

# Our Year of Advocacy 2023-2024

## Play your Part: Promote, Celebrate and Communicate Drama Learning

**T**his *Reflections* column prepares the way for National Drama's 'Year of Advocacy', in which your Executive Officers will do their utmost to bring the value of educational Drama to the attention of politicians, governing bodies, employers and policymakers. We have already made a highly successful start.

Whilst there are 'pockets' of excellent Drama practice in many areas of the UK, readers will be well aware that the general status and provision for Drama in England has now reached a perilous state, particularly in state-maintained schools. The decline is largely due to STEM, EBacc, Progress 8 and the absence of Foundation Subject status. This deterioration is not evident in independent schools where Drama is highly valued and there is continuous investment. The levels of inequality in the UK are unfair, unnecessary and detrimental to children's educational opportunities.

However, I have no intention of being negative or of repeating the gloomy statistics that clearly illustrate the marginalisation of Drama since 2010. ND extends an invitation to all teachers, lecturers and theatre practitioners whose work involves children and young people to 'play their part' and join with us in promoting the subject in every way possible during 2023-2024.

In short, ND is reaching out to other Drama associations, networks and social media platforms in the safe knowledge that creative collaborations, as is the case in effective theatre-making, will enable us to make a difference.

If you require evidence of impact, consider the positive effect that the Music campaign has had. Musicians recognise the value of communicating with a collective voice. They do not allow distinctions between professional instrumentalists and classroom teachers to become a division. They are aware that they share the same long-term goals and values.

The recently formed DTEA has presented a unique forum for theatre and drama associations to engage in a positive dialogue, rather than focus on historical divisions. Let's build upon that forum amongst the Drama teacher networks. We all have evidence of how much parents, children and young people understand and value our subject. Let's make this a year when we communicate with politicians and employers.

### What do we want?

ND exists to ensure that all children and young people have opportunities to learn about and through drama within a broad, balanced, and coherent curriculum. A curriculum taught by teachers who have appropriate levels of subject knowledge, expertise and relevant training.

ND also supports the three objectives of the DTEA:

- The inclusion in the curriculum of Drama as a Foundation Subject in the National Curriculum with the same status as Art and Music.
- The entitlement of every child to at least one annual engagement with professional theatre.
- A drama curriculum and theatre repertoire that is more representative of the UK's diverse population.

Whilst recognising that these objectives will appear to have a sense of idealistic optimism in the current context, we believe they are interdependent and should be addressed equally.

### What needs to change?

In order to achieve our ultimate goal, we believe that:

- A national review of curriculum Drama is required with a focus on representation, inequality, teaching and assessment.
- The subject hierarchy created by EBacc, STEM and Progress 8 needs to be urgently reviewed.
- The contribution of the theatre industry to children's cultural education should be more clearly articulated.

Finally, in my experience, Drama teachers have continuously demonstrated their willingness to be adaptable and innovative with regard to curriculum requirements. Personally, I have grown weary of justifying our subject in terms of transferrable skills, cross-curricular learning, PSHE literacy targets, and so on; all can be justified with legitimate argument.

Although Drama does have effective pedagogical qualities which facilitate interaction, exploration and self-expression, it is, above all else, an art form that that enables children and young people to both explore their world and to present their vision of the kind of world they wish to see. Drama is integrally part of the human capacity to make sense of the world through the imagination.

Please 'Play your part' in preserving Drama in schools. ■

### What have we done in 2022-23?

- Presented at the House of Lords to an All-Party Parliamentary Group in support of the DTEA
- Presented at the House of Lords to the 11-16 Curriculum Enquiry
- Participated in a Roundtable with Shadow Education Team
- Engaged with Ofsted
- Met with DfE Remote Education Team
- Met with DfE Cultural Education Plan Team
- Actively engaged with the Council for Subject Associations
- Actively promoted the Drama and Theatre Education Alliance
- Focused on Early Careers Teachers and supported PGCE Specialist Course Provision
- Collaborated with DTEA at the Labour Party Conference 2022

### What will we do 2023-24?

- ND will make an input into the three Party conferences with the DTEA
- Participate fully in the DTEA's third *Seize the Day!* initiative for MPs
- Make presentations at the Music and Drama Expo
- Publish advocacy-curriculum statements to support ND members
- Host a two-day residential conference for secondary teachers
- Ensure that every phase of education is promoted equally throughout the year
- Invite Drama associations, networks and social media groups, to engage in creative collaborations that will support our advocacy mission



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