



# Interview

*Pam Bowell talks to National Drama Chair, **Patrice Baldwin** about drama education and the Drama for Learning and Creativity (D4LC) project.*

**Pam:** How did you become involved in drama in the first place?

**Patrice:** As a young child in Gloucestershire I spent a lot of my time creating pretend worlds to play in (like most young children do) and making up plays with friends. Then I had my first humiliating under-rehearsed school play experience when I was about 10 and a couple more not particularly good theatre experiences at High School. But it was when I had my first taste of youth theatre that I became hooked ... and I have been ever since. Suddenly there was the opportunity to work expressively with my own ideas as well as other people's. We devised and toured our own shows. It was exciting, free rather than restrictive – about things that mattered to us as teenagers. We owned it and it was social.

**Pam:** So after youth theatre where did drama take you next?

**Patrice:** I went to Dartford College, a specialist PE College and did a B.Ed

in English and Drama. It was towards the end of my course that someone gave me a recording of Dorothy Heathcote to watch and I was intrigued by the way she was working with children. I'd never seen anything like it and was keen to have a go myself.

**Pam:** So when did you start teaching drama process drama yourself?

**Patrice:** Fortunately I started teaching in the good old days of ILEA. This meant that there was plenty of free training available to teachers and there was time to attend it. I had access to free long-term courses and did the ADBEd course with Will Earle and I half lived at the Stage Centre in Plumstead.

The grounding I had is so different from the impoverished and patchy provision that is available to over-stretched teachers nowadays. There is a real need to seriously address the lack of provision of longer drama courses for teachers and of accredited drama INSET courses.

**Pam:** So with drama provision so good in ILEA, what took you to Norfolk?

**Patrice:** Life and love. I left ILEA in 1979 and headed for 'The Good Life' in rural Norfolk and soon realised that ILEA drama provision was exceptional. In Norfolk they were phasing out their drama advisory teachers and I found myself working in isolation and desperate for CPD that barely existed.

Around 1987 the LEA set up an RSA Diploma in Drama in Education led by Rob John. It was inspirational and put me in touch with keen drama teachers. We wanted to keep in contact after the course ended and this led to the start of Norfolk Drama Network that is still in existence, supporting each other, 20 years later. That's why I think that, in National Drama, we need to help members who don't attend Conferences to form local networks. ND has been my main source of high quality CPD over many years and offered me many professional opportunities.

**Pam:** I agree that ND has an important networking role. What else do you think is high on the National Drama agenda?

**Patrice:** It's an interesting and critical time for drama. I think drama has had a very raw deal curriculum wise over many years. The government has strongly dictated the focus of teachers' and schools' attention ever since the introduction of the National Curriculum and then the National Strategies and high stakes assessments. It's no secret that I personally believe that drama has not benefited from its placement in English. It turned out to be of little advantage being largely ignored within a core subject that has focused on reading and writing. Where I think drama is about to develop next is as an experiential pedagogy and methodology across and through Curriculum 21. National Drama has an important role in helping get the next curriculum right and the QCA Futures document was disgraceful, not mentioning the word drama at all and mentioning just actors in schools. I am concerned that through Arts Council England theatre in schools could separate rather than unite theatre educators and drama teachers and that would be a retrograde step. We need an holistic approach. Drama is being recognised as a humanistic pedagogy that is very versatile. There is an interest from schools and QCA about using drama but the fact remains that to use drama well for whatever purpose, attention still needs to be paid to the development of drama itself. Teachers don't get good at it without time, training and support. Most teachers have one or two drama tools now but few have the understanding, confidence or competence to really develop whole class drama. National Drama can help teachers to at least begin to understand what good whole class drama looks like and can achieve.

**Pam:** That of course underpins what D4LC (the Drama for Learning and Creativity project) is about doesn't it? One of the things about it that's been great is that its based on developing teachers' holistic understanding of whole class process drama across the curriculum.

**Patrice:** Absolutely. Also one of the great things about D4LC that I've enjoyed so far is working as part of such a high quality team. As you know there is the core team (you, Kate Fleming and I) but also Dave Farmer (previously from TIEbreak), Melanie Peter working in a D4LC Special School and there are a band of Advanced Skills Teachers and last but certainly not least, Dave Simpson from the University of Brighton. And we have the joy of working alongside 120 really enthusiastic and committed teachers. D4LC has provided us with the opportunity to work together and collaborate with practitioners 'hands on', to get into schools alongside teachers and make a difference. Hopefully we will have the outcomes of 14 schools' action research to go to key agencies with and that could make a difference too, perhaps in terms of the place of drama in the next curriculum.

If we can show decision makers and fund holders what drama uniquely achieves in relation to learning and creativity then it might start to get the attention at last that it deserves. D4LC is also, as you know, a very interesting and sustainable model. Local authorities and ASTs working with subject associations and clusters of schools and Learning Networks could be a way forward in developing classroom based subject specialism and developing ASTs.

**Pam:** We already know that D4LC is significantly influencing practice. Who over the years had influenced your own practice?

**Patrice:** As I already mentioned, in the early days it was Alan Lambert and Dorothy Heathcote and I attended some sessions that Cecily O'Neill gave that certainly influenced me, as Eileen Pennington did later. Once I became involved with National Drama I think I was particularly influenced by the work of Jonathan Neelands, Helen Nicholson, John Rainer, Andy Kempe, and also yourself and Kate Fleming. I also attended some powerful sessions led by Liam Steele and Jim Clarke. To be honest I have had the benefit of so many fine practitioners over the years that it feels unfair to single them out.

In Norfolk the biggest influence on my practice has come about through regularly working with Rob John over many years. We co-tutor a long term drama course we devised when the RSA stopped, called 'Drama as a Creative Teaching and Learning Medium'. Rob is a theatre director and playwright as well as a teacher. I started out working with him from my mainly drama in education background and he came at the work from a theatre background and we realised that the common ground emerging from our shared practice was enormously fertile for both of us. He is immensely exciting and challenging to work with and keeps me on my toes! I gradually came to the conclusion that the process/product debate of the 1960s and 1970s was fruitless and unhelpful and that the key was to bring theatre and drama practitioners to work together more closely and to use and develop each others' skills. The roots are the same.

**Pam:** What or whom do you think is influencing the development of drama practice for most teachers today?

**Patrice:** I'd like to say that it's working with really good drama

practitioners that influences most teachers practice but sadly that's not true. Most teachers don't have easy access to them. As I mentioned earlier the National Strategy materials now mostly influence practice. The world seems to be full of almost de-contextualised hot-seating and freeze frames nowadays but I don't often see powerful whole class drama where that 'cognitive shift' that Gavin Bolton refers to is actually taking place in a compelling way. It's possible for many teachers to think they are doing drama but all they are really doing is using some drama techniques to develop speaking and listening or as an effective precursor to improving writing. It's OK to do this but drama in schools for children needs to be so much more. The drama strategies mentioned within the *Speaking and Listening, Working with Children at KS1 and 2* box don't even pick out teacher in role, which I think is the most powerful thing of all! I must admit to being intrigued at the current comeback of Mantle of the Expert. As you know it's been around since you and I started teaching in the late 60s and early 70s and we've used it all through our careers. Its resurgence is good news, especially when Dorothy is involved, but I have been a bit alarmed that many teachers starting to use it don't seem to realise that they are engaged in drama at all and are unaware of the full drama toolbox. I think it is very important to make it clear that Mantle of the Expert is rooted in drama. It involves sustained working in role in an imagined context. There are some practitioners who are hesitant to use what they call 'the D word' about Mantle of the Expert and some who even seem to be actively denying that it is drama!

I think that teachers need to have a full toolbox of drama strategies, conventions and approaches and be playful, creative and flexible with

them. I hope the new interest in it at this time is not driven by the need to develop little workers for the 21st Century and ensure their economic wellbeing. I hope its primarily about the way that (when it is done well) it empowers children, boosts confidence, competence and self esteem and is flexible as way of teaching across a relevant curriculum. It needs to be done in a way that engages children both cognitively and affectively and should not be primarily motivated by the need to get good work outcomes from children to raise standards – although of course it will, which will help its popularity!

**Pam:** As you know I think that what is different when working with Mantle of the Expert is where the dramatic tension lies. In non-mantle of the expert drama it's between the characters in the drama but in mantle of the expert drama the tension is in the task that the characters have to undertake.

So is there anything else you would like to talk about in this interview?

**Patrice:** Yes there are two more soapboxes I'd like to get onto before we finish. The first is that we need to make sure that the DfES and Arts Council England realise that theatre educators should never be allowed to simply replace drama teachers. I have a real concern about this as the Extended Schools agenda and workforce remodelling takes effect. As money flows into theatre education at a time when drama teachers' numbers are being cut and demand for drama teachers outweighs supply.

Teachers who teach drama are different to theatre educators and we have to hold onto both.

It's the sort of thing that maybe Creative Partnerships could consider financing. They bring different knowledge, experiences and

strengths to children and students. It would be a very different drama curriculum we offered children if it were provided solely by theatre educators and particularly if it took place outside the core day of the school. The power of drama as an integrated pedagogy and core experience and entitlement could easily be lost.

Secondly, it's been hard to fly the flag for drama and drama teachers within the world of English that has been Reading and Writing SATs focused. It's been hard to get across that drama is an aesthetic art form and not just a tool for English. What has made it harder to push coherently for drama is having Arts departments separate to English departments at the DfES and QCA, although I must say that there are QCA English staff that have bent over backwards for National Drama and the DfES are becoming increasingly helpful to us as an organisation. It's also been hard, historically, to drive the point home that if drama is within English then it should have been inspected as part of it in every core subject inspection to make sure it was taking place in all schools (which it isn't) and all English inspectors should be trained to inspect it. In my own inspection training it was not even mentioned (except by me of course!) And whilst drama is part of a core subject how come QCA did not bring out drama levels? What a pickle it all still is.

Let's hope that in whatever way the curriculum is developed next, drama is given its proper place and not sidelined or shoved under other subject rugs and lets hope that the CPD drama teaching needs are seriously and addressed... oh look, there goes another unicorn!