

A NATIONAL PLAN FOR DRAMA AND THEATRE EDUCATION

DTEA

Drama & Theatre
Education Alliance



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This document has been created by the member associations of the Drama and Theatre Education Alliance (DTEA). The DTEA is an alliance of 20-plus UK associations, networks, and leading organisations, that are all working in drama and theatre education for, with and by children and young people.

The membership represents thousands of theatres, schools, businesses, individuals and universities across the UK.

The document is intended to inform policy makers about the learning potential of Drama and Theatre education and indicate the importance of a coherent and progressive plan, from Early Years to Higher Education in order that our children and young people have access to the learning opportunities that they are entitled to.

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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)

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I. OVERVIEW

The drama and theatre curriculum should place learners' socio-economic, emotional and academic needs at the centre of their learning.

- 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.
- Live theatre experiences are an essential entitlement for all learners.
- 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 and theatre repertoire 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.
- Creative process and artistic product should be valued equally for their contribution to learning. Drama pedagogy opens the doors to historical, socio-political and personal stories as learners create, interpret and perform stories that challenge, celebrate and transform human experience.
- 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.



Photo credit: Rosie Staunton

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.

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.

All children and young people should have access to drama and theatre education which is appropriate to their social, cultural, emotional and academic development.

The creative industries contribute **£126 billion annually to the British economy**. Many of the leaders and facilitators of this work context regularly acknowledge the importance and influence of their school drama experiences. There is a need for greater sign posting of possible career routes in the arts in general.

This plan proposes there is an urgent need for a clearly articulated policy concerning the relationship of the drama curriculum and employment opportunities in theatre and the creative industries.

II. KEY PRINCIPLES

- **Access and Inclusion:** Ensuring that all children and young people have access to high-quality Drama and Theatre education, taking full account of their background and personal circumstances.
- **Quality Teaching and Learning:** Teaching that focuses on effective subject-specific pedagogy, facilitative curriculum design and appropriate 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 and theatre practitioners and cultural traditions 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:** Integrating digital technology into all stages of drama and theatre practices should be a priority. Digital arts offer the potential for a blend of live and digital learning experiences which schools are encouraged to maximise and manage for the benefits of their learners.
- **Coherent Development Planning:** All schools should have their development plans for Drama and Theatre Education.

III. SCHOOLS

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Drama is empowering. Through the unique process of ‘enactment’, its diversity of form stimulates creativity and imagination, aesthetic sensitivity and personal fulfilment. Drama provides opportunities for investigation and reflection, for celebration and challenge. It is a potent means of collaboration and communication which can change the ways people feel, think and behave. (Bowell and Heap, 2013)

The drama curriculum should be practical, relevant and age-appropriate, 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.



Photo credit: Alex Summers

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. (Readman, 2024)**

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 staff;
- Time and training for ‘circle time’.



Photo credit: Alex Summers

V. SEND EDUCATION



The Purpose of an effective SEND Drama Curriculum is to help children and young people function healthily within a world that they understand, within which they feel safe, and to which they have an empowered connection. (Brigg, 2021)

Children and young people, who learn with SEND, have entitlements throughout their statutory education. We recommend improved access and increased opportunities in drama and theatre education in which barriers for children in low-income families, as well as children with SEND, are removed.

All vulnerable learners are entitled to an education in which:

- Teachers can access specialist, relevant, professional development throughout their careers;
- Teachers have access to associations and networks of like-minded practitioners;
- Theatre practitioners regularly visit and work in SEND schools;
- The multiple practices associated with applied drama and theatre are promoted in SEND and alternative contexts, including drama therapy;
- A play-based Drama curriculum encourages learners to pretend within fictional contexts that offer safety, creativity and opportunities for decision-making;
- Teachers and support staff engage with pupils in an exploratory process, characterised by imaginary worlds, including sensory pathways to understanding;
- Qualifying teacher training courses that are designed according to identified SEND needs.

VI. PRIMARY EDUCATION

Drama can be highly motivating to pupils, as it draws on their personal experiences and excites their imaginations. It engages pupils physically, emotionally, actively and creatively. Working in role, they can be empowered as problem solvers and decision makers. This can be stimulating and rewarding, resulting in memorable, deep learning outcomes. (Baldwin, 2011)

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 transferable skills as their criteria, 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 assessed is child-centered, formative and developmental.

VII. SECONDARY EDUCATION



Drama and Theatre open windows onto other worlds. They hold a mirror up to life and allow us to see ourselves reflected in it. From this we can learn about ourselves and the world we live in. It is a platform for free speech and makes people think, explore, communicate, challenge and change things for the better. (Noah Superville, Finchley Catholic High School aged 15)

This plan recommends what is required for a relevant and coherent 11-16 learning experience, rather than specific content.

The cultural context of each school is unique.

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;
- Provide strategies that enable learner perspectives to be heard;
- 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 meaningful drama and theatre experiences, 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 theatre craft, technological skills and routes into the industry.

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;
- Schools recognise the importance of co-curricular experiences, include live theatre and partnerships with theatre practitioners;
- The curriculum communicates how Drama and Theatre equip and prepare people for future employment.



Photo credit: Sam O'Reilly

This plan advocates that a core drama and theatre curriculum should be flexible and responsive to local, national and global matters. Teachers require the freedom and opportunity to include and facilitate drama and theatre that is relevant to ever-changing societal needs and the 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 fulfilment. It is our responsibility to provide and ensure courses are available 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. (DICE Research)



Photo credit: Konstantina Kalogirou

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;
- Recognising the richness that Applied Theatre and Drama Therapy bring to community development.



Photo credit: Amanda Abbott

X.THEATRE EDUCATION

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The plan proposes that every learner is entitled to experience live professional theatre at least once a year. (DTEA Manifesto, 2020)

In order for this to happen:

- Address the financial barrier of transport facing schools and families attending theatre performances, especially in rural areas.



Photo credit: Alex Summers

- Address the significant regional discrepancies in relation to accessing free public transport.
- Theatres should continue to provide curriculum resources to accompany productions and should ensure that their productions are accessible to all learners, 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 produce and programme work in consultation with local communities (young people, schools, communities of interest, etc) in their own places and spaces.

The UK's growing creative industries sector demands a wide range of specialisms, including design, craft and engineering; digital and broadcast; marketing, education, finance and human resources. The range of employment opportunities can be made clear from primary level onwards when discussing aspirations and ambitions.

The plan proposes that all theatre organisations should continue to develop and strengthen partnerships with schools, colleges, alternative education providers and their communities.

They should:

- Take a place-based approach, tailoring their work towards the needs and priorities of their communities and develop long term sustainable partnerships.
- Engagement with schools and communities should not just be the preserve of the Learning and Engagement departments but should involve the whole theatre.
- Value learners not just as audiences but as workshop participants, youth theatre members and apprentices.

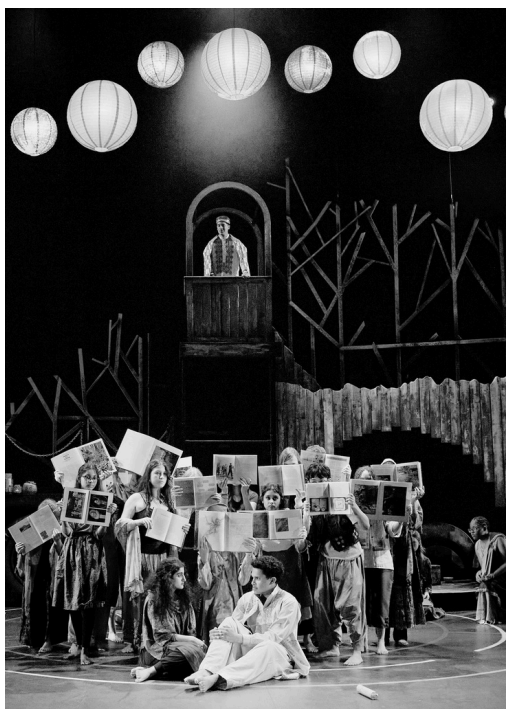


Photo credit: Alex Summers

- Theatres should signpost career opportunities in their organisations, and the Creative Industries, to all sections of their communities including schools and underrepresented groups. They should illustrate how to sustain careers in industry for the global majority.
- Although the Creative Industries are the fastest-growing sector in the UK economy, employing 2.4m people in 2022, there remain significant skill shortages.

- 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. The roles and responsibilities in the theatre industry can be increasingly explored at key stages 3, 4 and 5 (*Drama: a guide for governing boards. Arts Council England 2022*).



- The current lack of representation in theatres has a negative impact upon many young peoples' perception of careers in theatre. There should be a commitment to achieving greater access and more opportunity in drama and theatre education, for learners with SEND.

Schools, colleges and theatres need investment and ring-fenced funds for cultural learning. Access can be improved if they we able to:

- take work to schools and communities;
- offer free to access work to help make creative arts a priority for low-income families;
- change the media narrative around the value of arts and culture and change 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;
- Learners 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 learners who have been excluded from school.



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

- Create a youth board and youth ambassadors that provide genuine engagement with young people, that are inclusive and support a wide range of voices involving the whole organisation.
- Established theatres could create training resources to support organisations in developing such schemes.

The plan proposes that a national youth advisory board network should be established to share best practice and enable young people of all cultural backgrounds from across the country to work together to inform policy and practice.

XI. IN CONCLUSION

A confident, creative, literate, democratic and compassionate society is unlikely to be achieved unless students can access a well-resourced, balanced and coherent education.

Drama and Theatre Education are characterised and shaped by the dynamic that exists between teachers, artists and learners. The learning process stems from the human ability, indeed need, to take on roles and make stories that ignite enquiry into rich pluralistic themes and concepts.

Drama develops personal self-esteem alongside artistic and academic skills. It develops empathy within human contexts.

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.)

XII.

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APPENDIX A

DRAMA & THEATRE'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE WHOLE CURRICULUM

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;

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[...] 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 teacher invites the class to create a story together. A box of objects and a letter have arrived 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 the 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 Summary

When the artistic process is being genuinely experienced, all pieces of the jig-saw are likely to be drawn from, or touched upon, in a meaningful learning engagement.

APPENDIX B

THE MARGINALISATION OF DRAMA AND THEATRE EDUCATION

In 1988, Drama was not allocated Foundation Subject status, but deemed to belong within English (ERA 1988). Since 2010 arts education has been ‘progressively marginalised and devalued’ (Ashton and Ashton, 2022: 4).

Drama’s Subject Status has been undermined since 2010 by the following government policy decisions:

- A review of primary school websites quickly reveals that the majority of schools do not include drama in their curriculum offer as it is not a Foundation Subject;
- The introduction of EBacc created a subject hierarchy, undermining the status of arts subjects;
- The continued emphasis on STEM subjects to the exclusion of all arts;
- Progress 8 assessment does not include the arts;
- Only two art forms, music and art, are regarded as having mandatory status by school leadership teams;
- Drama is a largely practical subject. The undue emphasis on written and summative assessments at GCSE is inappropriate: 70% written and 30% practical.

In addition:

- Career guidance by SLTs is characterised by misunderstandings, misconceptions and erroneous assumptions about drama’s value as a potential career route;
- Reduced school funding has reduced theatre visits, arts workshops and co-curricular extension activities;
- Drama and theatre education is rarely the subject of a school Ofsted report, certainly not in the Research review series as was the case with music in 2021;
- Absence of drama training in ITE primary courses;
- No available data on the number of Arts specialists in primary schools, or how many hours are spent on each subject outside the NC;
- Assessment demands have reduced the teaching time available for non-statutory subjects.

THE MARGINALISATION OF DRAMA AND THEATRE EDUCATION

SEND Education

- Under funding;
- Lack of CPD for established teachers in drama;
- No courses of training that lead to teacher qualification in SEND education.

Drama Teachers and teaching hours 2010-2023

- the number of drama teachers has been reduced by 18 per cent;
- the number of hours taught reduced by 12 per cent;
- examination entries in drama reduced by 47 per cent;
- The fall in teaching hours for all arts subjects* has reduced by 21%;
- There are 14% fewer Arts teachers now than in 2010;
- The vacancy rate for Drama has increased by a multiple of five.

Secondary Education

- GCSE There has been an overall decline of 42% in the number of Arts GCSE entries since 2010;
- In 2009/10, 14% of all GCSE entries were in Arts subjects: by 2022/23 this figure had halved to 7%;
- Some schools no longer offer any Arts subjects at all at GCSE level;
- 41% of all schools no longer enter any pupils for Drama GCSE.

Research and Evidence Sources

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- DfE (2020) <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-workforce-in-england>

A-Levels and progression to Higher Education

- There has been an overall 21% decrease in Arts entries at A-Level since 2010;
- Tertiary Education;
- A review of post-16 education is required in which the distinctive value of vocational and academic qualifications in drama and theatre are identified: student wellbeing; employment routes; university relevance;
- The review would include: A Level; BTEC; T Levels; International Baccalaureate (IB).

Higher Education

- The number of students studying for an undergraduate degree in Creative Arts and Design subjects has decreased by 6% since 2010.

Initial Teacher Education (ITE)

- PGCE courses for secondary drama specialists have been marginalised and have reduced numbers;
- There is no bursary for specialist drama teaching and yet there is a teacher shortage.

APPENDIX C

RESEARCH IN SUPPORT OF DRAMA AND THEATRE EDUCATION

Drama & Theatre

- Cziboly, A (2010) The DICE has been cast Drama Improves Lisbon Key Competencies in Education www.dramanetwork.eu
- [Drama Research](#) – National Drama’s own peer-reviewed research journal is published online annually and contains international research into drama education.
- [Cultural Learning Alliance](#) – The CLA provide statistics on arts in schools and evidence for arts education.
- [RiDE](#) – Research in Drama Education is an international journal of applied Drama.
- [Children Engaging with Drama](#) – An evaluation of the National Theatre’s drama work in primary schools from 2003-4.
- [NJ: Drama Australia](#) – Established in 1976, NJ Drama Australia Journal provides high quality research articles supporting teachers, artists and researchers in the intersecting fields of drama, education, theatre and applied theatre
- [Applied Theatre Research](#) – a worldwide journal for theatre and drama in a range of social contexts.
- [Why study drama, theatre & performance?](#) The employment benefits are outlined on the Drama HE website
- RSC [“New Research Reveals RSC Approach To Shakespeare Improves Language Skills”](#) - New research from the University of Warwick.

The Following Associations and Networks have all contributed to this plan and give it their full support:



London Theatre Consortium:



National Association of Youth Theatres

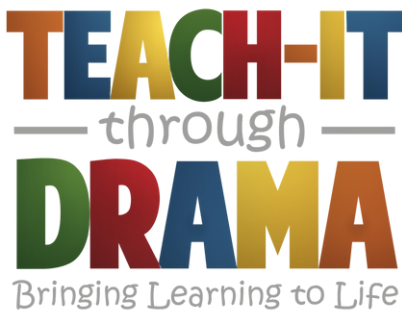


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