Chapter 3
Learning Through Drama

The History and Context in Schools

Drama is the art form that most explicitly mirrors and explicates human conflict. Conflict is part of the basic business of drama, which exists to depict and explore human relationships. Keywords and concepts are shared between drama and conflict resolution, and the very words *protagonist* and *antagonist* that are used to label the main parties in a conflict derived from Greek drama. A central element of all drama is *tension*, and dramatic action consists of *dialogue, opposition, negotiation and argumentation*, all of which are employed in the drive towards resolving the tension. The classic structure of the majority of traditional Western drama, known by scholars as the 'dramatic curve', usually describes the escalation and de-escalation of conflicts, and the end of the curve is dubbed the resolution. In educational drama as in real-life conflict-handling situations, how tension is managed and resolved offers insights for learning and change.

Learning, Social Control and Social Action

Historically, drama has a long and equivocal relationship with education, and almost as long—and equivocal—an association with conflict management, social control… and also social activism. The traditional Indian drama handbook Natya Shastra is explicit: 'Drama originated because of the conflicts that arose in society when the world declined from the Golden Age of harmony, and therefore a drama always represents a conflict and its resolution'. (New World Encyclopaedia—see also Chap. 4).

Drama and theatre have always been used by rulers to assist in generating and maintaining a stable and harmonious congruence of thought and social purpose. This has been true of governments from ancient Rome—'Bread and Circuses', as the poet Juvenal (Satire 10, line 81) pungently put it—to modern Singapore—'The Theatre

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that Governs' as theatre director Kuo Pao Kun (1996) equally succinctly labelled this useful quality. In 330 BC, Aristotle observed and attempted to define the stabilising effect of drama on an audience, explaining it in terms of catharsis, purging socially dangerous excesses of pity and fear.

By contrast, Plato (c. 360 BC) a generation earlier warned of the potentially disruptive effects of drama. Official ambivalence to theatre is always present. Governments and non-governmental agencies welcome the power of theatre to speak to the community and influence its attitudes to health and to the environment, but they look nervously on its potential to stir those communities into unrest (Kuo Pao Kun spent time in gaol for his social activist views). It is part of the two-headed nature of drama and theatre not just to reflect and celebrate society, but to interrogate it—to ask awkward questions as well as providing happy endings.

Not only that, but it must be noted that drama may also be traduced into assisting the escalation and maintenance of conflict itself: practising for war is in no small measure carried out through dramatic simulations and enactments.

Modern Movements in Drama and Education

The Twentieth Century

Throughout the twentieth Century and into the twenty-first, interest in the educational and social effects and possibilities of drama has been growing. From the 1920s in Vienna to the 1960s in the USA, Jacob Moreno and his associates developed the psychodrama (Moreno, 1946) and sociodrama (ibid. 1960) movements. Both were predicated on the assumption that drama may be used to assist in the restoration of personal, psychological and social stability. Both movements used forms of role-play: psychodrama to stabilise and normalise disturbed individuals, and sociodrama to assist groups, and both movements are still active and influential. Psychodrama is widely used in mental health settings, and sociodrama developed into the massive adult role-play training movement still popular in commercial and managerial settings.

The rise of progressive education throughout the twentieth century led to the growth of educational uses of drama in schools. From the turn of the twentieth century, educators in many countries started to find in drama a pedagogy to accomplish the liberal progressive education whose proponents were attempting to centre the curriculum on the personal and social development of the child. In England a radical school principal, Harriet Finlay Johnson, wrote *The Dramatic Method of Teaching* (1907), based on her work with village elementary schoolchildren that included both role-play and Shakespeare. In the USA, Winifred Ward developed the hugely influential Creative Dramatics (1930)—a movement that is still popular in the USA—with the aims of providing a controlled emotional outlet, an avenue of self-expression, encouragement of the creative imagination, growth in social understanding and cooperation and giving students experience in thinking on their feet

and expressing themselves fearlessly. In Sweden Esther Boman, the principal of a progressive girls' school, used drama to 'focus on aspects of the curriculum and on personal problems in the girls' own lives' (1932—see Hagglund, 1999).

All of these movements were based on the active learning power of *doing* drama, and all of them espoused improvisational methods to permit children to become active participants, not just audiences—albeit with a range of forms of participation, and for different purposes.

Child Drama and Developmental Drama

In the 1950s, the charismatic teacher Peter Slade set up a centre in Birmingham, UK to focus attention on the significance and natural structures of children's own dramatic play, allowing those to create the conditions for classroom learning. This he described in his internationally influential book *Child Drama* (1954). He also founded the still-active Dramatherapy movement, a more group-centred variant of psychodrama.

In the 1960s, Slade's equally influential associate Brian Way (1967) extended this idea into harnessing the dramatic instinct in a more organised way, through structured theatrical exercises, to provide a developmental progress for the individual child. The philosophical drive came largely from Rousseau through Dewey and the progressive education movement—crystallised in Richard Courtney's *Play, Drama and Thought* (1968). Theatre itself was downplayed in favour of children exploring drama for themselves in the private context of the classroom itself, with no external audience.

Drama-in-Education

These ideas became the springboard for the even more influential ***drama-in-education*** movement, again initially centred in the UK. The pioneers of this movement, Dorothy Heathcote and Gavin Bolton followed Slade's lead by starting their drama work on the basis of extending children's natural dramatic play into improvised drama, but to some extent they were reacting against both Slade and Way. Slade's declared reliance on letting the children freely lead the dramatic play sometimes led, in the classrooms of his less charismatic followers, to chaos, puzzled children and little in the way of learning. Heathcote had little patience with all of this. Like Brian Way, Heathcote and Bolton believed in structure, but not in Way's rather mechanistic patterns of dramatic exercises. They set out to build the children's ideas into intellectually and emotionally strong dramatic experiences; Heathcote's phrase 'building belief' is now part of the drama teacher's lexicon, and she happily agreed with libertarian critics that she used 'manipulation'. This drama had a strong social and group orientation.

In all drama-in-education, participants are collaborative learners engaged in learning by shifting role perspectives in a fictional or fictionalised context. Heathcote's most distinctive pedagogical innovation was the 'mantle of the expert', where to

achieve the goals of the drama, the participants as characters in role had to learn to carry out tasks and make decisions demanding real expertise. This shifted the balance of power and responsibility in the classroom on to the students. Drama was there to create genuine dialogue and social learning: understanding of the world and each other.

For a long time, the dominant mode of drama-in-education was group 'living-through' role-play, with no concept of an external audience. In this kind of role-play, the participants become entirely absorbed in the dramatic context as characters, empathising with the situation and their role, making it up as they go along, in concert with the other characters—the members of the class or subgroup. More recent drama educators have woven into this group-based empathic role-play a broader range of theatrical techniques, exercises and conventions, not least to provide the participants with the opportunity of exploring the context with a measure of emotional distance.

Both pioneers were themselves masterly, though very contrasting, teachers whose fame quickly spread. Heathcote's dazzling and revolutionary practice was seen in numerous films (e.g. 1971) and attracted teachers and drama workers to her side from all round the globe, who spread the word. With Bolton's meticulous theorising of the practice in *Towards a Theory of Drama Education* and later writings (1979, 1984; Heathcote & Bolton, 1995) they quickly created a worldwide movement. Many of their early followers and successors refined the practice and the theory, creating manageable classroom learning strategies that are still current, pre-eminently the composite drama form that is nowadays more commonly known as ***process drama***. This is still widely used, mainly in educational settings.

Emanating from the UK, DIE became most strongly established in Anglophone and English-friendly education systems, such as those in Scandinavia and former UK colonies like Australia. Not surprisingly the Brisbane, Adelaide and Swedish DRACON projects were all based on DIE philosophy and made use of some of its forms.

The early DIE pioneers were also influential in a complementary and contemporaneous movement in the field of young people's theatre known as ***theatre-in-education*** (TIE), which like DIE spread internationally. TIE commonly refers to a participatory form of theatre for young people provided to school students by external companies and groups. It started in regional theatres in the UK and was closely allied to the DIE pioneers and their aims; TIE's early practitioners similarly set out to visit schools in order to utilise the power of drama—through theatre—to open up, explore and influence learning, providing 'a dynamic means of gaining new understanding' (Bolton, 1979, p. 112).

Contemporary TIE is now a widely used extension of schooling worldwide across all age levels and many subject areas. It can also involve groups of students attending a performance at a specific site. Some education systems have established sites such as farms, environmental centres and historic villages which combine theatre performance with hands-on experience. Theatre in museums has become a major form of theatre-in-education in a number of countries in Europe, North America and Asia, where students travel to museums to see performances and take part in intensive

role-play days, with activities such as costumed improvisations of an historical event and battle re-enactments.

TIE was the form used by the Malaysian DRACON project and is described in more detail below.

Theatre of the Oppressed

Developed contemporaneously with DIE but on the other side of the world, and also now a worldwide movement, was ***Theatre of the Oppressed*** (TO). TO was founded by the Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal. Directly inspired by Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Boal set out to develop a community theatre practice that has become, in effect, a pedagogy. TO's original aim was to help the poor and disenfranchised to liberate themselves by revealing through theatre the nature and conquerability of the things that oppressed them. One of Boal's most celebrated techniques was ***forum theatre*** described in more detail below.

Boal subsequently acknowledged the problems for a visiting theatre company playing to localised audiences; these included the possible irresponsibility of a fly-in, fly-out experience leading to uncontrolled responses, and the limitation of only being able to work at the communal level. His later theory and practice included alternative forms which concentrated more on the individual, such as 'image theatre' and what he termed 'Rainbow of Desire' (1995). This involves a group with their leader engaging in workshop drama exercises, whose purpose is to assist individuals to deal with their own 'cops in the head' that provide much of what oppresses them. This method of theatre and therapy is now widely used within economically developing world contexts where it is seen to have the therapeutic potential of using theatre to transform life.

Boal's work was focused on adults and liberatory rather than educational. His workshop exercises were based on acting techniques rather than play forms familiar to children. However, his work is increasingly finding application in schools. Both the Brisbane and Swedish DRACON projects made use of forum theatre, with modifications.

Theatre for Development and Applied Theatre

Other significant influences on the DRACON project were approaches drawn from ***Theatre for Development*** (TfD). TfD refers to a process of creative problem-solving and community empowerment using theatre. Communities, usually with the assistance of professional theatre makers, draw on standard theatrical forms as well as their own specific cultural traditions, to address issues of concern in their own communities. Interchangeable terms have historically included Theatre for Social Change, Theatre of Liberation, Cultural Action Theatre, Protest Theatre and Popular Theatre. Most of these draw inspiration from Latin American liberation theology and the work of Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal, and some also from DIE and TIE. Now

these forms are most commonly aggregated under the umbrella term ***applied theatre***, a phrase coined and defined in the 1990s to encompass all these forms of drama based in communities of all sorts that have the aim of effecting some kind of social change.

Most applied theatre targets issues within the fields of health, environment, education and politics. It locates the creative process within specific social, cultural and political contexts; it uses familiar cultural forms and processes as a participatory medium, to raise collective consciousness and promote self-determination and change.

The Pedagogy of Drama

Drama and Transformation

The continuing action research of the DRACON project, since its inception and beyond, has confirmed the power of drama as a learning medium. Drama pedagogy has been utilised to stimulate insight and understanding first in all four DRACON settings, and then in spin-off projects in areas as diverse as professional learning in health care and working on resilience with the survivors of natural disasters (see Chap. 9). As Brown et al. put it, 'participatory drama opens spaces to explore lived experience, imaginations, emotions and possible solutions' (2017, p. 8).

At the time when the DRACON project was conceived, the power of drama as a powerful pedagogy was increasingly being recognised and acknowledged. Alongside the expansion of drama as a school subject in some education systems like the UK, Australia, Canada and the Scandinavian countries, there was an increasing global awareness among school policy leaders that as well as enhancing learning, drama had the power to generate profound aesthetic experience that could transform students as individuals. Beyond schools too, this same realisation was leading to the complementary worldwide applied theatre movement.

Understanding how drama generates engagement is central to understanding its transformative potential. Michael Fleming argues:

> In successful drama the … process of bringing about explicit awareness and making discriminations which are fundamental to human concerns is happening far more intensely because the art form serves to select, focus and heighten the feeling context. (2005, p. 38)

Fellow UK drama educator Jonothan Neelands identifies how dramatic transformation functions to stimulate learning:

> Theatre can offer young people a mirror of who we are and who we are becoming. Theatre can be a dynamo for social change by providing the space to imagine ourselves and how we can live differently. Theatre can be a lens through which young people can discover the embodied relevance of the real in their curriculum. (In O'Connor, 2010, p. 155)

Furthermore, the aesthetic nature of both classroom drama and theatre performance is notably a result of transformative processes—processes underpinned by

concepts such as empathy, imagination and creativity. Understanding how drama operates in relation to these concepts provides the clues to its power as a transformative medium.

Key Components of the Drama Process

Improvisation and Games

Those twentieth and twenty-first century educational movements referred to above have all been based on the concept of participant learning and children creating their own drama, so they have mostly abandoned what Aristotle would have recognised as the educational function of drama (namely the performing and viewing of a script) for the diverse forms of dramatic improvisation. There have been three major and connected sources of inspiration.

One of these has been the use of acting exercises, many of which are improvisatory, even when rehearsing a set script. Indeed, from the middle of the twentieth century, adult theatre itself started rediscovering the potential of improvisation not only in rehearsal, but also in performance. In the USA Viola Spolin (1963) and then her son Paul Sills used improvised acting exercises and games as the basis of the popular Chicago performance genre known as 'long-form improv'. UK theatre director Johnstone (1979) added the spirit of competition to the same exercises to create the even more successful genre of Theatresports. All forms of dramatic improvisation demand careful and continuous focus on the subject of the drama, the creative use of imagination, and immediate and sensitive reading of the group process—teamwork with the other participants. All participants have to be equally engaged and to have accepted the 'agreement to pretend', the contract inherent in together entering a fictional situation.

Games are the second of these drivers of improvised drama in school classrooms. Spolin saw the educational potential in theatre games and published a version of her handbook for schools (1986). Dramatic or quasi-dramatic games are already in the DNA of children, with their close connection to the dramatic play of early childhood. Though—like play—games are not traditionally encouraged in classrooms, they have the advantage for teachers of immediately engaging children's attention, and also being structured, with recognisable rules.

Games have been immensely popular in drama classrooms, in all the movements referred to above, from Finlay-Johnson's Dramatic Method to Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed. Games have a number of purposes in drama and were extensively used in all the DRACON projects:

- They create a sense of the group, with defined rules for all, and defined goals for the activity;
- That in turn leads to group trust, a vital prerequisite for that agreement to pretend;
- The result is uncertain, so they contain dramatic tension;

- They can change the energy level of a group—liven up a lethargic class or calm a frenetic one;
- They can interestingly introduce a theme that may be explored dramatically.

Role and Role-Play

The third and as far as DRACON is concerned the most significant wellspring of improvised drama is role-play (a feature of improvisation and many games, in any case). In many ways the 'grown-up' manifestation of children's play, role-play is so much a part of the basic dramatic urge, and so crucial to the learning in DRACON that its psychological and sociological roots need to be explored.

The psychological act of identification is crucial to human learning and development. Identification involves conscious and unconscious changes of behaviour through the deliberate adoption of other people's behaviour, ideas and feelings as one's own (Coleman, 2015). Identification allows us to both think and feel as another person, to experience a range of cognitive and affective states not directly accessible to us. In drama, this enhancement of experience and sense of self occurs through role, the fundamental act which is at the heart of drama, where participants take on the behaviour, perform the actions and speak the words of other characters in fictional or fictionalised situations. We *play with* these roles, as we *play* them *out*, so we accurately call this ***role-play***.

The power of identification to generate deep learning through the act of taking role is not restricted to the field of drama. For decades, academics, educators and trainers from many disciplines have identified the importance of role in personal development and learning. We know that the knowledge and techniques of creating a role can enhance the presentation of self in everyday life, through what sixty years ago Goffman (1956; Raffel, 2013) called impression management. In the field of psychotherapy, 'an individual's identity is seen as constructed through the roles they perform in various contexts' (Newman, 2017, p. 3). Education theorist Bruner (2005) believed that we achieve real insight through taking on and expressing roles that provide us with passionate experience. Finally, having the opportunity to construct and explore a range of effective personal roles in a rehearsal for life can be profoundly influential in developing a sense of identity and self-confidence (Erikson, 1965).

For the process of drama to operate, participants must first imagine or accept a fictitious role, and then behave as if this fiction were a reality. The experience generated by this taking on of role is, in one sense, authentic first-hand experience, because the actor is directly and actively involved in both becoming and doing, creating a level of commitment to the reality of the experience. However, the participant is also consciously involved in pretence, using identification and the substitution of action for reality. The participants are acting the role, but also perceiving their actions, consciously observing and controlling their involvement in the drama. As education theorist Lev Vygotsky famously described young children acting in role: 'the child weeps in play as a patient, but revels as a player'. (1933/1974, p. 548) He termed this

phenomenon *dual affect*. That concept is now embedded in the theory and practice of educational drama, and acknowledged as crucial in theatre theory, too.

This two-way process of relatedness is also key to the participant/percipient interaction described by Augusto Boal as 'metaxis' (1979). Metaxis is a framed activity in the sociological sense, separated from the more usual world of everyday interactions. Carroll (1988, p. 13) defines it as '…a mental attitude, a way of holding two worlds in mind, the role and the dramatic fiction, simultaneously in the drama frame.' The coming together and the resulting emotional frisson between these two worlds gives drama of this kind much of its tension and its learning potential.

The experience of identification through role in drama can provide the form of learning that Erikson (1975, p. 173) describes as insight: 'the act of seeing into a situation and into myself at the same time.' Antonin Artaud, one of the major adult theatre innovators of the twentieth century, described the experience of identification that occurred while in role as a form of enhanced awareness:

> While I live, I cannot feel myself living, but when I am acting, then I feel I am existing … theatre is like heightened waking, where I guide fate. (1993, p. 101)

Empathy and Distance

Drama fundamentally depends on a particular form of identification that is equally central to conflict resolution: ***empathy*** (the ability to identify not only cognitively but also affectively with others), to 'step into others' shoes' to some degree, and temporarily see the world from an alien viewpoint. Drama actually works through the simultaneous operation of both empathy and distance. As many writers on drama have pointed out, Vygotsky's 'dual affect'—better known in theatre studies and psychodramatic theory as 'aesthetic doubling' (e.g. Courtney, 1968, p. 192)—permits both emotional identification and closeness to the conflict, and at the same time dispassionate awareness of the elements of that conflict.

To permit the 'contract' referred to above, an emotional 'safe space' has to be created. In all the various forms of role-play that we used in DRACON (process drama, participatory TIE and EFT—see below) the participants need focusing, and sometimes warming-up into an appropriate mood and physical readiness where they are able to embody their roles with ease, and unconsciously step into and out of those empathic shoes, as called for by the dramatic context or the drama teacher.

As soon as the participants are asked to take a role, even if this is just a generalised shift of viewpoint ('Imagine this has happened to you—how do you react?') it is crucial that they are enabled to focus intellectually and emotionally, so that they can operate and respond with empathy, and simultaneously with distance. Particularly if they are asked to adopt a realistic, personalised or complex role where they will be expected to empathise and respond as a specific character who is perhaps very alien to their own disposition, it is crucial that appropriate preparation activity time and space be allowed for this process, known as 'enrolment'.

There is also a compelling contemporary case for the significance of empathy in transformative learning and the particular potency of dramatic transformation. Recent research provides insights into the fundamentally empathic, cooperative nature of human beings:

> Discoveries in evolutionary biology, neurocognitive science, and child development … reveal that people are biologically predisposed to be empathic—that our core nature is not rational, detached, acquisitive, aggressive, and narcissistic, but affectionate, highly social, cooperative, and interdependent. The realization that we are an empathic species, that empathy has evolved over history, and that we are as interconnected in the biosphere as we are in the blogosphere, has profound implications for rethinking the mission of education. (Rifkin, 2013, p. 2)

It is both the nature and the function of drama to encourage participants to seek affective experiences and feel empathy, to make vivid use of their imaginations and to be intuitive. Furthermore, creative engagement in drama may involve a genuine divergence of intense feeling and thought expressed through the drama process; it can equally allow the empathic and creative affirmation of the common beliefs of a group involved in the process.

Reflection

When stepping out of the kind of realistic dramatic role that may be involved in exploring conflict, if it has been strongly empathic the participants may also need a little time and even a structured 'derolment', to process the emotional content. The emotions kindled in a drama are quite real, though invested in a fictionalised dramatic context and should not carry over into the real-life context, other than as what is primarily cognitive reflection. Reflection has been described as the ability to examine one's own actions, thoughts and feelings (Newell, 1992), and thinking purposefully to gain new insights, ideas and understanding. In drama-in-education, the key to learning is not only the experience itself but also the reflection related to that experience.

Drama generates its own meanings, which cannot easily be reduced to simplistic resolutions and assumptions nor written down as discursive text. However, it is possible, and in some cases necessary, to reflect upon the meanings, those personal to each participant and those shared by the group. In the case of inexperienced participants, particularly in role-play exercises, this reflective process may need to be carefully structured and even to begin within the dramatic fiction itself. Whether there is a teaching, counselling or clinical purpose, this is crucial to make explicit the nature of the experience just shared, and what useful knowledge may be derived from it.

In genres of role-play, reflection may follow the drama (known as *reflection-on-action*) or be interwoven with the drama itself (known as *reflection-in-action*). Reflection-on-action usually takes the form of discussion about the experience the students have just had. It can, however, involve turning the original 'lived-through' drama into a performance for an audience, or even transforming the experience or

the feelings it evoked into other art forms, such as into drawing or dance. Reflection-in-action can begin within the drama itself and may itself include re-enactment, theatrical conventions or performance. A commonly used reflection-in-role strategy is to ask the participants to create original writing in the roles of the characters, such as personal diary entries or letters to an editor. However it is managed, reflection is invariably a distinct and necessary phase of processing the drama to make it into usable knowledge. For the three predominant genres of drama pedagogy used in DRACON (*process drama*, *theatre-in-education (TIE)* and *enhanced forum theatre (EFT)*, a reflective phase was built-in. The reflective phase is always important in process drama, and often in TIE, where the audience is invited to engage with the participants, either in role, or in discussion following the performance. In EFT, the form we specifically devised and refined for the Brisbane and Swedish projects, it turned out to be even more integral and consequential than we had imagined. In several ways, reflection-in-action was built into the structure of the drama, and as well as this, reflection-on-action, in the form of discussion, frequently supplanted and replaced the drama itself, crystallising the explicit cognitive and social learning for the students.

Cooperation and Trust

Drama of all kinds is a group activity, dependent on organised teamwork, and generally non-competitive—apart from occasional oddities such as Theatresports and ancient Greek Drama Festivals (and some school drama festivals). The teamwork must extend to all the participants and that includes the theatre audience. Obviously the playwright, actors, director and designer and theatre team must all be working on the same project in synchrony, and the audience needs to 'tune in' to the play. There is, however, a deeper bond between all of them—the bond of accepting a shared fiction, without which the play cannot happen at all. This goes right back to children's social play, the 'agreement to pretend' that has to happen if the players are to step into those others' shoes and create a shared dramatic situation and context. This is sometimes known as 'the dramatic contract' or in schools 'permission to play'. For adults, though it is rarely made explicit this contract is clear: the creative team affirm it when they agree to join the production and the audience sign up for it when they buy their tickets. In dramatic genres where there is no external audience, the drama must still start with the agreement to pretend.

Based on Bakhtin's theory about dialogism Eva Hallgren uses the concept of *postupak* to explain the central acting behaviour in role-taking within an improvisational frame. She describes postupak as 'a goal-oriented action that contains open, not completely defined offers' (2018, p. 256), directed towards another person and waiting for an answer in role. It is a complicated creative process, serious and at the same time playful, involving teacher and children in role making offers to and answering each other.

This can be trickier in schools and classrooms, particularly with classes unused to social learning or socially dysfunctional. The 'safe space' may be much harder to

create, as some of the DRACON class teachers and facilitators discovered. Where there is little cohesion or group learning experience, shedding one's real-life role protections and trusting other people to respond in the same way leaves one vulnerable. Safer to keep up one's guard and offer nothing—especially as there may be real conflicts within the class, or with the teacher—and anyway, isn't school about real life, not pretending? As students move into adolescence this protective need grows stronger, and if they are not already used to drama it may be hard to get them to drop their guard.

Generating trust is the most basic prerequisite of all for drama, and sometimes it has to be taught. Teachers may have to use serious group social engineering tactics (usually in the form of games and group exercises) before anyone is ready to sign the contract. Drama's most basic requirement is just an 'empty space', as Peter Brook (1968) reminds us, which must then be turned by that dramatic contract into a place made special to allow the participants to make the agreement to pretend. So, as we have seen, the special place must also be a 'safe space' where the students are trusting enough to sign the contract and invest their emotions in empathy. The simplest and most common manifestation of this special space is in the drama classroom. At the beginning of a lesson and during class discussion and planning, the students, whatever their age, are normally grouped in a circle, including the teacher, usually seated at the same level, rather than the conventional classroom formation of the students, all sitting, facing the teacher, who is often standing or on a raised level. This in itself signals a democratic power shift and an invitation to take an equal part in discussion and decision-making, as well as permitting all participants eye contact with each other. The importance of this safe space in the DRACON classroom explorations of conflict we will discuss in the next chapter.

Narrative and Tension

Of all the basic elements of drama, ***narrative*** and ***dramatic tension*** are the two which come together most naturally and integrally in exploring and depicting conflict, its causes and effects. As we have already analysed in Chap. 2, contemporary social constructivist philosophy acknowledges and conceptualises humans as 'storytelling creatures… that not only tell stories, they live them too' (Section "Conflict Attitudes (The A-Component of Conflict)"). We construct our very reality and sense of meaning in the form of narrative. Drama is just a way of making and depicting plausible narratives for us to observe our behaviour and explore cause and effect: why we behave as we do, and what this does to the personal, social and physical worlds we inhabit. This narratising gives shape to the welter of our lived experience—making it into a comprehensible story by finding a beginning, selecting a simplified train of events or significant ideas to follow and looking for a meaningful conclusion to the story.

The dramatic fictions of drama-in-education are not 'just made-up' stories, but narratives that must be in some way authentic—not 'real' but realistic. The situation, characters and dramatic action are always one degree removed from reality—as

a representation of that reality, not the real thing—or else it is not drama. This is a particularly important distinction to make in a context like DRACON, where students who like all of us experience unpleasant real-life conflict are being asked to step into the shoes of people in conflict. Our DRACON conflict narratives were of three kinds. Some of the stories were in fact taken from the participants' own reports of their real conflicts, but only of those beyond the DRACON classroom; they were then fictionalised in ways described elsewhere in the book to make them safely 'second-hand'. Some were third-hand, developed from stories collected by the participants through questionnaires, interviews with other students, even the media, etc. Those that were entirely 'made-up' had to pass stringent tests of their authenticity, through the students' own and shared ability to believe in them according to their own experiences.

Tension drives the narrative; it is the element that prevents the story reaching its conclusion until something significant emotionally or intellectually has emerged. Tension keeps the participants or audience interested, slows down the action and makes the story worth the telling. From the point of view of the dramatist, in simple terms tension is the force or forces that prevent the characters in the story reaching their goals without some form of change or development in themselves or in the dramatic context, or both.

For the dramatist, conflict of one sort or another is among the most productive forms of tension (making it hard for the characters to realise their goals, and therefore productive of development or change). That's why it is also among the most time-honoured across cultures. The Natya Shastra's claim about conflict as the mainspring of all drama may not be quite true—as there are other forms of dramatic tension, such as dilemma, ritual, suspense, discovery, secrecy and mystery (Haseman et al. 2017)—but some of these, such as dilemma, are frequently bound up in conflict too. That is why the factual realm of conflict and the fictional world of drama share the word for their ideal conclusion: 'resolution'. This will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Language and Dialogue

Dialogue is of course a word almost synonymous with drama. Language is one of the twin basic instruments of dramatic expression (the body being the other), and dialogue is what makes language dramatic. We expect any drama we watch or take part into be to a large extent comprised of dialogue, usually spoken but sometimes implied (as in a monodrama or a soliloquy). Sadly, it has traditionally been less essential to formal education. Throughout the history of schooling worldwide, the emphasis, sometimes the sole emphasis has usually been on the one-way transmission of knowledge, skills and morals from those who know to those who don't. This has on the whole been compounded by the invention of printed books, which are monologic, and the computer screen, only slightly less so. Add to that the advantages of one-way communication for controlling students' thoughts and behaviour, and the economic advantage that more one-way traffic demands fewer teachers and less time. This is

a cruel simplification that nonetheless has some truth—just thinks of a conventional secondary school classroom or university lecture hall in any era, even today.

Contemporary teachers, education theorists and even education systems are trying to find ways to restore dialogue; they are driven by the recognition that learning is not a commodity to be handed on, but an ongoing, dynamic, social and dialogical construction of knowledge and understanding. Drama is one of those possible ways. All the historical and current movements of drama education mentioned above have been at times welcomed, at times feared, just because they are dialogic. Restoring dialogue is also of the essence in handling and resolving conflict, so education and conflict transformation go hand in hand in making dialogue central to their goals.

Movement, Gesture and Embodiment

The body, its senses, feelings and movement form the other twin instrument of dramatic expression. Unfortunately, in traditional schooling systems, the transmission of knowledge has been seen as a purely cognitive absorption activity. It can thus best be achieved with everybody sitting down and facing the same direction, where the distractions of movement, of social interaction and of emotional response can be minimised. Again, just think of a conventional secondary classroom almost anywhere. But contemporary educators and some education systems know that learning is not like that; they are backed up by current discoveries in neurology, which show that the brain, senses and emotions are inseparable in learning and in cognition itself (e.g. Damasio, 2018). So of course those educators are looking desperately for embodied education practices. Again, drama provides a complete and holistic solution.

Imagination

> The imagination is, indeed, increasingly recognized as one of the great workhorses of learning, and its development is seen frequently as one of the proper constituents of any adequate educational program. (Judson & Egan, 2012, p. 38)

A number of key elements that constitute the operation of the imagination are inherent in the drama process:

- Imagination is a form of consciousness where individuals conceive of an object and then perceive it as an abstract representation to generate meaning
- Imagining is a complex synthesis of subject and object, created by the individual out of a range of different experiences to enrich understanding
- Imagination involves intuitive and affective dimensions to provide meaning that transcends cognitive understanding.

It is essentially the use of the imagination applied through the creative lens of aesthetic engagement that allows participants in drama to experience intense awareness, heighten our perceptions and discover embodied relevance. Through the use of the dramatic imagination, participants are able to conceive of and experience not

only a range of roles beyond our immediate experience but also a range of situations, contexts and issues we have not yet encountered. Through this we extend our own understanding of human behaviour and the world we live in. Using our imagination in this way, we can actually create our own versions of the world. By animating these, our understanding of the nature of being human is enlarged and we are made aware that the lives and experiences of others carry meaning for our own.

By drawing on our own experiences and by using our imaginations, participants in drama can also recreate situations and environments that are part of our history, and our relationships with other people. Alternatively, drama allows us to imagine completely fictitious experiences, people and environments. Using the drama process to act in an imagined environment or situation, we extend and transform our original experiences through thinking, feeling and behaving as if the imagined experiences were real, while being fully aware that we are constructing and reconstructing a fiction. This is the process of metaxis in operation. Drama education pioneer Richard Courtney argues that it is crucial to real learning: 'Nothing has reality to the human being unless he realises it completely—lives it in the imagination—acts it.' (1968, p. 273)

Creativity

Creativity is a crucial element in the functioning of drama, and in the process of drama. Drama communicates aesthetically and cognitively—its conception and reception rely on key human characteristics and drives. While we might recognise creativity in a work of art, and therefore consider its maker creative, creativity is not a unique gift or innate in a select few. Recent research suggests that we are all creative to some extent and that creativity is a fundamental human ability:

> The capacity to be creative, to produce new concepts, ideas, inventions, objects or art, is perhaps the most important attribute of the human brain. (Andreasen, 2011, p. 1)

The creative process in action consists of being inventive, having the ability to problem-solve, problematise, think and reflect laterally and respond in ways which provide fresh insights and lead to original outcomes. Working through drama stimulates the same cognitive and affective dimensions that work in the production of a creative response. It is both the nature and the function of educational drama, comprising as it does group-based activities where there is no clear distinction between players and audience, to encourage participants to seek affective experiences and feel empathy, to make vivid use of our imaginations and to be intuitive. Furthermore, creative engagement in drama may involve a genuine divergence of intense feeling and thought expressed through the drama process, and it can equally allow the empathic and creative affirmation of common beliefs by the group involved in the process. There is also a selective element in the drama process where only those things of significance to the participants are chosen for representation. In this way convergent thought can be as valuable as divergent thought in the process of creativity.

The interactive nature of educational drama is also conducive to creativity, involving shared commitment to the improvisation or representation of the perceptions and intentions of the whole group. This form of cooperative, aesthetic activity stimulates the ability to intuit feelings and thoughts that occur in the minds of others, which is apparent in the high-level creativity revealed in neurological research. Bernie Neville explains that in the holistic endeavour that characterises the drama process:

> Conscious and unconscious processes are integrated and what we do together intuitively is far more appropriate and creative than what was produced by our usual modes of thought. (1989, p. 12)

In essence, the deep aesthetic learning generated by engagement in the arts involves an act of the imagination, both cognitive and affective, and an intense engagement in a creative process. This combination results in the creative construction and reconstruction of perceptions of the world, both physical and human. In drama, deep learning occurs through the imaginative and creative process of assuming roles and creating transformations that generate the experience of metaxis, the balance between the fictitious roles and contexts in the drama and the real perceptions and understanding of the participants.

Drama, Conflict and Pedagogy

The fundamental nature of how drama operates, and the processes underpinning its power as a learning medium, share much with those of conflict management. Mediators identify three classic phases of conflict: 'latent', 'emerging' and 'manifest'. They construe the phases and factors involved in escalation, and work towards de-escalation and resolution. Furthermore, all the areas of situation and relationship that are explored by dramatic action are central to real-life understanding and stable relationships. Drama is about the clashes and conflicts of personality, of values, of attitudes, of emotions, of interests both internal and environmental, of status and power, of philosophy and ideology, of ethics and morals.

Drama offers living, breathing models to define and diagnose the nature of conflict, as well as to present the circumstances that motivate adversaries to take particular action. In retelling/re-enacting, the participants expose their needs and clarify their motivations for certain actions they have taken. The pedagogical intention in using dramatic models of conflict is to deconstruct the simplistic classifications and assumptions that dominate perception and perspective-taking. Drama provides the participants with three distinct perspectival experiences: first, the opportunity to explore the viewpoint and attitude of the protagonists; second, to deconstruct the enemy image by playing the antagonists; and third, to view the conflict situation more objectively by playing the third parties, such as bystanders and other stakeholders in the conflict.

These central connections between drama and conflict mediation will be addressed in more detail in the next chapter.

Dracon's Central Drama Strategies

Process Drama

The Brisbane, Swedish and Adelaide DRACON projects made considerable use of the DIE approach now most commonly referred to as ***process drama***. In process drama participants are collaborative learners, engaged in learning by shifting role perspectives. The work is unscripted and open-ended, based on forms of improvised role-play. In this way drama is used as a learning medium first and foremost, and its ultimate dramatic form is less important. The usual distinctions one would expect to find in a dramatic production give way to a more egalitarian group of collaborators. The participants are all engaged together in role as characters in the dramatic context not performers for an external audience, so they are simultaneously actors, playwrights, directors and audience. Their engagement is in the service of self-reflection, collaborative meaning-making and problem solving. Process drama is a distinctive dramatic form or genre insofar as it is exploratory and investigative, and its shape evolves and unfolds as each stage builds upon the last. It is always to some extent open-ended in nature, allowing room for multiple participant perspectives to play out. Participants take on roles relevant to the topic or theme being investigated and explored.

Despite its improvisational nature, process drama does have a focus—it is shaped by the teacher who identifies a learning area or theme and selects a sequence of drama strategies to support the investigation. The teacher often takes part, in a convention known as 'Teacher-in-role', a technique mainly developed by Dorothy Heathcote, guiding the dramatic action from within the drama. In the case of the DRACON project, the learning area was 'Conflict', and more specifically fictional or fictionalised conflict that directly related to the experiences of participants. Roles and relationships within the drama were based on real experiences. Having the opportunity to explore alternative perspectives on an event through role-play provided a springboard for learning, and the teacher's role was critical to 'find ways in which to connect pupils to content and enable them to develop responses to it through active engagement and reflection' (Bowell & Heap, 2001, p. 7).

While teachers have a central role in shaping the participants' engagement in process drama, it can be argued that problems or issues that have personal meaning naturally incite interest and stimulate a drive to explore them. Student engagement underpins experiential learning, and since one of the core characteristics of process drama is collaboration and role taking, the form lends itself to a pedagogy which seeks to develop an experiential approach to understanding alternative perspectives. That understanding is fostered through empathy, and the insights that the students gain through this dramatic form of experiential learning can be deep and meaningful.

> In successful drama the … process of bringing about explicit awareness and making discriminations which are fundamental to human concerns is happening far more intensely because the art form serves to select, focus and heighten the feeling context. (Fleming, 2005, p. 38)

Process drama in schools has been used in cross-curricular learning and has also proved a powerful approach to explore and deepen students' understanding of text of all kinds. In the context of DRACON, it was used as a medium for personal and social learning.

Theatre-in-Education

Theatre-in-education (TIE) was the form that the Malaysian DRACON team adopted, as there was no tradition of DIE or familiarity with it in their schools, and no drama teachers.

> Internationally, TIE is now characterised by its diversity of practice, and also by the shared aim of educating young people in ways that transcend the straight performance of a play and actively engage them in their own learning. (Vine & Jackson, 2013)

TIE's mission in its early days was defined, in the subtitle of the first book on the subject, as providing 'new objectives for theatre—new techniques in education' (O'Toole, 1977). TIE characteristically involves a group of actors who may also be teachers (some of the performers describe themselves as 'actor-teachers') visiting a school and working with groups of students, rather than just performing to them. This can involve both scripted and improvised performance, where the students are often engaged as characters in the drama. They share process drama strategies like Teacher-in-role; their participatory programs, usually in the students' classrooms, often involve the students integrally in the dramatic action as characters, making decisions and even deciding on the ending of the play. The actor/teachers also conduct discussions and workshops with the students to introduce or reinforce the knowledge and understanding generated by the performance work.

Both DIE and TIE have been from their inception characterised by a focus on sceptical and social activist interrogation of the society and its mores, usually with the leader's or teacher's underlying intention of contributing towards changing those mores. Issue-based classroom drama and theatre for many years became the norm, strongly influenced by the theatrical and educational ideas of revolutionary playwright Bertold Brecht, and of social learning theorist Lev Vygotsky. Particularly in secondary schools, TIE has traditionally focused on social and political subjects, investigating issues such as injustice.

Forum Theatre

Boal's most celebrated technique, ***forum theatre***, is now widely used throughout the field of applied theatre in economically developing world, health and educational contexts. In a forum theatre performance, a company of actors rehearse and re-enact on stage a story of oppression provided by the audience. They then invite the audience

as 'spect-actors' to intervene directly in the scene as characters—thus disrupting the 'set' playtext—and offer the oppressed protagonist alternative behaviours or courses of action, in order to find the most effective method of dealing with the oppression. Since the oppressors cannot be expected voluntarily to change their behaviour, a key constraint is that the spect-actors can only intervene as the protagonist. This usually leads to extended discussion, and according to the aims of Boal, encourages the audience to take liberatory action in real life to overcome the oppression.

This classic 'Boalian' forum theatre was used by the Swedish and Brisbane DRACON projects early on, but both discovered the same limitations of the form when applying it to conflict handling. This led to the evolution of the most prominent and sophisticated drama strategy used in the project, that has also turned out to have considerable longevity (see Chap. 9), so it is worth describing in a little detail.

Enhanced Forum Theatre

This form of participatory theatre was based on Boal's forum theatre, modified in two key ways, and augmented by some elements of process drama. ***Enhanced forum theatre*** (EFT) was developed during the Brisbane DRACON project, where forum theatre and process drama were both being used as alternative strategies. The research team, seeking to compare the advantages and disadvantages of each, were observing some limitations in each form that appeared to be complementary—and the same problems were noted by the Swedish team.

- Participants were reporting that they found forum theatre was easy to master, to implement in class and to peer teach. However, it frequently led to superficial exploration of conflict. Originally designed by Boal to address oppression rather than conflict, the classic forum theatre structure invites direct audience intervention in the conflict without close investigation of its context or causes, and also demands that the protagonist alone is responsible to take action. We found that this led to simplistic resolution of the conflicts. Worse, it could encourage entirely inappropriate conflict handling practices. In real life, conflicts are often better de-escalated and settled away from the battleground and the heat of the strife, and with the agency of third parties.
- In contrast, the participants and their teachers were finding the form of process drama much more difficult even to understand, let alone to structure, lead and control. It was particularly challenging for students tasked with the design of new dramas in their peer teaching contexts. However, those participants, both teachers and students, also affirmed that process drama engendered much deeper engagement with the conflict situation, and more thoughtful and reflective student discussion.

The Brisbane research team put the two forms together, and created a hybrid ('enhanced') form that was easy for both teachers and students to manage, to create workable conflict-based dramas for exploration. It also allowed for much deeper and

more sustained examination and discussion of the conflict situations. The Swedish team adopted many aspects of EFT in their project, with variations to suit their own context.

Using Boal's basic forum theatre structure, EFT diverged from his model in a number of key ways. Each play was structured in three scenes not one, depicting the three stages (latent, emerging and manifest) of a particular conflict. Those stories were sometimes generated from students' own stories using drama activities, and sometimes by prior discussion or student surveys. They were always fictionalised and thus distanced from direct experience, with a prescribed time gap between scenes, to ensure that the conflicts being explored were substantial and complex, instead of the evanescent or flashpoint conflicts often impulsively chosen by younger students.

Members of the audience were invited to intervene in the role of any character, not just the protagonist. In everyday conflicts, very often the protagonist has less power or will to de-escalate a conflict than others not so directly involved.

The enactments were controlled by a 'Host' (Boal used the term 'Joker'), and performed two or three times, to incorporate the following key process drama techniques that provided more contextual background and so deepened the response and discussion.

- *Hot Seating*. Any character from the play could be put in the 'hot-seat' and questioned by the audience to explore their background and motivations.
- *Thought Tracking*. A scene would be frozen for the Host or audience member to ask characters what was in their mind at that moment.
- *Role Circle*. The Host or the audience could ask questions relating to the conflict to all the characters in turn, as well as characters important to the conflict but not previously seen—also played by the actors.
- *Scene 4*. This further step was perhaps the most important extension of the forum, since conflicts can seldom be solved neatly or easily by a single intervention, and to imply this—as classic forum theatre does—teaches poor conflict handling. Usually, real-life mediation involves working with the antagonists and others outside the scene of the conflict, to identify with them what can be traded to de-escalate it. Once a piece of EFT had been worked through a number of interventions without full resolution (as was usually the case), the Host divided the audience into subgroups to identify another point in time, perhaps with characters mentioned but not present in the scenes shown, when the conflict might be better mediated or resolved. That scene was then acted out either by the actors or occasionally the audience group themselves—or just discussed.

One of Boal's techniques remained central: the control mechanism that he labelled 'magic'. If the dramatic action or interventions became improbable or any of the interventions out-of-character (such as the antagonists being reconciled through a million-dollar lottery win), any participant—audience, actors or Host—could freeze the action with the call 'Magic!'. The audience and actors would then discuss the scene's credibility, and if necessary take a vote before the action could proceed. This led to many richly pedagogical, student-led discussions.

As may be seen, EFT incorporated considerable reflection, both in-action and on-action. The hot-seating, the audience interventions and resulting discussions about appropriateness and magic were rich examples of reflection-in-action. The Scene 4 strategy started off the same way, but we found that frequently the discussion spontaneously took over and the drama itself just disappeared in even richer reflection-on-action.

EFT proved highly amenable to effective peer teaching. The older ('Key') class used the technique themselves to learn about conflict, and then they identified conflicts likely to be of concern to their younger peers. Using this as a basis the Key Class devised one or more pieces of EFT, with which they then initiated the peer teaching, reinforcing their own understanding of conflict as they did so. They followed that by helping the younger ('Focus') Class to construct their own EFT for enactment, so that the younger students were simultaneously clarifying their understanding of the conflict concepts and practising the techniques. These students in their turn, with their teacher, prepared EFT performances for their target peer group. The EFT was slightly simplified as the process descended through the primary school.

Crossover in Movements

Overall, the movement towards drama as a learning method has consolidated its pedagogy and diversified its practice since 1996, when DRACON began, establishing a strong foothold in the schools, especially in English-speaking countries and some European ones. In some developing countries, particularly in Africa, the movement has had a major influence on the equally fast-developing field of applied theatre. At the time of DRACON, drama and theatre workers were extending the pedagogy into social therapy in some war-torn countries, such as Northern Ireland, Israel and the Balkans—with promising but equivocal results (e.g. Fyfe, 1996; Schonmann, 1996; Knezevic, 1995). In DRACON, drama was explicitly not used as a direct medium for conflict handling or transformation, as it had been in all of the above contexts of national conflict. All the DRACON projects used drama as a method to provide school students with a basic cognitive understanding of conflict, and some tools that they might use to transform future conflicts.

There is now extensive crossover in these movements, particularly in the incorporation of TO techniques like forum and image theatre into the broader movement of DIE. In the use of structural and organisational strategies to build engagement and shape participant experience, there are links to the role of the teacher in process drama. This is the case in both Sweden and Australia, for example, where educational drama has been for a long time established in schools and tertiary education. In Malaysia, there is as yet virtually no drama in schools within the curriculum; however, both these approaches are understood and practised where possible, in special projects, and within the small tertiary drama sector.

Conclusion

As the DRACON project evolved in slightly different dramatic forms in the different countries involved, it became apparent that drama was an extraordinarily powerful tool to generate engagement in learning about conflict and to enable participants to develop competence in managing conflict in their own lives. Furthermore, drama provided an effective range of strategies and approaches for exploring and understanding conflict that could be adapted and applied in a range of contexts. Improvisation, the creation of a range of genres of role-play, process drama, and forum theatre were some of the key drama approaches we adopted that proved most effective in enabling young people to investigate and manage conflict. One of the major outcomes of the DRACON project was to identify those forms of drama best fitted for exploring and learning about conflict transformation, and then to modify them into new drama forms, such as EFT, to generate consistently effective knowledge and skills of conflict handling and transformation in the participant students.

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