CHAPTER 1

Drama in Schools – Some Basic Questions Answered

What do we mean by drama in schools?

Drama in schools ideally includes:

- free and supported dramatic play opportunities
- drama lessons within which children are taught how to do drama itself
- the use of drama methodology in lessons other than just English and drama
- whole-class drama lessons through which children explore issues and ideas together (learning in and across curriculum areas)
- opportunities to create, perform and respond to their own and each other's performances
- opportunities to create, perform and respond to professional theatre performances (including theatre visits in schools)
- participatory opportunities to work creatively and evaluatively with actors and playwrights.

There is much confusion about what 'drama in schools' includes. Drama should be seen by schools as much more than just putting on the Christmas play or acting out scenes in assembly. It should also include opportunities for working and learning in role regularly together in group and whole-class situations.

Some schools will include the provision of dramatic play opportunities, which involve being in role, as part of what they define as drama. To make drama in schools only playing *or* plays, would deprive many children of the rich spectrum of experience and possibilities that can be offered through both *learning in drama* and *learning through drama* with whole classes.

Role play and pretending is natural and essential to the all round development of young children and a powerful educational opportunity is missed if children do not have an opportunity to

move from their own pre-school role play into in-school role play and then whole-class drama/role play at school, as well as the important experience of participating in performances.

What do we mean by 'whole-class drama'?

Whole-class drama should be done *with* children not *to* them. The term 'whole-class drama' refers to the whole-class working in role together within one overall, shared, fiction that they are creating and contributing to together, in order to make it work.

Whole-class drama can split into groups working in role or solitary working in role at times, but it will also involve the whole-class spontaneously interacting in role together, in the same scenes for significant amounts of the time. They are all involved in the same overall drama even when they are working in role individually or in groups, for example, we might ask the class to create scenes in groups that portray what has happened to a character at different points in the past and then bring the groups' scenes together to build up missing bits of the plot (for example, Unit 7, Activity 4 and Unit 8, Activity 10, at the end of this book). The scenes would be complementary and contribute to the evolving whole-class drama. The whole-class is engaging with and offering parts of the same collaborative fiction, with the structural guidance and and co-participative support of the teacher. The teacher herself/himself is likely to be working as a co-participant in role for much of the time but can step out of role whenever required, to organize the lesson or give instructions as the teacher.

Why is role play and drama important for every child?

In every culture in the world young children who are developing normally will pretend. They will do this because their brains need opportunity to imagine and because they enjoy pretending! Because the brain needs to pretend, it makes the activity enjoyable, to make sure it happens. So, dramatic play and drama are naturally highly motivating to young children. Before entering school, they spend a great deal of their time naturally and spontaneously role-playing alone and with others.

When they get to school they often are given very limited opportunities to role-play even though their developing brain needs it. Their brains are wired up to learn through actively reliving and imagining experiences, at first alone and then with other children. To be able to pretend involves drama skills, and children already bring them to school. For educators not to use this natural method of learning once children arrive in schools would seem foolish, and could even be construed as a form of deprivation. With children entering nurseries and schools earlier, and with children spending more time at schools and with the extended school day, it is essential that they do not lose the opportunity for spontaneous and imaginative play, both alone and with others.

There is evidence to suggest that the brain changes structurally in response to what it experiences. The time when language is developing most rapidly and when the brains pathways for learning (neural pathways) are being connected up is the same time in children's lives when they are most frequently pretending through dramatic play. This is no coincidence. Imagined worlds that they imitate, re-enact or create can give them an infinite range of contexts within which they

can practise speaking and actively listening. In dramas and role plays they can speak and respond as anyone conjured up from their own imaginations and experience. They can imagine themselves to be anywhere at any point in time with anything happening.

When left to their own dramatic play, without an empathetic adult intervening, children tend to repeat the same play rather than learn new things. They tend to enact and move speedily through plots without much time for conscious reflection. But with an empathetic adult alongside who has a learning agenda for them and who has some knowledge of basic drama strategies, children can be encouraged to engage more deeply with sustained learning through the pretend. Also they can be supported to sustain a collective exploration with other children that might otherwise be inclined to break down earlier socially. With an adult they can enter playfully, yet seriously, into new learning territory.

Drama as multi-sensory learning

The brain learns multi-sensorily. Dramatic play (and later good drama) enables children to operate multi-sensorily, rather than rely on learning mainly through reading, writing and listening to teachers. Drama like dramatic play is visual, auditory, kinaesthetic and tactile. It involves children being physically and mentally active, being on the move, interacting and responding to each other for a social and learning purpose and, above all, thinking. whole-class drama is readily accessible to a wide range of types of learner as it resonates with earlier, familiar dramatic play. Older children, too, still value working in role as it is highly motivational and many older children are covertly dramatic playing outside school for years longer than most adults realize. Of course, adults, too, still play dramatically from time to time. If you are going to make a speech you might rehearse in front of an imaginary audience. If you have an interview you might practise in front of a mirror. You might even employ fantasy and role play as an adult to excite another. You can know that you are pretending but the emotions and learning are real.

Drama as socialization

To keep a 'pretend' going with others, children need to pay attention to each other, listen and watch each other, and negotiate and co-operate. In carrying out a make-believe with others, children show what they already know. It gives us an insight into what children have already experienced and understood (or misunderstood) and helps us know what we need to help them to learn next. Working alongside children sensitively and empathetically in role provides educators with a powerful and engaging way of keeping interactively alongside children as they learn and helps to structure learning and to mediate experience. The teacher using drama in schools can be seen as a natural development of the playful and empathetic parent or carer, who quite naturally is drawn to play alongside children in their pretend worlds. Within those worlds the alert adult becomes aware of myriad unfolding learning opportunities for both the children and themselves.

Drama as empathy

Being in role encourages the development of empathy and this helps children to understand and feel other people's positions and viewpoints. Children can respond in role to unfamiliar situations and practise and rehearse how to deal with real ones. Drama situations may portray real-life situations that have been experienced or may be invented. However, invented situations are

always in some way rooted in the real-life experiences of the child as they draw on what they already know (or have seen or heard about) in order to create drama. It is one of the reasons child psychologists are observant of children's pretend play. But we do need to remember that through television children pick up on much to imitate that may not be in their direct experience. Also teachers are not psychologists and drama in schools never sets out to be psychodrama (which is a specialist area).

Drama as freedom

When we operate in role, the make-believe is liberating. Working in role provides a possible distance and a safety net that enables participants to attach and detach themselves at will, to step in or out of role and disassociate themselves personally from what they said or did as a character. Dramatic play, drama and theatre is a magical play space that we agree to keep going together and be experientially playful in, but when the make-believe finishes the characters in the make-believe (however real they may have seemed) have vanished except in out memories. We can bring them alive again at another time, literally 're-member' them, if we all agree to or we can keep them alive just in our memories.

Drama as empowerment

Through dramatic play young children feel empowered! Being in role enables children safely to try out and experience what it might feel like to speak and act as someone else. It enables them to rehearse real life and what it feels like to be an adult and in control. Dramatic play lets children safely play out issues and past or future experiences that are disturbing or exciting them in real life and rehearse resolving them and taking control of them.

Drama as memory

Dramatic play and drama gives a special space for active reflection. While children are role-playing they are able to engage emotionally with the pretend and, even though they know the dramatic play or drama is not real life, the emotional connection with it is real. The connection between the emotions and drama makes it memorable. Any learning acquired through engagement with role is therefore also made memorable. Dramatic play, the drama lesson and the theatre are all important forums for personal, social and emotional development. The role-play area, the drama room and the stage are all significant spaces, full of infinite possibilities for memorable learning.

Drama as holistic education

As holistic child development, dramatic play is nature's gift. Drama and dramatic play involve engaging and developing the whole child (Figure 1.1).

What is 'drama in education' and 'drama for learning'?

Drama in Education (DiE) as it used to be called, or 'drama for learning' as it is more often called now, focuses primarily on creating shared make-believes to develop children's learning,

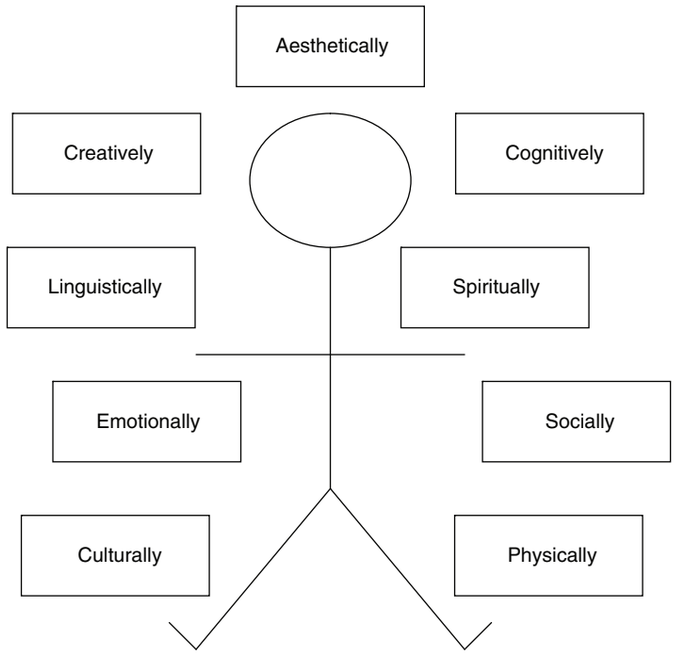

Figure 1.1 Drama engages and develops the whole child

confidence, self-esteem, creative and critical thinking, and communication skills through working in role (Figure 1.2). It may also be referred to as 'process drama' or, more recently, 'context drama'.

There are those who do drama under the wider umbrella of 'imaginative enquiry' and do not name it (or maybe not even recognize or acknowledge it) as drama. The burgeoning of circle time is interesting as it also has its roots in drama (being based on the socio-drama and psychodrama work of Jacob Moreno that has been adapted for schools by Jenny Mosely). You will note that many of the Drama Units use class circles on and off throughout. Also, the development of philosophy for children can be linked to drama as it encourages philosophical enquiry through the use of stories. All drama is story and is often used as a way of encouraging and developing philosophical thinking, frequently with the use of picture books that deal with big questions and issues.

Mantle of the Expert

There has been renewed interest in using 'Mantle of the Expert' (MoE) as an approach to learning and the more creative curriculum in some schools. 'Mantle of the Expert' was named by Dorothy Heathcote (Heathcote and Bolton, 1995), a highly influential and skilled drama practitioner and was a pioneering approach to teaching and learning in the 1960s and 1970s, which waned almost to extinction when the first content-laden National Curriculum was introduced and the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy Frameworks and Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) schemes of work arrived in schools.

'Mantle of the Expert' crosses curriculum boundaries (which is an approach now being encouraged again) and involves children engaging and working in role in a sustained way as experts with tasks to do. Again its roots are in dramatic play and drama, as children take on the roles of accomplished adults and become increasingly competent at related tasks. They rise to the occasion and are empowered by being treated as experts, with a resulting rise in self-esteem, confidence and

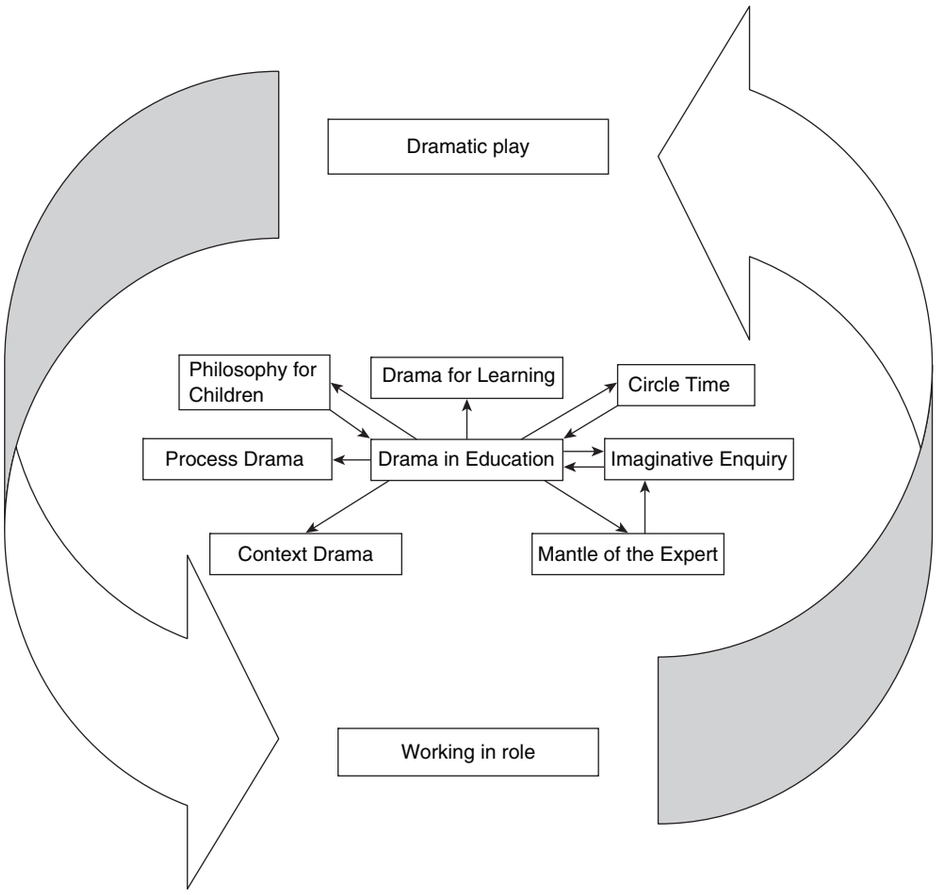

Figure 1.2 Current drama, story and role play linked learning initiatives and terminologies

skills. There is a taster of this to be found within Unit 5, when the children take on the role of expert designers of holiday developments working for an external client.

This resurgence of interest in MoE may be fuelled by the interest in methodologies that develop thinking skills and, more recently, the need to consider whether we are supporting children to develop entrepreneurship and thereby economic well-being.

To drama practitioners it is important that 'Mantle of the Expert' is acknowledged as drama and not just promoted as a curriculum approach or as enquiry-based learning. Many teachers using 'Mantle of the Expert' do not fully realize the drama heritage of 'Mantle of the Expert' and are missing a powerful opportunity to bring other drama strategies into play and extend further their teacher repertoire.

What drama skills do young children already have?

Young children who are developing normally come to school as experienced role players, already equipped with basic drama skills and powerful imaginations. If they are developing normally they can already pretend to be someone else (character), somewhere else (setting) and with something happening that is not really (plot). This is the essence of dramatic play, drama, story and theatre (Figure 1.3).

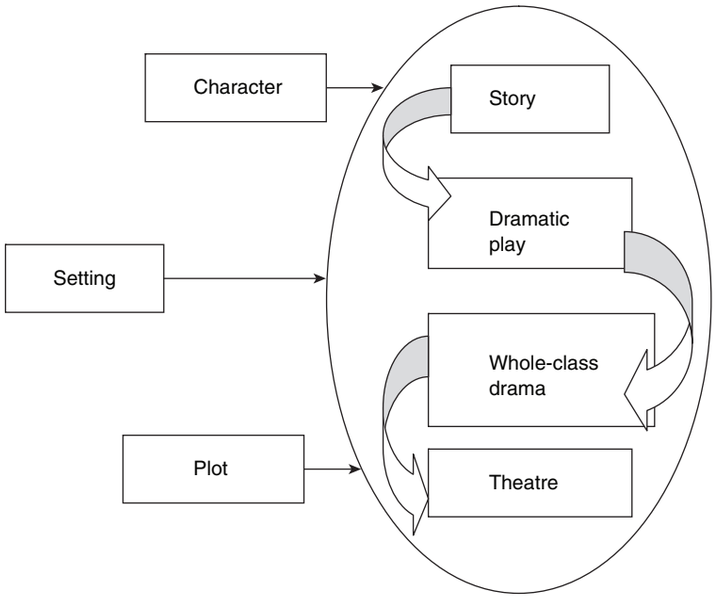

Figure 1.3 Narrative links

Since they were babies children have been able to imitate and mimic what they have observed in order to help then learn and they soon learn to re-enact scenarios rooted in what they have experienced and later create their own. The experiences they enact and re-enact may be from real life or from stories heard, seen or read.

Most young children will talk easily and naturally to imaginary creatures, animals and people, and sometimes keep the same important and necessary imaginary friends for as long as they need them, that is, for months or even years. Young children are also capable of imbuing inanimate objects with great emotional, sensory and symbolic significance, for example, the piece of blanket that a child needs to go to bed with. They also accept easily the notion that inanimate objects can have life, for example, accepting vehicles as characters in stories and films, and imagining their dolls and teddies are real companions that they can talk with. They readily engage with puppets and television characters as if they were real people. They can initiate and sustain chat based on make-believe with friends, relations and other adults who have not lost touch with the enjoyment and importance of 'pretend' to children and to themselves! Young children keenly serve pretend cups of tea and pieces of cake to those who are prepared to stay awhile to enter a make-believe with them. They will also spontaneously use 'ambiguous' objects as if they are something else, for example, a cardboard box as a spaceship, a blanketed clothes dryer as a tent, a bed as a boat! Objects are often used in this way in theatre as multi-purpose props, for example, Harlequin's stick. Put in theatre terms, young children create settings for their 'play', act out different characters and create plots, use simple objects and materials as props and sometimes as scenery, improvise dialogue and create scenes and short plays that are sometimes 'one offs' but are sometimes repeated.

How does drama link to story?

Story is important in the lives of children. All drama involves story, and drama lessons provide opportunity to create a shared living story that unfolds 'in the moment' at which it is happening.

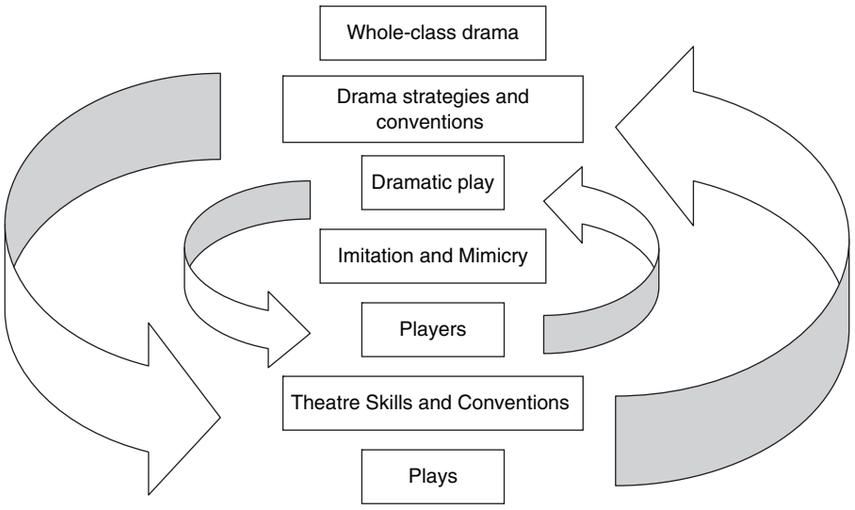

Figure 1.4 The development spiral of drama and theatre

Rehearsed theatre usually re-enacts and presents a story that already exists. In drama we are active, interactive, collective story-makers and storytellers who are living the story as we create it and engaging with it cognitively and affectively through role.

In every culture across the world and throughout history, humans make sense of the world and their place in it through story as they do through all the art forms. They may present their real-life or imagined stories through writings or enactments or sculptures or dances or music, for example. Through drama we can bring alive and enter existing stories to explore them together or we can create new stories. We can begin to know and understand the world, other people and our place and feelings in relation to both.

Is there a difference between theatre and drama?

Young children's own play or 'plays' are often repeated (almost ritualistically) and may almost become scripted as they are frequently replayed, for example, 'Let's play shopkeepers' or 'Let's play mums and dads', can to the initiated group of friends involve demonstrating shared understandings about what will need to be said and done if you are allowed to join in. Dramatic play, like drama, can involve agreed rituals and will only work if all the participants follow the agreed rules of engagement. A maverick player, whether in the home corner or on the stage, jeopardizes the make-believe and is usually firmly dealt with by co-participants. Dramatic play is also very flexible and can be spontaneous and unrehearsed. Whether played or replayed, dramatic play is very engaging and motivational for young children. Dramatic play, drama and theatre can be seen as part of the same spectrum (or spiral) and it is best not to consider them as hierarchical with theatre as the icing on the cake (Figure 1.4).

Theatre is often devised and does not just rely on enacting play scripts written by playwrights and performing on stages. Theatre can happen anywhere (including classrooms) and can be arrived at by consensus, from a reworking of scenes that have first been improvised. Within drama lessons we may well devise short pieces of theatre for each other as part of the drama, to help us communicate our understandings in an aesthetic way to ourselves and our fellow participants. When we know the human-made boundaries of conventional theatre we can deliberately play with them in effective and playful ways. Some forms of theatre invite the audience not just

to observe but to interact verbally or even physically with the performance and participate in various ways, for example, Forum Theatre and Pantomime.

Dramatic play skills are also drama skills. Theatre, like dramatic play, is about people pretending to be someone else, somewhere else with something happening that is not really. But theatre usually implies that we prepare this sustained make-believe or 'play' for an external audience and not just for ourselves. We aim to help an audience to experience, understand and be affected by a play.

Who should be teaching the drama?

Artsmark (an Arts Council England initiative that recognizes different levels of good arts provision in schools – www.artsmark.org.uk) has been very successful at getting drama in its own right onto the timetable of an ever-increasing numbers of schools. To get basic Artsmark, drama needs to be given its own regular, timetabled slot. However, many schools put drama on the timetable to get Artsmark but then are unsure about what to do developmentally in a regular drama lesson. If they do not understand the depth and breadth of what drama in schools can be and there are no drama specialist teachers to support drama teaching in the school, then the slot may be used narrowly or repetitively.

It is important that at a time when structures are being put in place to enable drama specialist teachers from Specialist Arts Colleges and secondary Advanced Skills Teachers and theatre educators to work in primary schools, that the primary drama slot is not simply handed over by primary teachers to others who may not necessarily have a professional understanding of young children's learning and all-round development or of the Primary Curriculum or of whole-class drama. This could hamper the integration of drama as pedagogy across the primary curriculum and its integration and development in and across the creative curriculum.

We must ensure that teachers and teaching assistants understand the place of drama across the curriculum and are competent at it so that drama does not become an 'add on' provided by others and that there is not an overemphasis on scripted performance and plays.

It is also important that drama does not just happen in the Extended School slot where it is not necessarily accessed by all children and may be detached from the core educational experiences and entitlement of all children. We should be open to working with creative partners in drama, but recognize what experienced primary practitioners can and must bring to a real drama/theatre for learning partnership. We still need to develop drama practitioners who are rooted in schools and child development and are not just visitors who are focused only on plays and theatre skills, with no sustained connection with the school and the children's learning.

Who should lead and manage drama in the school?

Few head teachers are themselves drama specialists, even when they are English specialists. All teachers should have an understanding of teaching in and through drama, and with the enhanced role of teaching assistants it is necessary that they too become proficient at using its methodology and maybe teaching drama. All schools need someone to lead and manage drama

just as they do any other curriculum area. If drama is to be an important part of the methodology and pedagogical toolbox of all teachers and teaching assistants, then the leadership and management of the school have a responsibility to arrange leadership and professional development for their staff in this area, and not just skirt around the issue by passing drama over to external providers or ignoring drama altogether. Drama is a core and statutory entitlement at present as part of English, so all Primary children must receive it.

Through becoming skilled at teaching in and through drama, we can support whole classes of children to imagine they are anyone, anywhere, at any point in time, in any place and in any situation. What an infinitely flexible teaching medium drama is and one that every teacher can benefit from.

Through the units of drama work in this book alone we can meet and interact with Samuel Pepys and Howard Carter in history, enter the tomb of Tutankhamun, challenge land developers in Geography, talk with and advise migrants in personal and social education (PSE), as well as explore an underwater world and help a bullied mermaid. We can meet characters in poems and a painter as we escape the Fire of London as well as defeat a Samurai Warrior. Why would we want to develop the drama teaching skills of only one member of staff when we can use drama as an enjoyable and infinitely flexible methodology right across the curriculum?

How can I get support to teach drama?

It makes a difference if teachers and assistants experience being in drama themselves as participants with other teachers as well as with their own class as co-participants. Accessing drama in-service training (INSET) and continuing professional development (CPD) with a practical element is advisable as we all know that reading about something is not a substitute for experiencing it. If you are asking children to do drama, then having fairly recently experienced what it feels like yourself to be in role with others is beneficial. Some local authorities provide drama courses with strong practical elements for teachers, as do subject associations (www.nationaldrama.co.uk) and several commercial companies.

There is an increase in the numbers of freelance drama consultants and theatre educators available to work in schools. Find out a little about exactly what they are offering as some may be helping you with staging performances, while others are teaching about whole-class process drama as pedagogy. It is worth asking where they have recently worked and taking the time to phone or email to get a first-hand evaluation. Also, of course, they must be police checked if they are working in your school.

There are also companies and consultants that teach predominantly about a particular aspect of drama for learning, for example, MoE (www.mantleoftheexpert.com). It is best to explore MoE once you have already acquired some broader drama training. However, there may be teachers whose interest in drama for learning generally has been kindled through specific learning about MoE. Teachers whose introduction to drama is initially through MoE only may acquire some alternative, parallel drama convention vocabularies.

Some local authorities have drama advisers (but not many) or arts advisers who might put you in touch with advice and support. Often drama advice nowadays comes from National Strategy consultants as part of their work in schools linked to developing speaking and listening rather than to drama as an art form.