical representation is playing in her understanding of character and plot. Such use of her physical being seems integral to her interpretation and portrayal of the characters she plays.

### **Example 3: Interaction with physical objects enhancing meaning making**

Interaction with physical objects, including costumes and props also seem integral to the meaning making process. This appears to enable an extension to the participant's own physicality. Examples include asking for a crown when playing an apparition, linking to the wording of the text 'THIRD APPARITION: a child crowned, with a tree in his hand'.

In later weeks when the focus of the club switched towards preparing for a performance, the use of physical objects appeared to become increasingly important for the participant, as described in the vignette below. On the day of the performance, she arrived with a collection of props and costumes (by her own volition) for the roles she would play. A lot of thinking



had clearly gone into the selection and making of these costumes and props, thus supporting her meaning making in becoming the characters she would play. During rehearsal time prior to the performance, she spent most of her time engaged in business with her costumes and props, both trying on and exploring her movement in them and making additional items she felt were needed. This included the making of a brush that she decided she would need to play the role of the gentlewoman. This period of intense activity could be described as her becoming those characters in preparation for the performance. The physicality and movements she made reflected the costumes she had created for the character, as if the costume was the character and those were the movements someone wearing that outfit would make. It is as if the costume and props became the interpretation of each character.

*There is an ongoing exploration of costumes. First the participant stands in a bloodied and ripped t-shirt she has worked on at home to wear in her role as an apparition. She bends her knees and pushes her torso forward as if to emphasise the prominence of the costume in being that character. Costume changes are ongoing in this exploration. In one minute the participant is exploring a red cape to add to her apparition costume but in the next is exploring an apron she has brought from home to form a costume for another role she will play, the gentlewoman. Momentum builds in her exploration of the gentlewoman costume as she declares, 'I need a brush.' She locates a tube and then starts digging about in the paper tray. She works on the floor with a range of craft materials to make the brush, appearing very focused and independent in this activity. Before long her crafting becomes a sweeping brush. Once it is complete she stands and tests out her sweeping action.*

### Thinking across the three examples

Throughout the three examples shared here, physical movement and interaction seems integral to the participant's meaning making. Her movement (both physical and vocal) seems at times involuntary and automatic (such as the continual movement of her body in response to listening to me as the facilitator of the drama workshop) and at other times more deliberate and planned (for example, her interactions with costumes and props). Across these examples it appears as though processing and thinking is taking place across her whole body. Thinking and understanding could be seen as a cognitive process, taking place within the brain, but in the examples presented this thinking appears visible throughout her body. It is as if the processing and assimilation of information and thinking through interaction with others and with material items (text, props, physical space) takes place throughout her entire body. This includes a need for understanding to be felt (physically and viscerally as well as mentally) and to be tested and experimented with (practically through the body and not just hypothetically through the imagination). This is not to suggest that thought and mental cognition becomes redundant but rather the body and mind act as one in the processing and development of meaning and understanding. It is useful to draw on the thinking of Perry and Medina (2011) here, whose work explores the notion of embodiment in performative pedagogies:

*'Embodiment in performative pedagogical practices... describes teaching and learning in acknowledgement of our bodies as whole experiential beings in motion, both inscribed and inscribing subjectivities... the experiential body is both a representation of self (a 'text') as well as a mode of creation in progress (a 'tool'). Embodiment is a state that is contingent upon the environment and the context of the body.'* (Perry and Medina, 2011, p.63)

This sense of the body as both a 'text' and a 'tool' helps us to see the ways in which the participant's body is integral to their meaning making as an experiential being. The body acting as a tool that supports the process of creating meaning, and as a text that becomes a

product of that meaning making. Perry (2015) also draws on the work of Ellsworth (2005) to consider participants in drama as what Ellsworth terms 'body/mind/brain' and 'a learning self in motion' (Perry, 2015, p. 15). This idea of the body, mind and brain working as one and in motion to create meaning appears apparent in the three examples presented.

The examples presented also reflect some of the conceptualisation highlighted earlier in this chapter in terms of drama's affordance as a form of learning through play (Bolton, 1985; McGuinn, 2014; Dewey, 2012; Slade, 1954). Across the examples there is a sense of the participant as an active constructor of meaning, drawing on senses and engaging with the physical world through her own movement and interaction with props to deepen understanding. Slade's (1954, p42) assertion that 'play is the child's way of thinking, proving, relaxing, working, remembering, daring, testing, creating and absorbing' seems particularly pertinent here. Movement appears to accompany and be integral to thought processes and to aid absorption of information and understanding. Similarly, her interactions and movements with props, costumes and her own body appear to be forms of testing and creation as she becomes the characters she seeks to create.

In the next section, we move to Laurel's work with children, focusing on performing Shakespeare's work.

### **Laurel: co-constructing meaning through drama and movement**

The three case studies that follow are from my reflections on classroom practice and my experience of running an extra-curricular drama club, for children in Key Stage 2, to prepare and then perform a Shakespeare play as part of the UK-wide Shakespeare Schools Festival. The festival aims to increase access and exposure to Shakespeare's works across the primary and secondary age ranges, with the focus being placed on performance – or product - as a way to develop pupils' enjoyment of Shakespeare and their understanding of the significant themes within his plays, which are as relevant today as they were in the 16th century. During the festival, children from across the UK perform Shakespeare's plays in local theatres, having worked with their teacher-director over a period of approximately four months to develop the production of their chosen play.

As a teacher-director, I worked with pupils on two productions - Hamlet and Macbeth – and so this presents a contrasting approach to Jemma's example. In this case study, the pupils and I were engaging primarily in product drama, with the performance of the play being the end point to which we were all working. However, in this example we used process drama approaches and techniques in developing the performance, demonstrating how an understanding of process drama, for both teachers and pupils, is essential when engaging in product drama with the aim of producing a performance for an authentic audience. This approach reflects Neelands (2008) assertion that within practice, drama is often a more holistic approach, with product and process interwoven and coming to the fore at different points.

For the purposes of this chapter, I reflect on the affordances of process into product drama for co-constructing meaning through drama and movement. This focus relates particularly to the ways in which engaging collectively and collaboratively in meaning making can support children's personal growth and self-development. It builds on the examples within Jemma's case study, where the focus is on individual meaning making through physical movement (including voice), to consider collaborative and collective meaning making. That the product drama approach (and the process drama used in developing a performance) is fundamentally rooted in spoken language is important: as Bearne and Reedy (2018:13) assert, spoken language is the bedrock of "personal, social, cultural, cognitive, creative and imaginative development". Thus, the opportunity to co-construct meaning and engage with language outside the normal constraints, expectations, and anxieties that existed within the

classroom for a number of these pupils was significant. There remained a structure for our collaborative learning and there was the clear end goal and destination of the performance; but the space we created was different and one which was negotiated and co-constructed.

### **Case Study Focus**

#### **Example 1: Working collaboratively to communicate meaning through collective physical movement within the performance space**

Tableaux and freeze frame were two ways in which the pupils explored the themes and key moments of the plays through collective physical movement. These two techniques allowed pupils to work together to present still images of a scene in the play, including characters and the setting, and to represent characters and objects through body-shapes and postures. Thinking about objects as representations of themes within the play was extremely helpful in supporting pupils to develop their understanding of the text, but these 'tableaux' – or still images – also then became key parts of the final performance. For example, collectively using body-shapes to create a cauldron, forest, crown and dagger helped pupils to understand themes (crown/power, dagger/murder) and key scenes (cauldron/witches on the heath, forest/the murder of Banquo) within Macbeth, and then became ways to share and communicate these with the audience as part of the production.

At the start of the after-school sessions, the two groups struggled to work collaboratively when creating a tableau or freeze frame and generally pupils' use of their bodies and postures was rather limited. However, the success with which they were able to use these techniques improved both as they came to know the play better, and as their own awareness and confidence in their own physicality developed. It is important to note that we cannot expect children to come to a drama session with an innate sense of how to use physical movement within the performance space – this, like learning to read and write, needs to be taught and then practised. These rehearsal-based approaches – using techniques such as tableaux and freeze frame – helped pupils to explore and deepen their understanding of a challenging text (Edmiston and McKibben, 2011) and also develop their awareness of how physical movement can communicate meaning. This aspect also demonstrates the wider affordances of drama within English, as it can be a crucial way in which to help children develop their inference skills when reading: authors frequently convey meaning through nuanced choices about how characters move, walk, turn, even sit within a space; and so as children develop their understanding of this through drama and performance, they will hopefully become more aware of this when reading.

With a relatively small cast for each play and limited use of props, we had to find a way to present a range of different settings and complex narrative arcs in a simple way. Key to communicating meaning to the audience was the pupils working collaboratively and drawing on the process drama used to develop understanding of the text. In each of the plays, I identified key scenes to develop as ensemble pieces, where pupils worked together as a group to physically represent a setting. For example, pupils used the tableaux they had created during the process drama activities to represent the king's chamber and the forest in Macbeth where the crucial murders take place. When Hamlet is banished to England and narrowly escapes being murdered, pupils used a series of freeze frames to present key parts of the action being described by the narrator, with central characters moving between each freeze frame as the narrative unfolded. In each of these examples, pupils had to develop their ability to work as a group to both present a coherent still image to the audience and to move around each other and across the stage during transitions from one scene, or setting, to another.

However, some of the most powerful moments in the two plays came when the cast worked together as one 'character' or body of characters. In Macbeth, virtually the entire cast

became a homogenous group of witches to create a distinct and unsettling atmosphere for the scenes when Macbeth encounters them. The pupils worked individually and then as a group to develop a specific and slow series of body movements to take them on a winding route from the very back of the stage to the front, then moving and freezing as one group as key lines of the text were delivered. Later in the play, they devised a procession to follow Lady Macbeth, mimicking her movements as she walks through the castle at night trying to scrub the imagined blood from her hands. In Hamlet, as Ophelia buries her father and begins her descent into madness, pupils worked as a group to create a repeated series of movements which conveyed her sadness, grief, and mourning. Then, in the final scene of the play, they developed a slow-motion sword fight to echo and amplify Hamlet's fatal duel with Ophelia's brother.

In each of these truly collaborative moments in the play, pupils worked together as a group to powerfully convey atmosphere, feelings, emotion and meaning for the audience. These examples reflect Bolton's (1983) assertion that drama offers a unique opportunity for children to explore and experience emotions. The collaborative nature of these scenes further emphasised this, as the groups had to develop a shared understanding of the emotions they wanted to convey to and create within the audience. It was clear as the rehearsals progressed and developed, and then in the performance itself, that they had understood and embodied the significance of these moments within the narrative arc. Everyone within the group was aware of how they individually contributed to sharing that meaning with the audience.

Furthermore, during the process of developing these collaborative scenes, the children had to guide and manage their interactions within the group, take turns when sharing, explaining, and challenging ideas, listen actively and respond appropriately to each other. This took time and space for them to be able to experiment with ideas, and to make collective decisions to reject some ideas and retain and build on others. Engaging in the development of these scenes, then, offered particular affordances for the development of collaborative and communicative skills as noted by O'Neill (2015). It was through the process, but with a clear focus on the product, that the children developed their ability to work with others as part of a coherent cast.

### **Case Study Focus**

#### **Example 2: Co-constructing dialogue and movement to develop characterisation**

One of the most challenging aspects of performance for the children was understanding how their physical movement within the performance space related to the other actors. Practicing dialogues between characters often began with the children standing rigidly at opposite sides of the stage with the dialogue just going backwards and forwards between them. Alternatively, they would stand very close together in the centre of the stage, again with very little movement. Tackling this issue required pupils to understand how dialogue and movement worked together to convey meaning in the text by showing characters' emotions, thoughts, and feelings. To help pupils understand this, we first practiced key parts of dialogue using just movement and no words: in the dialogue each character would move closer to or further away from the other character(s) for each line of speech. This helped them to focus on the meaning of the text, consider how their body language could show the emotions and feelings of the character at that point, and how their character related to the other characters on the stage.

Consider, for example, the dialogues between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth as they formulate their plan to murder the king. Here, tensions and emotions are running high, but this cannot

simply be conveyed through words: it is through the physical movements of the actors within the performance space and in relation to each other which give these moments in the play deep significance. It is important to note that this process is also giving agency to the pupils within the performance: What meanings do they feel are being conveyed at this particular point? How do they believe the character is feeling about events and in relation to the other characters in the scene? This focus on the performance of the text, supported pupils to make links between what the characters say and how they say it, embodying meaning through the performance. It was also a central part of how, as product drama came to the fore, the children were able to develop their understanding of drama as a subject in its own right; the mastery of its practices which Hornbrook (1998b) highlights in advocating for drama to be given its own status.

< Text box starts about here>

### **Case Study Focus**

#### **Example 3: Collective use of the voice to co-construct meaning**

Undoubtedly, pupils developed their confidence in speaking, and their ability to listen and respond, throughout the process of working towards a performance of the play. As discussed above, specific drama activities helped to develop their understanding of the text and the relationships between the characters, all of which supported them in delivering their lines with confidence, liveliness, and flair. However, just as some of the most powerful physical moments in the play were collaborative, we worked a number of moments into each of the plays when the cast collectively used their voices to co-construct, and communicate, meaning. As a group, the witches collectively delivered key lines of the script: in whispers, hisses, and echoes, building to shouts, screams and cackles! It may at first seem like a relatively straight forward thing to do, but this kind of collective delivery of the script requires pupils to develop a nuanced understanding of pace, tonal variation, and clarity of pronunciation. Without these key aspects, it becomes a confusing mess of words and sounds, and as the pupils' awareness of the audience developed, so did their understanding of how to use their voices collectively to co-construct meaning within the play.

Within Hamlet we developed the use of a choral and echo ensemble piece for Hamlet and Ophelia's central dialogue within the narrative (see table 1 below). For this, there were several couples of 'Hamlet and Ophelia' in different places on the stage. Key lines within the dialogue were delivered as a chorus – i.e. all the Ophelias or Hamlets speaking together. In addition, the dialogue moved from one couple to the next, with the last line being repeated as the beginning of the next couple's section. Again, this more complex ensemble approach required the pupils to listen extremely carefully to each actor on the stage. They were responding not only to their partner within their part of the dialogue, but also to the other couples on the stage.

In each of these examples, the pupils moved beyond a focus on their own lines to an understanding of how the collective group worked together to convey meaning. The need to listen actively in these scenes inevitably benefitted pupils' delivery and performance of dialogue in the rest of the play, and it was clear to see as the rehearsals progressed that their understanding of their own character became situated in the interactive nature of the dialogue.

**Table 1:** *Example of choral and echo ensemble dialogue*



*Pairs 1, 2, and 3  
start the scene in  
freeze frame*

PAIR 1	OPHELIA	Good, my lord. I have remembrances of yours that I have longed to redeliver. I pray you receive them.	<i>Pair 1 unfreeze the frame</i>
	HAMLET	No, not I. I never gave you aught.	
	OPHELIA	My honoured lord, you know right well you did.	<i>Pair 1 into freeze frame</i>
PAIR 2	OPHELIA	My honoured lord, you know right well you did. <i>[repeated line]</i>	<i>Pair 2 unfreeze the frame</i>
	HAMLET	I did love you once.	
	OPHELIA	Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.	<i>Pair 2 into freeze frame</i>
PAIR 3	OPHELIA	Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so. <i>[repeated line]</i>	<i>Pair 2 unfreeze the frame</i>
	HAMLET	You should not have believed me. I loved you not.	
	OPHELIA	I was the more deceived	<i>Pair 2 into freeze frame</i>
ALL PAIRS	HAMLET	Get thee to a nunnery.	<i>All pairs unfreeze</i>
ALL PAIRS	OPHELIA	Oh, help him, you sweet heavens.	

< Text box end about here>

## Implications for teachers and practitioners

Having introduced a range of perspectives on what drama in English education might do and having presented two examples from our own practice, we now turn to what our chapter suggests might be important for teachers and practitioners. We will focus this on the key themes we have sought to draw out so far.

We began by considering how drama has been conceptualised as process and product and the potential for these elements to entwine depending on the focus of drama work, as suggested by [Bowell and Heap \(2012\)](#). In the examples we present, the relationship between process and product was fluid as participants continually engaged with learning on multiple levels while at times holding a clear focus on working towards a performance. We would suggest that regardless of the planned focus of any drama work, the relationship between process and product will always emerge. The potential for what can be gained from the practice of drama will be maximised if practitioners work with this understanding in mind and make space for the affordances that both these approaches offer.



A feature of the approaches to drama used in the examples within this chapter is the positioning that drama gives children as active meaning-makers with agency in the process. This can be seen in the way that children learned through their own explorations and creations and engaged in negotiating meaning individually and collectively through their interactions – with each other, the text, material items, and the space itself. Through these interactions, children actively construct meaning, drawing on senses and engaging with the physical world. Through this they deepen understanding. This highlights the benefits of positioning children as active meaning-makers and utilising drama as a playful pedagogy, as we set out in the positioning of drama as play earlier in the chapter (Bolton, 1985; McGuinn, 2014; Dewey, 2012; Slade, 1954). Furthermore, it is worth highlighting that our roles within the examples presented here were not as teachers as transmitters of knowledge. While we certainly guided and facilitated children's explorations and play, we sought as far as possible to create more equal relationships within the workshops.

In considering the value of drama in supporting active meaning making and learning through play, it is important to consider what drama practice specifically has to offer. Throughout the examples presented it is clear that the affordance of drama drawing on the whole experiencing body to facilitate and make meaning is integral to its value. This can be seen in the way both spontaneous and planned movement appear to support exploration and meaning making in both examples shared. We would argue that such opportunity for movement and valuing the role of the physical in meaning making opens up opportunity for children to explore and discover in ways that they might not within more static literacy pedagogies. While experiencing through physical movement and interaction is not something that is exclusive to drama practice, drama does draw heavily on such affordances. It is therefore important to consider how these elements of drama practice can be utilised to support children's meaning making.

It is also important to recognise the affordances of drama for children's personal growth and development. As we discussed earlier in the chapter, these opportunities are presented through the need to explore and express emotions when performing and playing in drama, and the fact that the content of drama is fundamentally about human experience (Bolton, 1983, 1998; Neelands, 1992). In both case studies, children engaged deeply with characters within the texts, through their exploration of characterisation and narrative arc. Through the process of working in collaboration with others – both their peers and adult facilitators – they developed their ability to communicate through spoken language using their voices to work and learn collectively (O'Neill, 2015). This, we would argue, highlights the potential drama offers to both support children's speaking and listening skills within English, and for the holistic development of the whole child, through social, emotional, and personal aspects.

Finally, the nature of the texts one chooses to explore through drama is also worthy of consideration. Within the two case studies in the chapter, we, and the children we worked with, explored plays by Shakespeare. These texts might be considered, by some, to be too complex for the age of the children we worked with. However, we have demonstrated how drama pedagogies can be utilised to support children's engagement with and understanding of such challenging language and texts, as was also explored by Kidd (2011) and Edmiston and McKibben (2011). We would argue that such pedagogy extends beyond Shakespeare and can be used with any challenging texts. This might include texts which would not traditionally be seen as challenging texts but are complex for the children which you are working with, in terms of language, ideas, or themes. Drama is a way of deepening comprehension of texts which may otherwise be potentially out of reach for the age and linguistic development of the children you are teaching.

<b><i>Prompts for Critical Reflection</i></b>
---

**Considering how your understanding of drama as a diverse literacy practice has developed as a result of reading this chapter**

- Look back at your reflections from the beginning of this chapter and consider how your thinking about drama has changed.
- What is your understanding of process and product drama?
- What do you now see as the affordances and value of drama?
- What implications for practice will you take forward from this chapter?

**Chapter summary**

In this chapter we have explored drama as a diverse literacy practice and considered its wide-ranging potential in terms of supporting meaning making and personal and social development. We hope the two case studies have offered insight and inspiration for how drama can be used to explore challenging texts as part of your own practice, and that the implications for practice we have discussed offer you further thoughts to support you in working with this pedagogy. As we draw the chapter to a close, we invite you to reflect on some final thoughts from Boal (2008), who has inspired our own thinking about the purpose of drama in education:

*'I was a teacher of theatre. Now I understand that there is no such thing. Those, like myself, who are teachers- and students- of theatre, in reality we are students and teachers of human beings... When we study Shakespeare we must be conscious that we are not studying the history of the theatre, but learning about the history of humanity. We are discovering ourselves. Above all: we are discovering that we can change ourselves, and change the world.'* (Boal 2008, p ix)

**References**

- Bearne, E. & Reedy, D. (2018). *Teaching Primary English: Subject Knowledge and Classroom Practice*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Boal, A (2008). *Theatre of the oppressed*. New ed.. ed., London, Pluto; Pluto Press.
- Bolton, G (1983). Drama in Education: Learning Medium or Arts Process? In Dobson, W (Ed), *Bolton at the Barbican*. London: National Association for the Teaching of Drama.
- Bolton, G (1985). Changes in thinking about drama in education. *Theory into practice*, 24 (3), 151-157.
- Bolton, G (1998). *Acting in Classroom Drama: A Critical Analysis*. Chester: Trentham Books.
- Bowell, P and Heap, B. (2012). *Planning process drama: enriching teaching and learning*. 2nd ed.. ed., London, Routledge.
- Department of Education and Science (1975). *A Language for Life (The Bullock Report)* London: HMSO
- Department of Education and Science (1989). *English for Ages 5-16 (The Cox Report)*. London: HMSO
- Dewey, J (2012). *Democracy and Education*. Start Publishing LLC.

Dixon, J (1967). *Growth through English: A Report Based on the Dartmouth Seminar 1966*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Edmiston, B and McKibben, A (2011). Shakespeare, rehearsal approaches, and dramatic inquiry: Literacy education for life. *English in education*, 45 (1), 86-101.

Ellsworth, E. (2005). *Places of learning: Media architecture pedagogy*. New York: Routledge Falmer.

Heathcote, D and Bolton, G (1995). *Drama for learning : Dorothy Heathcote's mantle of the expert approach to education*. Portsmouth, NH, Heinemann.

Hornbrook, D (1985). Drama, Education, and the Politics of Change: Part One. *New theatre quarterly; new theatre quarterly*, 1 (4), 346-358.

Hornbrook, D (1986). Drama, Education, and the Politics of Change: Part Two. *New theatre quarterly; new theatre quarterly*, 2 (5), 16-25.

Hornbrook, D. (1998a). *Education and dramatic art*. 2nd ed.. ed., London, Routledge.

Hornbrook, D. (1998b). *On the subject of drama*. Routledge.

Kidd, D (2011). The Mantle of Macbeth. *English in education*, 45(1), 72-85.

McGuinn, N, (2014). *The English teacher's drama handbook: from theory to practice*. Routledge.

Neelands, J (1992). *Learning through imagined experience: the role of drama in the National Curriculum*. Hodder & Stoughton.

Neelands, J, (2008). *Drama: the Subject that Dare not Speak its Name*.

Neelands, J, and Goode, T, (2015). *Structuring drama work*. 3rd edition (Eds). Cambridge University Press.

O'Neill, C (Ed.) (2015). *Dorothy Heathcote on Education and Drama: Essential Writings*. Oxon: Routledge.

Perry, M. (2015). Devising in the Rhizome: The "Sensational" Body in Research in Applied Arts. In M. Perry & C. Medina (Eds). *Methodologies of embodiment inscribing bodies in qualitative research (Routledge advances in research methods; 15)* (pp14-27) New York; London: Routledge.

Perry, M., & Medina, C. (2011). Embodiment and performance in pedagogy research: Investigating the possibility of the body in curriculum experience. *JCT (Online)*, 27(3), 62.  
Slade, P (1954). *Child Drama*. London: University of London Press