

The Drama Curriculum

National Drama's Vision

The learning potential of Drama 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, for young people to study Drama (2022, 2023).

National Drama acknowledges that curriculum provision for the arts in England's schools has been re-shaped by an enforced academy structure, a more assessment-driven curriculum and mandatory inspections that result in competitive school league tables. This has led to the situation where many schools, particularly those within Multi-academy Trusts (MATs), produce their own curriculum policies and offer in-house professional development and training which seeks to further the MAT's particular aims and implement their preferred methodology. This guidance is intended to help teachers working in this context.

National Drama recognises the opportunities as well as the challenges of constraints created by this more fragmented school landscape, and the predominance of school-led philosophies and practice. However, the current absence of opportunities for subject networking and dialogue on practice is stifling innovation and preventing shared articulations of relevant subject knowledge and pedagogy.

National Drama encourages all schools to view Drama as a subject with inherent effective pedagogical qualities which impact positively on learners and learning. Drama facilitates interaction, exploration, performance, self-expression and a sense of meaning. The ability to participate in Drama is not dependent on students' written or reading skills. Its roots are in the human ability, indeed the human need, to imagine, play, adopt roles and create stories.

National Drama supports the mission of those schools which offer a curriculum that is:

Inclusive;	Questioning;
Representative;	Diverse;
Creative;	Relevant;
Ambitious;	Broad;
Inspiring;	Balanced;
Challenging;	Coherent;
Transformational;	Expressive.

National Drama welcomes the intentions of those schools which develop learners who are:

Curious;	Challengers;
Resilient;	Literate;
Imaginative;	Numerate;
Ambitious;	Confident;
Respectful;	Independent;
Responsible;	Empathetic.

Key Words selected from search of school website curriculum statements

National Drama's vision is based on an ambition of achieving a mandatory Drama curriculum.

Governing Bodies, Trusts and elected policymakers will need to recognise the need to:

- Appoint Head teachers and Senior Management Teams that understand the learning potential Drama and Theatre in promoting a whole-school ethos and in developing student health and well-being;
- Plan a policy of arts entitlement for all students within which Drama has equal status with the other arts;
- Facilitate policies in relation to visiting artists and theatre companies that will enhance existing curriculum provision.

National Drama is an inclusive association that welcomes all drama and theatre practices that make a positive impact on students' learning. Although National Drama does not advocate a specific curriculum in terms of design, content or delivery, the following statements will hopefully inform both schools and individual teachers.

A Drama Curriculum For All

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)

This quotation highlights the importance of preserving the 'artistic' dimension of the process, as well as skills and knowledge. Art is central to all Drama practice in a coherent 3-16 curriculum: primary; secondary; SEND. Patrice Baldwin, primary Drama expert, defines Drama as 'motivating' as it draws upon children's 'personal experiences and excites their imaginations'. She emphasises the benefits of learning in role as children become 'problem solvers and decision makers'. ND believes the Drama curriculum should be rooted in an inclusive and questioning process which might comprise: role-taking, imaginative play, rituals, stories, digital and fictional narratives, drama conventions, social and communal game-playing and the performance of written texts. All of these activities are part of a dramatic learning spectrum that includes the 'play' in nurseries and productions of 'plays' in theatres.

Policy-makers often need reminding that Drama is an essentially practical subject with identifiable artistic elements (Bowell and Heap 2013). It is a subject with clearly defined concepts, skills and forms. It is an arts subject that has implicit pedagogical qualities. The importance of process is central to both the theories of drama education practitioners (Heathcote; Bolton; Neelands; O'Neill) as well as to theatre-makers who feature in secondary examination syllabi (Stanislavski; Brecht; Boal; Frantic Assembly).



Drama's Contribution to Learning

Although the learning in Drama is often an embodiment of skills, knowledge and content, which are developed simultaneously, it is also helpful to articulate and categorise the learning in terms of its contribution to whole curriculum: academic, artistic, creative, personal and social, cultural and communal:

Academic:

Drama develops such skills as generating ideas; imagining; negotiating; exploring; rehearsing; questioning; interpreting; researching; reflecting; problem-solving; presenting. This is achievable when taught within a student-centred learning context.

Artistic:

Drama combines multiple practices that reflect distinctive genres, intentions, concepts and forms. If Drama is to achieve its rich capacity for learning, then the 'art' needs to be present both in teacher intentions and in student engagement. The stronger the art the more meaningful the learning.

Creative:

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

Personal and Social:

Drama is collaborative, in that it facilitates the exploration and development of ideas within shared fictional contexts that can be improvised or text based. It commonly features ensemble practices which develop confidence, personal self-esteem, social responsibility and individual wellbeing. Effective Drama always 'protects'.

Cultural and Communal:

Drama and Theatre celebrate a school's cultural values and ethos, and those of society. Drama develops empathetic understanding and responsible awareness of 'community' between peers, across the school and within the immediate environment. Productions, assemblies, devising and high-quality group theatre-making all reflect a school's priorities. At its best, it forges strong connections to the wider global community.

Drama's Contribution to a 'Broad, Balanced and Coherent Curriculum'

The ways in which drama contributes to a school's broad, balanced and coherent curriculum requires clear definition by academies, schools and teachers. These reflective questions may provide a checklist:

Does the Drama teaching and learning:

- Provide access and relevance to the cultural identities within the school population?
- Place students' socio-economic, emotional, cultural, physical and academic needs at the centre of 'their' curriculum?
- Celebrate diversity and actively promote equality in all dimensions of school life, welcoming each student deemed to have 'protected characteristics' (2020 Equalities Act)?
- Prepare students to engage in active and democratic citizenship?
- Enable students to question, empathise and negotiate through creative, open-ended problem-solving approaches?
- Access and integrate developments in technology that support the creative process?
- Develop skills and expertise as outlined in the school's mission statement?
- **Reflect Drama's discrete subject identity?**

Drama Curriculum Design

The following questions are intended to advance the process by which the curriculum is designed. It is hoped they will enable teachers to review, plan and monitor the curriculum in more detail:

- Do lessons draw upon the energy, dynamics and interests of the class?
- Which distinctive skills, concepts and knowledge are taught?
- Do students have opportunities to rehearse, select and shape material for dramatic impact?
- Do students have opportunities to work in a variety of groupings?
- Is the school able to offer opportunities for pupils to experience theatre-making with professional artists?
- Do students have access to a diverse range of dramatic texts?
- How are theatre practitioners and their terminology introduced and taught?
- Do lessons enable students to make connections with cross-curricular concepts, themes and contexts?
- To what extent does Drama explore personal feelings, social relationships, and implications?
- How do students, as both participants and spectators, develop an appreciation of drama in performance?
- Do students experience a diverse range of dramatic forms?
- Do students have access to appropriate and relevant technology?

National Drama believes that Drama has the transformational potential to enable students and their teachers to reach new understandings of what it is to be human. As **Bowell and Heap** remind us that Drama is:

A potent means of collaboration and communication which can change the ways people feel, think and behave.

References

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