

TOWARDS A NATIONAL PLAN FOR DRAMA AND THEATRE EDUCATION

DTEA

Drama & Theatre
Education Alliance



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Arts Education is a universal human right, for all learners, including those who are often excluded from education, such as immigrants, cultural minority groups, and people with disabilities (Unesco, 2006).

I. OVERVIEW

This plan proposes that:

- Drama should be a discrete subject in all primary, secondary, SEND and alternative education settings with equal status to other arts subjects.
- Every child and young person should experience a weekly practical drama experience taught by teachers with relevant training.
- All children and young people should have access to co-curricular learning in terms of theatre visits, school plays, drama clubs and work with artists. Every child and young person should experience live professional theatre on an annual basis.
- The Drama curriculum should reflect the cultural, social and economic identity of the UK population and be constantly reviewed by schools, MATs and LEAs, in terms of texts, theatre practices and Schemes of Work. Drama has a vibrant ‘ever-changing present’, as children and young people create and interpret stories that reflect, challenge and celebrate human experience.
- ‘Process and product’ should be valued equally for their contribution to learning. Drama pedagogy opens the doors to historical, socio-political, communal and personal stories that entertain and transform.
- Drama and Theatre are arts subjects with inherent pedagogical qualities that facilitate interaction, exploration, performance and self-expression; they develop empathy and explore human relationships. They are, simultaneously, uniquely accessible art forms that reflect vibrant and humane pedagogies.

The learning potential of Drama and Theatre is internationally recognised for its contribution to the development of a healthy, humane, empathetic, creative and democratic society. It is a statutory requirement in many countries, including Scotland and Wales, but not in England. **This Plan will ensure that all children and young people receive a high-quality drama and theatre education which is appropriate to their social, cultural, emotional and academic development.**

The Creative Industries, which include music, publishing, architecture, film and video, crafts, visual arts, fashion, TV and radio, advertising, literature, computer games and the performing arts, contribute some **£126 billion annually to the British economy**. Many of the leaders and facilitators of this significant achievement regularly acknowledge the importance and influence of their school drama experiences.



II. KEY PRINCIPLES

- **Access and Inclusion:** Ensuring that all children and young people have access to high-quality Drama education, taking full account of their background and personal circumstances.
- **Quality Teaching and Learning:** Teaching that focuses on effective subject-specific pedagogy, curriculum design and assessment methods which enhance learning experiences in Drama.
- **Partnerships:** Facilitating collaboration across schools, theatre organisations, and the creative industries to create a cohesive and supportive ecosystem for drama and theatre education.
- **Diversity and Cultural Heritage:** Celebrating Drama traditions and cultural understanding through multi-dimensional performance practices.
- **Progression Routes:** Providing clear pathways for students to continue their drama journey beyond school, whether through further education, vocational training, or professional opportunities.
- **Technology:** Digital technology should be integrated into all stages of drama and theatre processes. Digital arts offer the potential for a blend of live and digital learning experiences and engagements. Technology will continue to improve, develop and change; schools are encouraged to maximise and manage the benefits these changes bring.
- **Coherent Development planning:** All schools should have development plans for Drama and Theatre Education.

III. SCHOOLS

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Education is no longer about teaching children something but about helping them develop a reliable compass, and the tools to navigate with confidence through this world that is increasingly complex ... ambiguous. Success in education today is about building curiosity, opening minds. (Schleicher, A. 2021)

The Drama curriculum must be relevant and age-appropriate, but with the flexibility to respond to change and new priorities. It is increasingly apparent that there are emerging educational priorities resulting from political, social and economic events across the world. A relevant curriculum requires flexibility and elements of teacher-choice, in order that learners can have the opportunity to explore and be aware of such emerging, local, national and global matters.

IV. EARLY YEARS EDUCATION

Drama is inherently part of human development. Children play naturally and, when they play, they adopt roles that enable them to imagine, explore, investigate, re-enact personal experience and, most significantly, learn about their world. Role is as integral to child development as touch, moving, walking and making sound.

If Early Years providers are to offer children a strong grounding in play and drama, there needs to be changes in approach.

- Drama should be valued and celebrated in every early years setting.
- Provision of creative and imaginative classroom play spaces;
- Involvement and engagement with parents and carers re imaginative experience;
- Opportunities for story-making, telling and hearing;
- Training for classroom assistants and support;
- Time and training for 'circle time'.



V. SEND EDUCATION

Children and young people, who learn with SEND, have entitlements throughout their statutory education. They are entitled to an education in which:

- Teachers have allocated responsibility for Drama;
- Teachers can access specialist, relevant, professional development throughout their careers;
- Teachers have access to associations and networks of like-minded practitioners;
- A play-based Drama curriculum that encourages learners to pretend within a fiction with agency for creativity and decision-making;
- Teachers and support staff engage with pupils in an exploratory process, characterised by imaginary worlds, including sensory pathways to understanding;
- SEND Teacher training courses are established which are specifically designed.

VI. PRIMARY EDUCATION

Learning through and about Drama and Theatre in the primary phase should be relevant to children's age, learning needs and cultural identity.

Effective and meaningful learning outcomes will only be achieved if:

- Drama is taught within a coherent curriculum framework that reflects progression, age-appropriate content and supportive assessment procedures;
- Drama is recognised as being inclusive and accessible for all abilities, learning context and the social and cultural identity of the children;
- Children are encouraged to participate in a questioning and exploratory drama process;
- Teachers and children value the 'art forms' that define drama and theatre and do not rely solely on transferrable skills, which are so often promoted, important though they are;
- Teachers have a clear rationale for the selection of the curriculum material in developing progression and continuity from 3-11;
- The nature of the criteria by which the learning is to be judged is child-centered, formative and developmental.

VII. SECONDARY EDUCATION

It should be recognised that the cultural context of each school is unique. Therefore, it is not appropriate to propose a curriculum structure in this 'Plan' but, more valuably, state what is recommended for a relevant and coherent 11-16 experience.

The Secondary Curriculum should:

- Be coherent to learners in terms of progression and continuity, with a clear rationale for the selection of content and assessment;
- Include formative, as well as summative, age-appropriate assessment;
- Include a variety of improvised, text and devised Drama and Theatre, informed by appropriate theoretical frameworks;
- Offer every learner an authentic and meaningful Drama experience that is designed for all, including those who wish to specialise at GCSE and beyond;
- Offer a variety of Drama and Theatre practices that teach and develop skills within meaningful and relevant contexts;
- Explore and celebrate matters of gender, culture, ability and social background;
- Ensure that the Drama and Theatre experience is enhanced and not restricted by written work;
- Offer Schemes of Work that reflect diversity and balance in the choice of text and subject matter;
- Include a degree of prominence to theatre craft, technological skills and routes into the industry.

VII. SECONDARY EDUCATION

More specific expectations are that:

- Learners will have a minimum of one lesson a week in Years 7,8,9;
- Drama will be taught in an appropriate space, with resources and technology that are manageable and relevant;
- Drama will be taught by specialist teachers, who can access CPD support;
- Homework is integral, productive and relevant to coursework;
- The curriculum communicates how Drama and Theatre equip and prepare people for future employment.



This ‘Plan’ advocates that any a core Drama curriculum should have the flexibility to respond to emerging local, national and Global matters. Teachers require the freedom and opportunity to include and facilitate Drama and Theatre that is relevant to the ever-changing societal needs and cultural mores of the school community.

VIII. TERTIARY EDUCATION

A relevant and productive post-16 education should enable all young people to achieve their potential. Courses in drama and theatre should offer an appropriate balance of practice and theory. They should be designed to deepen and develop a wide range of artistic skills. They should indicate a range of career pathways, both vocational and academic.

Courses should also prepare young people for career fulfillment. It is our responsibility to provide and ensure that courses are offered which enable young people to have choices, pathways and meaningful artistic, cultural opportunities.

Research evidence has illustrated that young people with access to drama and theatre achieve highly in terms of social mobility, employability, education and general well-being.

The arts should be viewed as essential to a young person's cultural education and development. However, this does not mean they are interchangeable. There is a worrying trend in educational discourse and planning towards 'the arts' or 'performing arts' being categorized as generic entities. If terminology denies access to drama and theatre opportunities, then there are serious issues of entitlement, inclusion, and social justice.

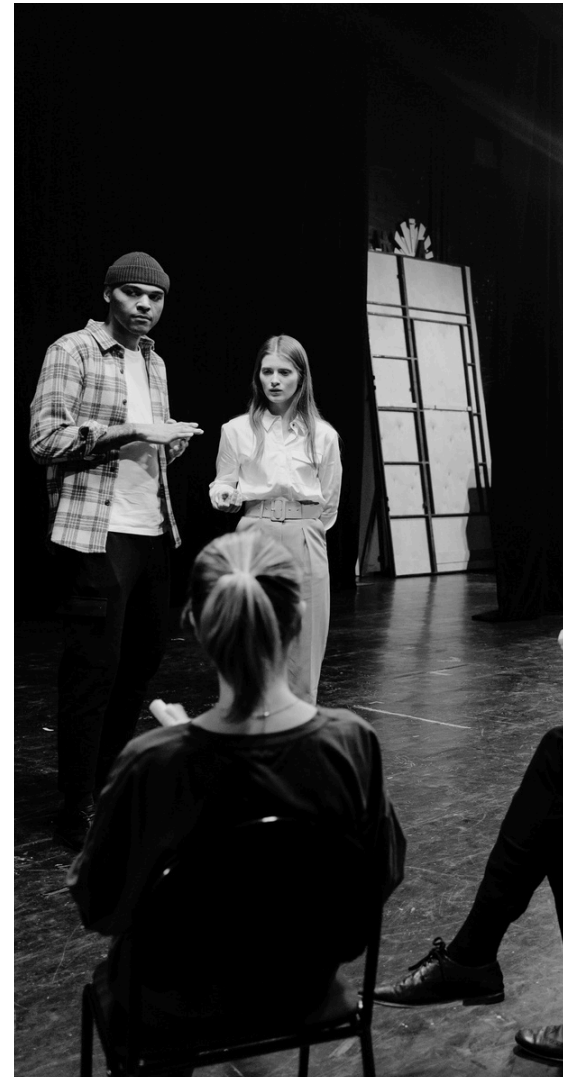
This 'Plan' advocates that there should be a review of post-16 education which identifies the distinctive value of vocational and academic qualifications in Drama and Theatre, in terms of student wellbeing, as well as employment routes and university opportunities. The review would include: A Level; BtEC; T Levels; International Baccalaureate (IB).

IX. HIGHER EDUCATION

It is proposed that a primary, secondary and tertiary education system, one that values STEM, Arts and Humanities in equal measure, be established. One which enables and embraces interdisciplinary study and research.

In order that creative arts and cultural arts' students have opportunities to engage in higher education, the 'barriers to opportunity' need to be addressed by:

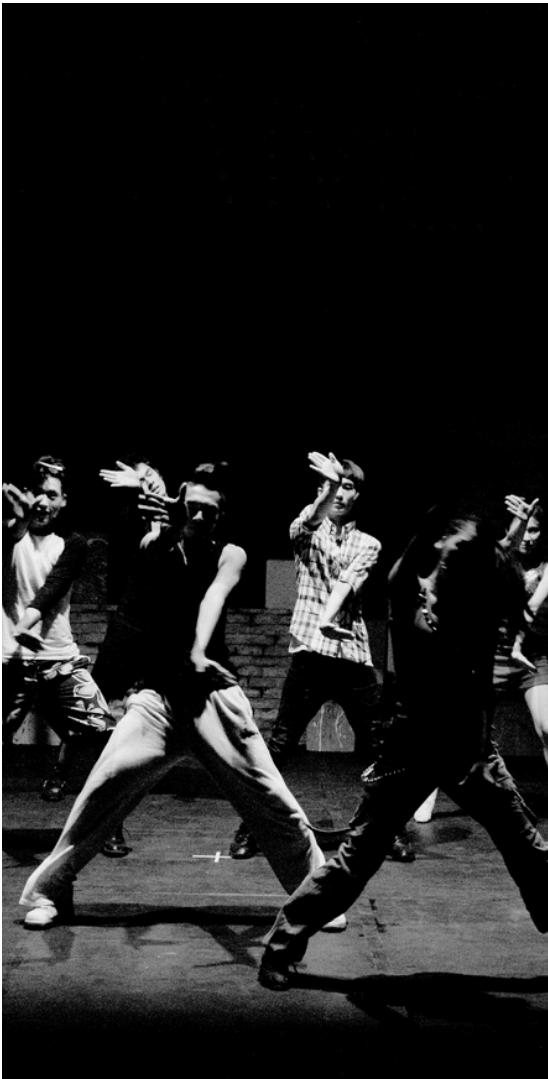
- Removing financial shortfalls for students and providers;
- Developing a coherent post-16 education strategy;
- Reforming apprenticeships and skills policies;
- Reversing the marginalisation and reduction of teacher education and training;
- Developing diverse ecology of theatre practices in HE;
- Promoting a dynamic and constant relationship between HEIs and the Creative and Cultural Industries.



X.THEATRE EDUCATION

Every child and young person to experience live professional theatre at least once a year.

Transport is a major barrier to schools and families attending theatre performances especially in rural areas. There are significant regional discrepancies in relation to accessing free public transport which need to be addressed.



Theatres should continue to provide curriculum resources to accompany productions and should ensure that their productions are accessible to all CYP including those with special educational needs and those that are home educated and looked after.

Theatres should produce and programme work that is representative of contemporary Britain. They should also produce and programme work in consultation with local communities (young people, schools, communities of interest, etc) in their own places and spaces.

Theatre organisations should continue to develop and strengthen partnerships with schools, colleges, alternative education providers and their communities.

Theatres should take a place-based approach, tailoring their work towards the needs and priorities of their communities and develop long term sustainable partnerships. Engaging with schools and communities should not just be the preserve of the Learning and Engagement departments but should involve the whole theatre.

Theatres should regard school pupils as not just audiences but as workshop participants, youth theatre members and apprentices.



Signpost and support career pathways into the Creative Industries considering how to sustain careers in industry for the global majority.

The Creative Industries are the fastest growing sector in the UK economy, employing 2.4m people in 2022, yet there are significant skill shortages. The current lack of representation in theatres has a negative impact upon many young peoples' perception of careers in theatre.

Schools and theatres should signpost career opportunities in their organisations to all sections of their communities including underrepresented groups. Greater emphasis should be placed on engaging parents, raising understanding of the range of jobs available in theatre – onstage, backstage and off stage; attending Careers Fairs and developing high quality work experience, internships and mentoring which provide opportunities for skills development. National companies should provide schools across the country with nationwide work experience opportunities.



A commitment to achieving greater access and more opportunity in drama and theatre education, identifying and removing barriers, including for children in low-income families and children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND);

Schools, colleges and theatres need investment and ring-fenced funds for cultural learning. There are a number of ways to increasing access which include taking work to schools and communities, making free to access work to help make creative arts a priority for low-income families, changing the narrative of the media around the value of arts and culture and changing the culture of our industry by placing greater emphasis upon wellbeing and ongoing training for staff.

In order to increase access to venues we should also consider:

- Accessible programming
- YP shadowing creative teams
- Better Signage
- Non gendered toilets
- Running open dress rehearsals for invited groups
- Better creative embedding of access into work
- Community festivals and events in front of house spaces
- Increased provision and greater consistency of relaxed performances
- Engaging CYP who have been excluded from school.



Theatres should value youth voice and use it to inform decision making.

Some theatres have youth boards and youth ambassadors but this is not widespread. Such schemes should provide genuine engagement with young people, be inclusive and support a wide range of voices and involve the whole organisation. A national youth advisory board network should be established to share best practice and learning and enable young people of all cultural backgrounds from across the country to work together to inform policy and practice. Additionally, training resources should be developed to support organisations to develop such schemes.

XI. IN CONCLUSION

Drama and Theatre Education are characterised and shaped by the dynamics between teachers, artists and learners. The process stems from the human ability, indeed need, to take on roles and make stories that ignite enquiry into rich themes and concepts, in the spirit of pluralism. It develops personal self-esteem alongside artistic and academic skills and empathy with human contexts.

Drama experiences have the potential to address the nation's most pressing and current concerns from understanding mental health to exploring national identities to the realities and consequences of war, peace and changing family lives. Society needs informed, tolerant and active citizens. Drama and Theatre Education can, with schools, make a significant contribution.

References

- [Andreas Schleicher, Director, Directorate of Education and Skills, OECD, CLA Advisory Panel 2021](#)

Conference

- [World Conference on Arts Education, Lisbon, 2006](#) [4] Corporate author: [UNESCO](#) [8878]

APPENDIX

The Drama curriculum encompasses children’s play, classroom improvisations, digital technology, devised performance and the exploration, performance and study of scripts. Children and young people make sense of their changing world through an engagement with their inner feelings. As Ken Robinson articulated;

“ [...] education should enable young people to engage with the world within them as well as the world around them (Robinson, 2016).”

The diagram below indicates the potential contribution of ‘Drama and Theatre Education’ to the whole 3-18 curriculum. At the centre, the key descriptor emphasises that children, young people and their teachers are all artists, that learning is co-creative and that the subject is essentially concerned with ‘practice’.

Drama & Theatre’s contribution to the whole curriculum



What do the jig-saw pieces mean in terms of classroom practice?

Academic: developing such skills as generating ideas; imagining; negotiating; exploring; questioning; interpreting; analysing; applying; researching; reflecting; problem-solving; presenting.



Key Stage Four Example:

A GCSE Drama group are devising a performance. The group are surrounded by research that they have brought in - poems, images, a piece of music, a newspaper article. They are sharing and questioning their initial ideas and now need to decide where they are going to start the practical rehearsal process. They are forming connections between the different stimuli material and negotiating their next creative steps.



What do the jig-saw pieces mean in terms of classroom practice?

Artistic: combining multiple practices that reflect distinctive genres, intentions, concepts and forms. If Drama is to achieve its rich capacity for learning, then ‘art’ needs to be present both in teacher intentions and in student engagement.



Key Stage Two Example:

The class receives a box of objects and a letter from a local care home. Objects might include baby clothes, old birthday cards, a bridal veil, a slipper.

The home needs help with piecing together some memories for their residents. The class are commissioned to create biographies, based on the objects. Teacher works in role as Head of the care home and visits the class, inviting them to present their biographies in ways that will gain the attention and interest of the residents.

This could be a performance, video, gallery-style with artwork and interpretation boards, poems set to music, a lecture with PPT.

Thus, the children use the art form to meet the demands of the fictional commission.

What do the jig-saw pieces mean in terms of classroom practice?

Creative: when taught in meaningful contexts, Drama facilitates creativity through the pedagogical nature of its process. Learners develop creative skills in individual, small-group and whole-group contexts, both real and fictional. Drama enhances students' creative health and wellbeing.



Key Stage One Example:

In an adventure story, the children meet Rosie (Teacher in Role), a character from an evocative picture book, Rosie Revere Engineer. In then story, Rosie keeps her passion for engineering a secret from her classmates, as she fears their judgement. She is also desperately frustrated that everything she engineers fails!

Rosie (Teacher) appeals for the help of the children to become engineers alongside her and support her in her ambition to build a flying machine. In the 'Role of the Expert' the children coach Rosie on resilience, of being proud of her passion. They help her develop a growth Mindset, whilst also examining how to build something that can fly and resist the force of gravity.

Thus, the children feel compelled to be creative problem solvers.

What do the jig-saw pieces mean in terms of classroom practice?

Personal-and-Social: collaborating, facilitating exploring and developing ideas within shared fictional contexts; these might be real, imagined or text based. Drama combines practices which develop confidence, personal self-esteem, social responsibility and individual wellbeing. Effective Drama ‘protects’ learners’ feelings and nurtures emotional intelligence.



Key Stage Three Example:

In a lesson concerning peer group pressure, a parent discovers that the teenage daughter has trashed her bedroom and destroyed all of her favourite ornaments, torn her books and smashed her mobile. She has disappeared and not been heard from since.

Teacher: Why might a teenage girl do this?

In groups the class discuss the possible factors that might have prompted such action. They are then asked to create five scenes that take place on the day before the ‘trashing’ happened. The class are asked to make each scene reflect one potential cause. Also, they are given the constraint of not having the girl present in any scene:

The five scenes:

Breakfast; Registration; Art lesson; Rehearsal; Journey home;

What do the jig-saw pieces mean in terms of classroom practice?

Cultural-and-Communal: celebrating a school's cultural values and ethos. Drama develops empathetic understanding and awareness of 'community' between peers, across the school and within the immediate environment. Productions, assemblies and high-quality group theatre-making all reflect a school's priorities. At its best, it forges strong connections to the wider local, national and global community.



Key Stage Five:

An A-level Drama group are exploring a text through the lens of an established theatre practitioner. They have researched the rehearsal process and the methods of the practitioner and are now adapting and applying these to their own context. They are mindful of their peer and teacher audience and the cultural sensitivities of their audience but want their creative work to question, inform and inspire action. They are interweaving elements of script with design ideas to create a multi-sensory experience that will engage and impact the audience.

In Conclusion

A confident, creative, literate, democratic and compassionate society is not likely to be achieved unless students can access a well-resourced, balanced and coherent education.

Drama and Theatre education certainly involves the development and acquisition of key skills. However, it also requires artistic engagement and the exploration of feelings for those skills to have genuine learning purpose and context. When the artistic process is being genuinely experienced, all pieces of the jig-saw are likely to be drawn from, or touched upon, in meaningful engagement.

As Dorothy Heathcote asks;



What else is drama and theatre about other than examining ‘what it is to be human’ in the safety of the made event? (Heathcote, 2009, n.p.)

References

- Robinson, K. a. and L. a. Aronica (2016). *Creative schools: The Grassroots Revolution That's Transforming Education*, Penguin.
- Heathcote, D. (2009). *Mantle of the Expert: My current understanding*. Unpublished keynote address: *Weaving our Stories International Mantle of the Expert Conference*. Hamilton, New Zealand. In: Edmiston, Brian and Towler-Evans, Iona (2022) (eds.) *Humanizing Education with Dramatic Inquiry: In Dialogue with Dorothy Heathcote's Transformative Pedagogy*. London: Routledge.