

TEACHER and ROLE

— a drama teaching partnership

Chris Lawrence

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Teacher role-play is now generally recognised as one of the most important weapons in the armoury of drama teachers.¹ It allows them to sidestep their usual teacher status as the one who knows and tells, and to function in many different ways in relation to the class — for example, as outsider or newcomer (one who does not know), as doubter or devil's advocate, as antagonist, and many more. It gives them direct access to the drama process and allows them to support the children's work from the inside. It permits them to employ the vocabulary of drama — such as gesture, eye-contact, use of symbols and space — in a way that not only demonstrates them to the children, but demands an immediate response in the same terms.

A single teacher employing role will shift in and out of that role, sometimes stopping the drama to resume a teacher function in order to clarify or to organise, to present decisions which need to be made or to promote reflection on what has been done.

If the teacher sometimes has access to another person to work with him, the functions of teacher and role can be split and each allotted to a separate person. This is a particularly powerful way of working in drama, and one which has been explored by many teachers in recent years, but one about which little has been written. I therefore asked Chris Lawrence who regularly employs this way of working, to write a guide to the method. The result is a full, detailed and exceptionally clear analysis of the teacher-role partnership.

Introduction

It is a school hall, with a very shiny floor. There is very little to pick it out as an ESN(S) school; the climbing apparatus in one corner is usual enough. I am lying on the floor, my cheek resting on the cold, polished wood. My whole body is covered over with newspapers, which crackle softly as I move. My feet, wrapped in rags tied with rough string, are just poking out. I wear a pair of old baggy trousers, an old shirt and an old, cold, black, buttonless PVC coat with a string belt and large pockets. In one of the pockets is a small, battered lozenge tin with a (very old) boiled sweet in. I am clutching a small 'dolly' made out of newspapers and sellotape.

How will it go? I am nervous. I remember the first time of playing this role about six months before, when I was concealed in a large play box in a mental hospital —

how I had panicked when I realized I hadn't thought of a name for myself, and then one had come — *Albert*. Albert, the derelict, the tramp.

The clock jerks on another thirty seconds. What if I say or do the wrong thing and mess it all up? What if the children laugh or say something absurd (as I have heard mentally handicapped children do) and I feel tempted to smile or even giggle? I know that high tension tends to make me do this ... And the tension is certainly high now. The silence. The waiting...

Footsteps! Children's voices, cries, clapping feet, a teacher's voice. Pictures emerge for me of the children from the sounds they make. Blind people must listen like this... It occurs to me how much at the mercy of feet I am. Their names come in excited voices, some very indistinct, but all repeated, made clear, by the gentle Yorkshire voice of the teacher leading the session, Dorothy Heathcote...

Selected Events from the Session

1 The session begins

CHILDREN: *Have grouped around teacher and are curious about newspapers.*

ALBERT: *Twitches newspapers, gently at first, then more firmly.*

CHILDREN: *One or more of the children has noticed the movement of the papers and discovered the man beneath. Debby has been careering round the hall excitedly.*

TEACHER: Debby. Debby. Come and look.

CHILDREN: *Gather round teacher who sits about 6 feet from Albert's newspapers. There is a sense of urgent fun and wondering in the class.*

TEACHER: Can you try? (to lift newspapers)

BOY: Me? (giggles)

TEACHER: Go on.

CHILDREN: *Go on. General chatter. The boy lifts a corner of the paper very tentatively.*

ALBERT: *Snatches it back in an urgent manner.*

CHILDREN: *A look of wonder on their faces.*

TEACHER: (loudly) You're in our Hall! This is our Hall isn't it?

CHILDREN: Yes. Some nod.

TEACHER: We have our dinners here!

ALBERT: *Projects a look of being frightened.*

TEACHER: (to class, in a low voice) Is he frightened?

BOY: He must come up! *The boy's face indicates a close interest in Albert. The noise level is very low now. Hey!*

TEACHER: What did he say? (low and urgent) He looked a bit frightened.

BOY: What's your name?

GIRL: Gets up and gently picks at newspapers. Shall I help him?

TEACHER: Yes. You help him. See if you can get him to get up.

GIRL: *Holds papers. Get up man. (quietly) She moves the papers. Get up!*
(louder).
 BOY: *(still louder) Gerrup!*
 GIRL: *Gerrup, man! The newspaper is thrust off. Albert is exposed.*
 ALBERT: *Looking frightened, he sits up.*
 CHILDREN: *Are also frightened. Girl and boy back off.*

2 A Few Minutes Later — 'The Tin'

ALBERT: *Has revealed his tin. Kathleen is now with Albert cuddling him.*
 TEACHER: *I wonder what he's got in his tin? What?*
 BOY: *(whispered) He may have got money in it.*
 TEACHER: *Have you got money in your tin, Albert?*
 BOY: *Leaning right over to teacher whispers something inaudible.*
 TEACHER: *Ask him.*
 BOY: *(leaning right up to Albert) Albert, have you got any money in your tin? Three boys are now right up close to Albert.*
 2ND BOY: *Money!*
 3RD BOY: *Oh no!*
 2ND BOY: *No?*
 ALBERT: *Shakes his head.*
 BOYS: *Withdraw.*
 TEACHER: *Have you got any sweeties in, Albert?*
 ALBERT: *Is about to open the tin.*
 BOYS: *Though on their knees, rush up again.*
 TEACHER: *(in a very strong warning tone) He'll put it away!*
 2ND BOY: *Whispers to teacher.*
 TEACHER: *An egg cup? Have you got an egg in there, Albert?*
 ALBERT: *Shakes head with a very small movement.*
 GIRL: *Miss, he's ...*
 A VOICE: *You've got a cup and cottage, ha, ha...*
 TEACHER: *(a very clear warning, and a signal to Albert) He'll put it away...*
 ALBERT: *Slowly puts the tin away.*
 TEACHER: *Look. He's going to put...*
 ALBERT: *Quickly hides the tin.*
 TEACHER: *...Oooh!*
 GIRL: *Oooh!*

3 Later on — 'The Doll'

ALBERT: *Is clutching his doll closer.*
 TEACHER: *Careful with it, 'cause it's Albert's.*
 CHILD: *What?*
 TEACHER: *It's Albert's teddy. Albert, can I hold your teddy for a minute?*

CHILD: No. No.
 2ND CHILD: Yes.
 TEACHER: He won't let anybody. Can I just hold him for a little minute?
 CHILDREN: *Inaudible talk amongst the children. One child seems to be saying, Kill 'em, Kill 'em, over and over.*
 ALBERT: *Slowly passes over the doll to teacher.*
 TEACHER: Thank you... A teddy bear!
 CHILDREN: *A moment of silence and attentive awe.*
 TEACHER: And it's all made of paper.
 CHILDREN: *There is a long time spent with the focus on the teddy bear, just looking at it. The children's faces register wonder. The doll is passed to a boy.*
 BOY: *(holding its head) Head!*

This session took place several years ago (1972 I believe) at Sherriff Leas ESN(S) school in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. I describe it here in such detail, and in this sectional way, for several reasons:

- 1) Although not the first time I had been used in this role, the impression of it is still with me strongly (I was very nervous).
- 2) It was videotaped and can be seen in part of a general film about the handicapped called *Who's Handicapped?*, so it might prove a valuable reference point for anybody interested enough to hire the film.²
- 3) The four sections of the lesson that I have extracted here raise some important points about working in this way.

My purpose in this article is really to clarify some parts of the process of working in drama with a group of children (subnormal or normal) and another teacher who is playing a role. There appear to be rules governing the process, as well as a theory informing it. I hope that the analysis I offer here will not be tedious, but that it will shed some light on what can be a very exciting form of drama and that those interested enough to try something out for themselves will not feel bogged down by a lot of *do's* and *don'ts* before they have even started — read on discriminately!

Why Use a Role?

Using a person who remains in role throughout the session and who *will not go away*, keeps a class and the teacher firmly focussed on that part of drama which is the weighing of human relationships. There is a meeting offered which often causes an assessment of contrasting lifestyles. Viewed simply as a visual aid, a person represented with a problem of some kind is more immediately comprehended, more laden with potential shifts in relationship, than any other kind of stimulus. There is an immediacy in the emotional and intellectual demands on the children. A person begs a history and a future from them. What has led this person to be like this? What will life be like for him from this day on? A person-in-role can *respond*: unlike a picture stimulus, for example. Most importantly, a person-in-role can create

tensions for the class: tensions of different kinds and in different degrees, but tensions which are the very heart of all drama experiences.

Perhaps the observations of Jerome Bruner in his *Man: a Course of Study* may prove more valuable at this point in answering the question: why use a role? In his chapter, *Pedagogy*, he observes:

"The most persistent problem in social studies is to rescue the phenomena of social life from familiarity, without at the same time making it all seem primitive and bizarre. Four techniques are proving particularly useful in achieving this end. The first is contrast... The second is the stimulation and use of informed guessing, hypothesis making, conjectural procedures. The third is participation... The fourth is the ancient approach of stimulating self-consciousness. We believe there is a learnable strategy for discovering one's unspoken notions, one's unstated ways of approaching things..."

Most, or all, of these techniques are incorporated into the person-in-role type of drama, and often to the same purpose: the study of man.

The Ground Rules

Betty Wagner⁴ describes four:

- 1) The teacher, not the role-player, is in charge of the lesson. The role is, in a sense, the teacher's 'visual aid'.
- 2) The person-in-role seeks his own meaning in the role and projects appropriate signals *simply*.
- 3) The role should exemplify a way of life.
- 4) Within a session the role should not be too fixed.

A fifth rule I should like to add is:

- 5) The children should be aware that the person-in-role is role playing (i.e. not 'for real').

The reason I think this rule is important to add is that drama is about being able to hold *two* ideas in your head at the same time — the fiction and the actuality. If the children are unaware of the fiction, then they cannot be said to be in drama — they are in a real life situation and could have damaging real feelings afterwards of being let down or conned. There are some theatre-in-education programmes, for instance, which appear to be running this risk.⁵

I will now amplify these ground rules under the following headings:

Planning the Role

The Person-in-Role

The Teacher

Tensions

Planning the Role

When the children are confronted by the role they must be able to 'recognise' and accept it. The visual image of the role should be planned in such a way that it (and

not teacher talk) explains itself and commands attention. So — acceptability seems to be the first criterion, coupled with simplicity of imagery.

A second important criterion is the needs of the group. Within the band of acceptable roles, which one has most power to allow the group the kind of experience you feel it needs?

A third one seems to be: what roles can the teachers convincingly offer? Does the role-playing teacher have 'suggestions' for roles bound up in his personality or his customary non-verbal signals, which with a little emphasis could be made productive for the class?

A fourth criterion seems to be to do with the content of the role. What are the potential learning areas/lines of enquiry/drama possibilities/curricular possibilities which this role offers?

A fifth question to be asked is: do the children need to be cast in a role of some kind, e.g. archivists, newspaper reporters, explorers, to allow the role to function for your chosen purpose, or can they just meet him as a class?

There are any number of possibilities for roles but here I shall concern myself only with those that are probably most recognizable in their visual imagery, as it is likely that these are simpler and easier for inexperienced teachers to handle. Children may well find the following roles fairly instantly recognizable. Whether they find them acceptable depends largely on the age or interests or needs of the group.

A Derelict (e.g. Albert)	A Pirate	An Injured Bear
A Grandad/Grandma	A Spaceman	A Giant
A Gypsy	A Sad Clown	A Robinson Crusoe-type man
A Prehistoric Man	A Sad Princess	A Scarecrow
A Red Indian	A Mermaid	A Tree
An Eskimo	A Sunflower	A Dog

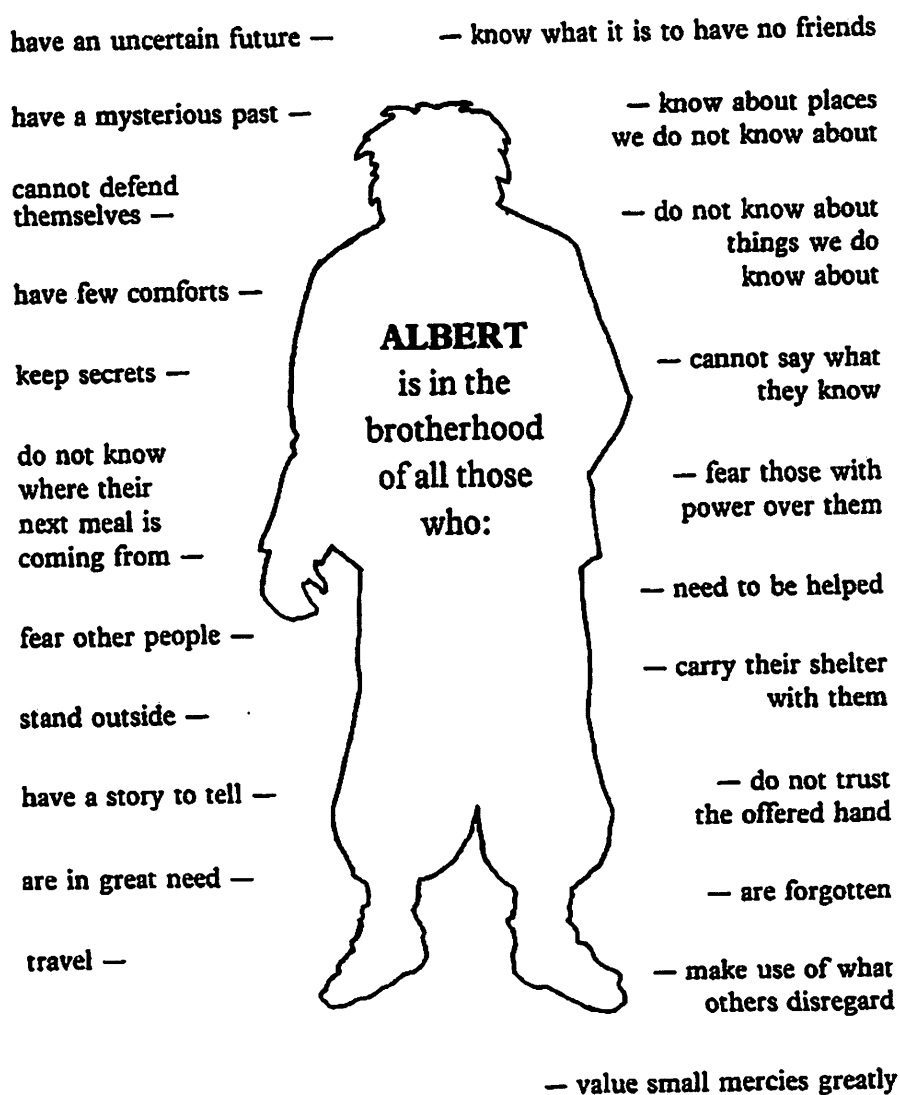
Some of the more extravagant roles (Sunflower, Tree, Scarecrow, Bear, Mermaid) are of particular value with the mentally handicapped and with the very young. Only a few of these may be suitable with secondary pupils (most of column one perhaps?); some suggestions for roles they will find acceptable (hopefully!) are:

- A man dressed in prison clothes**
- A soldier in handcuffs**
- A teenager who appears to have been sleeping rough**
- A girl with a baby**
- An old person who seems to have lost their memory**

These lists are by no means exhaustive. That means — think of some yourself!

Some of the five criteria I have noted here are worth considering in greater detail, particularly the question of what the role has to offer by way of potential lines of enquiry, and some considerations to do with making the role simple and effective in imagery, and efficient to your purpose.

If we take an exploded view of Albert (the mind boggles!) we can see more clearly what he's made of in terms of potential experiences or lines of enquiry for the class. For this, the 'Brotherhoods Code' which Dorothy Heathcote uses can help make the analysis productive for our teaching purpose.⁶



When this general kind of planning is converted into the practical considerations of selecting clothing and objects, the process of selection can be more *informed by a teaching purpose* than by merely elaborating on the image of a derelict. Alongside each item I have suggested some of the potential lines of enquiry the teacher may be able to open up with a class.

QUESTIONS ITEMS OFFER

STATEMENTS MADE BY ITEMS

Where did he rest his head last night?
Where will he rest his head tonight?
Was he out in the rain/snow?



**BEARD &
RUFFLED HAIR**

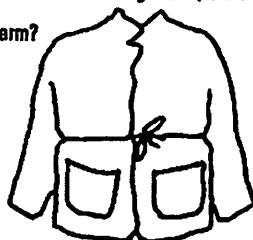
I am open to the elements
I am wild
The wind moves me along

I wonder why he seems
so frightened of people?

EYES
Most important non-verbal
signallers/emotional registers

I am frightened/
happy/friendly/sleepy/
mistrusting/etc.

Is that all he has to keep him warm?
Shall we make him warmer?



OLD COAT

I am like a piece of rubbish
I need warmth

I wonder if he uses the string
for other purposes too?

STRING

I use what others disregard
I have few possessions

What has he got in his pockets?
Is that all he possesses in
the world?

POCKETS

I have a private world
I have secrets
I will/will not share

Will he share with us?



TIN

I have few possessions
I need few possessions
I carry all I own

What's he got in his tin?

Is that where he puts
all his valuables?

Will we give to him?

Will he share with us?

Will we respect his rights?



DOLLY

This is my child
This is me
I have few loved ones

Is that the only friend he has?

Will we be his friend?

Who cares about him?

Who has he got in the world?



**BAGGY
TROUSERS**

I am old
I am poor yet I find covering

I wonder what things
he has seen in life?

What has brought him to this?

How does he manage
to walk in those rags



RAGS

I suffer hardship
I survive
I need shoes
I cannot defend

Is that the only home he has?



NEWSPAPERS

I carry my shelter with me
This is my home

If we make the same kind of analysis with a different role we find other lines of enquiry, other areas of potential experience and reflection.

have different ways
and customs (to ours) —

teach their young —

pass things on from
generation to
generation —

tell stories —

use tools —

defend —

hunt —

conserve —

make what
they need —

are mistrusted —

have great skill —

— know all the ways
of animals

— live outside
our conventions

— have secrets

— use what others
disregard

— are wary of
strangers

— travel

**THE
GYPSY**
is in the
brotherhood
of all those
who:

— take their shelter
with them

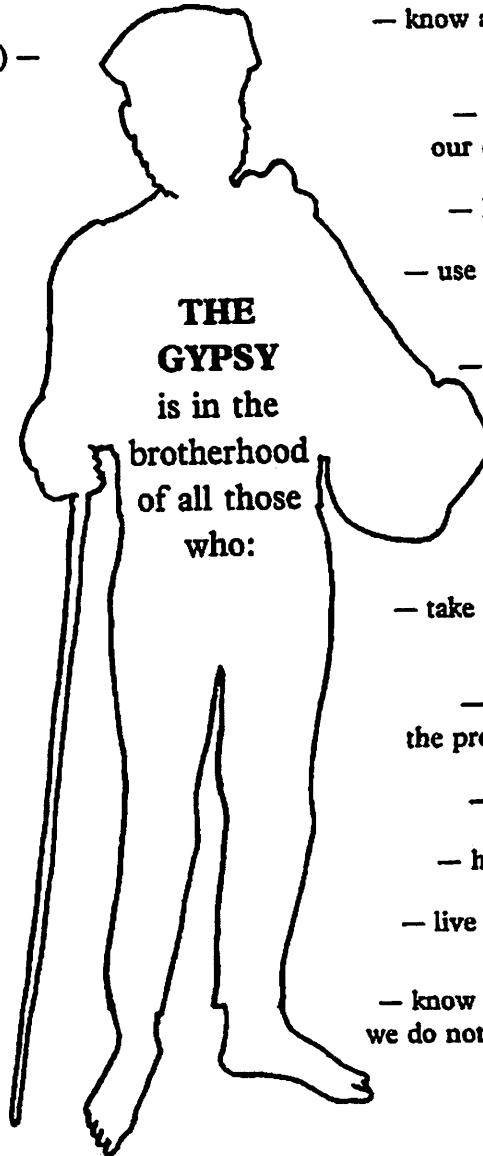
— are wary of
the proffered hand

— make rules

— have a family

— live communally

— know about things
we do not know about



WHAT LEARNING AREAS SEEM TO BE ON OFFER WITH THIS ROLE?

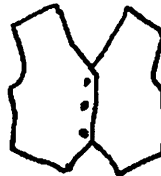
WHAT SIMILARITIES TO ALBERT ARE THERE AND WHAT DIFFERENCES?

HEAD BAND



I labour
I have self regard

BRIGHT WAISTCOAT



I embroider
I seek recognition
I have identity
I seek leisure

STUDDED BELT



I have authority
I control

ROUGH TROUSERS



I labour
My work is my life
I venture
I am poor

BARE FEET



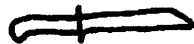
I need no shoes
I am hardy
I am free
I live outdoors
I hunt
I trust my footing

WICKER BASKET



I make what I use
I possess
I catch what I eat
I share
I conserve

KNIFE represents



DEFENCE
TOOLS
ANIMALS
ART
SKILL

TRIPOD AND POT represents



HOME
COMMUNITY
FOOD
SHARING

5 In the Albert lesson, two of Albert's possessions, the tin and the doll, become the focus of the children's attention at different points in the lesson, in two different kinds of way. It is precisely this *power to interest the children* which should be the yardstick by which all accoutrements to the role should be judged rather than any question of verisimilitude, hence a dolly rather than a meths bottle. Albert's tin clearly contains a tension of mystery particularly for the boys. It is also used as a controlling factor by the teacher, who instructs Albert to 'put it away' when they become too boisterous, the implication being that it has value to Albert and that the children need to respect his possessions. The doll later on creates a rather moving moment of speculation and wonder: the tension of ritual as it is passed from Albert to the teacher to the boy causes a slowing down and a savouring of a moment, which for this class I would imagine is quite a rare occurrence. There is also a controlling factor attached — the teacher says:

"Careful with it, 'cause it's Albert's...Can I hold your teddy for a minute?...He won't let anybody..."

The idea of a container attached to the role, be it a tin, or unopened basket, or handbag, or unopened pouch (the form it takes will be appropriate to the context represented) is a very useful one when planning a role, because of its powers to inspire curiosity in the children. What you place inside is also worth considering: with Albert is it more appropriate with the group to have a boiled sweet (as in the example) or an old cigarette end *but without a match*? Used with some adolescents the latter is highly productive in tuning in to their own experiences of not having been able to light up for long periods! With the gypsy role, a real fish or rabbit or game bird in his basket can provide a very riveting focus when it is revealed. Lines of enquiry about "How does he obtain his food/what does he use for cooking/what parts of an animal will he be able to use for other purposes?" make a useful comparison with the children's own world and how these things are done.

Footwear is another productive focus of attention, immediately designating aspects of the role's lifestyle. With Albert, it is rags tied on, which say: "I need proper shoes but haven't got any." With the gypsy, bare feet say: "I need no shoes in my life." He is more self-possessed and deliberate. Both visual statements offer the teacher a provocation for the class into the "use of informed guessing, hypothesis making, conjectural procedures" proposed by Bruner. Other roles may wear, say carpet slippers, or big boots, or an animal's skin, or a fish's tail, or have no need to walk at all, like the Tree or Sunflower.

2 Another planning consideration is to decide whether the role is likely to be an ambiguous, "I can tell you little, help me!" type of role (Albert is one such) or whether the role has a possibility within it to organise, teach, tell a story or demonstrate a technique (the Gypsy tends towards this category). In the course of a session, depending on the class, the role may need to shift from one to the other, but it is as well to fix firmly in one of these two modes at first, so that signalling is kept distinct.

Finally, how you decide to place the role when the children first see him is important. The general demands of the situation are:

- a) The children need *an opportunity to stare*;
- b) your colleague in role will need an opportunity to tune in to the needs of the group without having to think about anything else;
- c) you, the teacher, will need to maintain a little distance between the group and the role, to enable the above two things to happen;
- d) consequently, at first, you will need to amplify clearly to your colleague what the children are saying and feeling; and finally
- e) you will need to be able to see clearly what the children see, so make sure the role is in your sightlines at all times.

Some very simple ploys to achieve a) and b) are:

- (i) to have the role 'asleep' when he is first seen.
- (ii) to have the role 'in effigy' like a still frame from a picture.
- (iii) where appropriate, to tell the children they are to see 'a film' representing the chosen lifestyle, and that the person-in-role (now in effigy) will be the film in a moment.

Your own ingenuity will provide more.

The distance between the group and the role will also protect the role and sets up a hidden tension of space, which will work in the teacher's favour (see section on *Tensions*).

The Person-in-Role

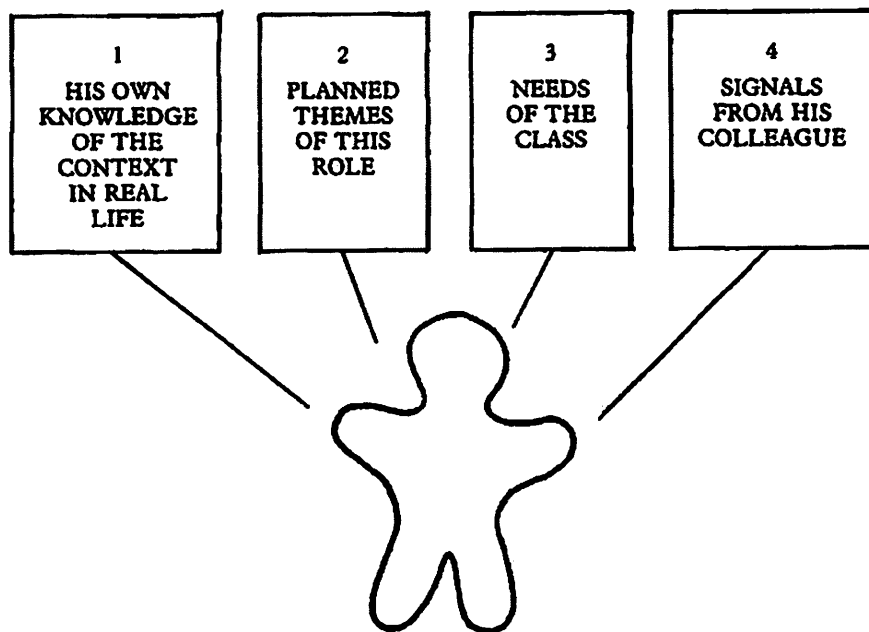
There is no qualitative difference between role playing of the kind described here, and that in any other good drama experience where a teacher moves in and out of role. The chief differences are:

- a) the role is able to, and should, remain in role throughout a session;
- b) the way the role is *defined* is more non-verbal than verbal;
- c) the role is free to concentrate on the selection and projection of appropriate signals;
- d) the role is not responsible, in the final event, for the *management* of the class;
- e) the role *is* responsible for exciting, or tempering the emotional state of, the class.

Three of Dorothy Heathcote's ground rules are appropriate here:

- 1) the teacher, not the person-in-role, is in charge of the lesson;
 - 2) the person-in-role seeks his own meaning in the role and projects appropriate signals simply;
 - 3) within a session the role should not be too fixed,
- as well as my own fifth rule: the children should be aware that the role is 'someone dressed up'.

The role-player draws sustenance from four main sources, which I shall represent visually for clarity:



The role player should not simply be drawing his inspiration from source 1, his knowledge of derelicts (as an actor in a play might), to set up an illusion of verisimilitude. He is just as much a teacher in the situation as his colleague managing the class, and should keep his 'teacher-thinking' open all the time. Often the selected items of clothing, if they are well chosen, will take the burden of verisimilitude off his shoulders for him, allowing him to listen, and respond, to the teacher and the group. Freed also from the burden of class management the role is more able to create those crucial moments of rapt attention and awe which are so difficult for the class teacher to achieve alone: e.g. in the 'doll' sequence in the Albert session, when the gypsy slowly opens his basket. Coupled with the need to seek the necessary tensions (of which more later), it is these moments above all that the role should be aiming to achieve.

Occasionally the role player needs to be aware of when to shift from being too passive, into a more active role. Are there aspects of the lifestyle of the role which can be demonstrated, or a story told? Some roles permit this more than others and it would be hard to advise someone on this except by saying, "Do what seems to be needed at the time."

One of the most important signals is the first one that you give. Time spent planning this one will be time well spent, because one good signal can sustain a whole session. Signals of wariness, of being frightened in some degree, of uncertainty, are

particularly useful in the first encounters because they often reflect the very feeling the class is experiencing in those moments. But because they are registering on the role, the children are able to conquer their own feelings. With a very nervous class, such signals would have to shift quite quickly to friendlier ones; with a boisterous class, as in the Albert session, they are needed much longer, to provide protection to the role.

Non-verbal signals are particularly powerful. Children are experts at non-verbal signals; they should be: they depend for their survival on accurate readings of them, in adult faces particularly. It is an area of communication where *all* children are strong, no matter how much they are labelled sub-normal. For this reason alone (the currency in non-verbal signals that is called for) this way of working is a powerful educational tool, particularly with the handicapped or with 'less able' pupils. Because of this, the person-in-role should play to his own strengths in these terms. In other words, make sure that his own non-verbal signals are appropriate to the role, or the role appropriate to his own non-verbal signals. Non-verbal signals a person gives off are much harder to change than are verbal ones and the children (as you will discover) will read yours intently.

Using the Albert session as a reference point, it is clearly apparent how little this role needed to actually do or say. The only word I spoke throughout the session was the one word "Albert". This role is about as extremely non-verbal as you'll get, but the general rule still applies. Most of the movements in this session are simple and slow too, except for the hiding of the tin and the snatching back of the newspapers. Sudden movements have a surprise element in them, but this can work against you, making the class too excited, or confusing them as to what action it is that you have just performed, or, worse still, confusing your colleague. Moreover, slow movements, or making the class wait, or making them take their turns one by one, all contain different tensions which should be exploited on behalf of the class's interest and involvement. The reason why the tin was hurriedly put away before it was opened, is because the tension surrounding the tin was going, and if it had been opened and the contents revealed, it would have lost all potential mystery. The teacher is here using it to 'discipline' the class's response.

Finally, the question of the children knowing you are in role. Reasons for this are stated earlier. There are many different ways of handling this. Some are explicit, others implicit:

- a) the role can change clothes in front of the children;
- b) the children meet the role-player out of role and are told, "In a moment Mr. ____ will be somebody else for us when we next see him." The children can then be brought to the room the role is set up in;
- c) occasionally the context represented is very patently and plainly fictional e.g. Tree, Sunflower, Scarecrow. In these cases, the accoutrements of the role should be exaggerated in accord, so that there may be no need to explain;
- d) the children may already know the person (say, their teacher).



Chris Lawrence
in role as the Gypsy

The Teacher

The teacher's main functions are:

To manage the class	To focus the problem or issue
To protect the role	To ask questions
To maintain tension between class and role	To indicate clearly to the role what is needed

This all seems very complicated, but a teacher has most of these functions when teaching alone. One very great advantage of this way of working is that the role comes to represent where the drama is for the children: if they accept, and are involved with, the role then they are accepting, and involved with, the drama. The children's response to the drama situation can be very clearly seen. It is not always so in other drama circumstances.

The teacher is also not carrying the burden of the content of the lesson so much: the visual impact of the role will be doing a lot of this work for him.

Because of these factors, protecting the role is more than shielding a colleague from a horde of excited youngsters trying to put the boot in (although this is, of course, important). Because the role represents the drama experience you need to be as careful over building in the required attitudes in the children (of belief, taking the work seriously, of not taking advantage of the situation) as you are when you carefully win them to any other drama context. However, over-protection of the drama can lead to the teacher not really listening to what the children feel the role is about, and result in the teacher heavily structuring to a pre-formed pattern — with the risk of the children being alienated. The same risks are apparent *whenever* the teacher, not the class, has chosen the context.

My saying this implies that, after the opening few minutes, *where* the children go with the role is very much an open question to be negotiated between teacher, children and role. And indeed this is generally so. However, good planning will leave the teacher well armed with some possible lines of enquiry or even productive activities for the children to engage in. (See *Planning the Role* above)

One very important technique for any teacher in any teaching situation to acquire is that of good questioning. It is often a minefield in drama situations: I have known questions that kill! Questions, the very things which *close down* discussions. They can be, and often are, a threat to children. As with non-verbal signals, so with verbal ones, children are experts at reading the *real* (often implicit) meaning of questions and they will respond accordingly. These meanings are carried both by the way the question is structured as a question, and by the tone of the voice or attitude of the questioner. We will all be aware of:

- the questions which interrogate.
- the ones that say, "I know the answer — do you?"
- the ones that indicate the child has to search the teacher's mind: "That's not the word I was thinking of... Does anyone know the word I was thinking of?..."

- the ones that are guessing games: "...the word begins with a 'B'..."
- the ones that are status reducers: "... do *you* know, Tommy?..."

The only problem is, asking questions of a class is a very necessary teaching process.

In the Albert session, there is about a 50/50 mixture of questions and statements by the teacher. Many of those questions are mere amplifications of the children's questions and are directed at the role rather than the class:

"I wonder what he's got in his tin?"

"Have you got any money in your tin, Albert?"

The "I wonder.." type of question is very neatly oblique, inviting rather than demanding response.

I think the key to being able to ask productive questions in any drama is for the teacher to assume a relationship to the context and make utterances from that stand-point: in other words, *to be in role yourself*. This role will usually be a 'twilight' or 'shadow' role, not sharp and clearly defined as your colleague's will be, just an attitude — and one that can rapidly shift. We get a clear illustration of this in the opening moments of the Albert session. The teacher takes on an ambiguous 'I'm one of the children' role, and voices what she feels must be the attitude of some of the children she is with:

"You're in our Hall! This is our Hall isn't it? We have our dinners here!"

This has the effect of helping the group to bind together, badly needed at this point with Debby tearing round the video equipment. The attitude of indignation is now shifted into an intimate:

"Is he frightened?"

Some other productive attitudes to assume might be:

(As though puzzled) "What do you make of this then?"

(As though frightened) "He looks a bit dangerous to me!"

(As though curious) "I wonder how he ...?"

(As though baffled) "How on earth does he cope with ...?"

So long as the underlying attitude is clearly registering, such forms of question shift the teacher out of the interrogator into the 'I'm as curious as you are' mode.

Some useful themes for sessions could be:

What can the role teach us?
 What can we teach the role?
 What does he know about?
 What story has he to tell?
 How can we help him?
 Where did he come from?

How do people treat him?
 What does he value?
 What company does he seek?
 What led him to be like this?
 Who are the people in his life?
 What feelings must he have about...?

These themes contain the means whereby some of the propositions Bruner discusses can be brought about: coupled with good, ambiguous, attitude-coloured questioning, role play sessions of this kind can be powerful in inducing "informed guessing, hypothesis making, conjectural procedures" in the children. What the role and teacher between them are likely to raise are the class's "unspoken notions ... unstated ways of doing things".

Finally, if needed, the teacher might find that a more clearly defined role for himself becomes productive, e.g.,

with Albert — the teacher later becomes a policeman, social worker, etc.

with the Gypsy — the teacher later becomes a council officer, farmer, etc.

Such roles can introduce a new and productive tension, causing the class to reflect upon its experiences, or put into practice decisions they have made, or ask them to take a new look at the role, or build their confidence in their chosen attitude.

This brings me (neatly enough) to the question of the tensions available to teachers in these, and all other, drama sessions.

Tensions Available

Tension is the spring of drama. It is not the action, it is what impels the action. I have throughout this essay sprinkled examples of this or that tension at work, where appropriate. I shall not elaborate much more here except to list a few of the more useful ones, with some accompanying examples.

- 1 **Secrecy:** "Is he who he says he is?"
- 2 **Mystery:** "What's he got in his tin?"
- 3 **The Dangling Carrot:** "If we can do such and such, then..."
- 4 **Blocking:** Teacher adopts a role to block children's scheme.
- 5 **Surprise:** The visual impact of the role contains this tension.
- 6 **Conflicting Priorities:** Whenever a decision has to be made.
- 7 **Time:** a) Urgency — "We've got to work quickly."
b) Waiting — "Let's see if he'll wake up."
- 8 **Space:** Role remains at a distance.
- 9 **Daring or Challenge:** Teacher adopts a role to challenge children's thinking.
- 10 **Ritual:** Meeting one by one, saying names, passing doll.
- 11 **Control of Actions:** "He looks frightened — don't frighten him."
- 12 **Abdication:** When one child is sent to negotiate with the role — others watching.
- 13 **Images and Objects:** Visual impact of role.