Dramatic activity is concerned with the ability of humans to ‘become somebody else’, to ‘see how it feels’, and the process is a very simple and efficient way of crystallizing certain kinds of information. Humans employ it naturally and intuitively all their lives. ‘Put yourself in my shoes’ is a readily understood request, and one easily complied with, though some are more capable than others of achieving deep insight by this means. It has been turned into a complicated and therefore often misunderstood subject in school, by teachers (perhaps those who see childhood as merely the time spent waiting to become an adult, and deny the value of a child’s experiencing being a child) who have replaced the real experience with ‘exercises for’ the real experience.

The underlying assumption is that children are not capable of experiencing ‘the real thing’, so substitutes in the form of watered-down exercises are employed instead. This, together with a lack of understanding of the relationship between so-called ‘improvisation’ and ‘theatre’ experiences, and a paucity of adequate generally accepted vocabulary to order the thinking, has caused much confusion. A further complicating factor is that a good drama experience cannot either be preserved or transferred easily, so that those using drama intuitively in the classroom or club find it difficult to communicate what they do to achieve their ends, or the means they employ to learn which ends are relevant at that time and in that particular circumstance. Most good infant teachers are able to judge when they may venture to join children at play, especially wendy-house play, but many would be at a loss to explain how they judge.

Like many human learning experiences, drama is at once a subject area for research opportunity – for example theatre skills, and a tool for personal development – in personal role-playing. Because drama is concerned with the kinds of associations and conflicts which people in their public, personal and religious lives enter into, it offers two unique opportunities to the teacher:

1. The fact that for its expression it always demands crystallization of ideas in groups,
2. It can employ the individuals, working as a group, to conceive the ideas, area, and level of interest in the first place.
Therefore, even as the group — because such is the nature of groups — constantly modifies and gives form to its ideas, expression and sentiment, employing the natural laws of drama, it is also a direct result and expression of the inter-personal relationships of the group, and the individual strengths and weaknesses of those in it. A team-game or class project will also reflect these. The factor special to drama is that it achieves these in 'heated' not 'cold' circumstances, for it draws directly upon the individual's life and subjective experiences as its basic material, and achieves this in circumstances which are unique — that is when 'a willing suspension of disbelief' applies, and when those concerned are using their subjective world to illuminate and understand the motivations of others through role-playing.

Dramatic activity is concerned with the crises, the turning points of life, large and small, which cause people to reflect and take note, and it functions within the following disciplines:

1. It must use women and men in their total environment. That is, employing their experiences before the event in question, all their knowledge factual and subjective, their abilities, failings, blind-spots, skills, together with what is not known, their particular character and personality to assist in revealing their ability to face the crisis chosen to confront them at the present time.

2. Humans (or animals or creatures possessing human qualities, or attributes) must in action and situation be placed in some kind of emotional relationship with others, even if the topic and reason for their meeting is an intellectual one, for example, two doctors discussing the technique of a brain operation is not dramatic, but the same two doctors, both in love with the patient whose brain is damaged, is dramatic.

3. The statement achieved must be achieved in the present and must be seen to occur (drama means 'living through'), so that the personalities must behave at a 'life-rate', performing those acts and saying those words which would be relevant to the situation and period in time, and, as in life, show no future or advance knowledge of what will occur as a result of their actions — unless they are Gods or superhuman beings.

4. The achieved final statement must have 'form'. That is, everything irrelevant to the main issues must be lacking, and the relevant material must achieve order and style, so that what is revealed is a refined distillation of all the ideas embodied in the chosen material and considered by the group to be relevant. So form in this case is conceived as a sliding scale and related to the standards the group are able set themselves and perceive as required in the first place.

The infant child, the ESN child and the sixth-former will all
Drama must in its most refined condition be capable of being shared by others who participate in a different way—the audience, which may consist of only one person carefully chosen for some quality such as sensitivity to the actors' needs (for example teacher or headmistress), or the mixed mass of persons who pay to have the experience in the theatre.

Often the child's drama and that of the theatre are seen as being in opposition. The terms 'informal' and 'formal' drama suggest this. They do in fact spring from the same roots—the need of people to role-play, to enable them to measure themselves and their own experiences and viewpoints against those of others, not only in order to see where they are different, but also to discover wherein they are alike, so that they can achieve a sense of belonging, especially in those areas of living which are not capable of being communicated by words alone. Theatre in its most complex form (say a highly skilful presentation of 'Lear') is related to the child's first groping attempts to improvise upon an idea in that there is a natural progression from the tentative meeting of the group's ideas, through the group's achieving with those ideas a statement with form, to a theatrical presentation of a group's ideas.

Drama and education

Let us look now at some of the opportunities, and some of the demands, of drama. First of all, it allows children to:

- employ their own views of life and people,
- use their own standards of evaluation,
- exercise their own terms when expressing and tempering these ideas.

It also subjects children to the demand to communicate clearly and specifically both in discussion of the ideas, and the dramatic expression of them. The linguistic demands alone may range from academic discussion of a factual point, to an emotional outburst such as a king in defence of his kingdom might make (public language) or a tramp at the door of a rich man, justifying his existence might be called upon a make (private language).

Drama cannot properly function unless the children agree to tolerate generously, and put to work, differing personalities, points of view, information, speed of working, and levels of attention. A sixth-former recently, while working as a member of a self-chosen after-school drama group, when asked what was affecting him most, replied 'I never really saw a D-streamer before; I never realized what it must be like not
to understand what is said the first time I hear it. This bloke learns about life in a totally different way from me, and I'm not sure that my way is the best way.

It gives instant feedback for assessment and rethinking. E. V. Taylor, in 'Experiments with a Backward Class', quotes the example of a little boy role-playing a Greek guard who said 'By gum, it's cold'. His classmates protested that 'Greeks don't talk like that'. He modified after some thought to 'By ye gam, it's cold', which passed their critical surveillance.

On another occasion a group of four year olds were interested in an 'old' map, and decided to travel its roads and seas. They chose to go in a 'Yellow Submarine'. The song was 'Top of the Pops' that week. The approved school boys who chose to kill a president were interested to see how much latitude the (new to them) teacher would allow them in their garr-warfare.

Finally drama is also at the service of the other areas of the curriculum simply because, when people are put, in the act of living, in their environment, the area of study regarding them may be as varied as their characters or environment. Fisherfolk living in the Outer Hebrides may be of interest because of their isolation, their fishing boats and particular skills, their religious and moral beliefs and attitudes, their homes, stories, folklore, understanding of the tides, marts of communication, spending or voting power, hobbies or a multitude of other facets of their lives. Set them in another century and the possibilities are doubled. Which of these aspects is to be isolated and brought to special notice, depends upon the teacher's present purpose.

Aims and assessment

Because of the many purposes to which drama may be orientated, it is often difficult for teachers to discover how to plan progressive work, and how to recognize progression — indeed it is impossible to do the latter unless aim and assessment are kept firmly together in the teacher's mind. All too often the aim is too vaguely defined, and the assessment based falsely on 'showing' rather than 'experiencing' aspects of the work. Teachers find it hard to observe what is the real experience for the children inside the overt action which has been stimulated. An example of this was seen when some seventeen-year-old boys chose a theme of 'Mods, Rockers and music'. They finally decided that a garg owning motor-cycles should meet in a garage to draw lots to decide who should do the 'ton-up' on the M1 in order to carry urgently-needed blood plasma (and incidently to collect some purple hearts or riots). They used chaos as motor-cycles, and spent
most of the drama session discussing plans and arguing on a corner of
the hall (the garage). The teacher (looking for development of the
drama – the shape of the play) was frustrated and felt that session to be a
failure. What she failed to notice was that the boys' real experience
during this session was that of owning a motor-bike. One can sit on a
chair and it becomes the finest vehicle in the world – to have to wheel it
out of the garage and drive off would be to turn it once again into a
chair. The boys knew this for they were inside the situation, while the
teacher remained outside. This kind of misreading of children's drama
occurs too often.

One of the broad aims of education is to help people to achieve the
fullest and most varied and subtle changes of register in relating to
others. These changes of register must be in reference to role-
capabilities, language, and physical relations.

It is in this field that dramatic activity is of most direct help, whether
at the 'wendy-house' play in infancy, or the socio- and psycho-drama of
adulthood, together with all other types which lie between these two
extremes.

The role of the teacher

The skills required to understand how to employ drama to these ends
are not so shrouded in mystery as might be supposed. They would seem
to be as follows:

1 To acquire an understanding of the six drama elements, and how
they combine through contrasting with and supporting each other
to make statements.
2 Vivid pictorial and aural imagination.
3 Empathy to sense the general mood of a group.
4 Capacity to put the children's needs before the teacher's plans.
5 Sensitive changes of register in verbal communication with group.
6 Ability to employ changes of register in the teaching role. This is
explained more fully below.
7 Ability to look – to perceive the real situation. Ability to listen – to
perceive the real statement.

Changes of register in the teaching role

The teacher's role is often seen as a consistent one – that of he or she
who knows and can therefore tell or instruct. This is too limited a
register, and a barren one, except in certain circumstances. In drama
the teacher must be prepared to fulfil many roles:

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The deliberate opposer of the common view in order to give feedback and aid clarity of thought.
The narrator who helps to see mood and register of events.
The positive withdrawer who 'lets them get on with it'.
The requester of ideas, as a group member.
The supporter of tentative leadership.
The 'doerbody' who discovers material and drama aids.
The reflector who is used by the children to assess their statements.
The adviser in argument.
The deliberately obtuse one, who requires to be informed, and the one who believes that the children can do it.

The needs of the children

If children are to see their ideas function adequately the material must be so structured that without anyone interfering they are seen to work.
The non-verbal child should never be placed under a verbal pressure which is too great to cope with - it is the teacher's task to pass the expression of the idea so that the child's strength are used, not the weaknesses. No teacher would dream of asking children to try to make pictorial statements with badly mixed paint, and exactly the same must apply in drama work. As with art, they need not be fine artists but they must be sensitive to the possibilities of the medium.

It is urgently necessary that some means should be evolved of training teachers to use drama progressively during the child's school life - drama which is not always related to theoretical standards but which considers the child's changing needs both as individuals and as members of groups. Their experimentation can take place to discover which kinds of group drama most efficiently serve which present need in the children. All too often we press the future on them and leave them with insufficient time to experience the present. An example of the kind of error we fall into is when a lecturer in education watched a group of six-year-olds bungling to find which statement was the important one for them in the struggle between Pharaoh and the Israelites. In discussion sitting round the teacher they knew that they wanted their freedom to return home, but in drama all they could say was 'Give us more food'. Each time they asked and the Pharaoh refused, more children became involved, and 'changes of register' began to be available to them in this difficult verbal situation of kings and soothsayers, prophets and slaves, one civilization and another climactic and difficult approach. The education lecturer thought that 'movement might have been a better approach'.

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Conclusion

In small groups, all people whether children or adults, wise or foolish, verbal or non-verbal, employ the taking of roles (sometimes through individual day-dreaming, reliving of situations, reading of books, watching television and films) when it best serves the ends they require. To harness this to the classroom learning situation would obviously be common sense, even at some loss of the individual's ability to do what pleases when it pleases. Rules do not restrict, they aid, if they are good and pertinent: rules. The old-fashioned (and false) rules of theatre such as 'face the front', must be replaced with rules which artists have always employed when creating, such as 'use your ideas and talents honestly, serving the disciplines of the medium'.