

Photos: © Paul Bateson

National Drama Report:

Áine Lark Research Inspires Bursary

By Paul Bateson

I have been Drama teacher since the early 2000s; now, I am in a privileged position, leading the Secondary Drama PGCE course at the University of Huddersfield.

If teaching is the best job in the world, as I tell the trainees on day one, then teaching teachers is a close second. This work keeps me optimistic about the future of Drama in schools, as I see new people eager to enter the profession, and it keeps me developing my own practice. But working in teacher training also brings some of the contemporary challenges for Drama as a subject, and for Education in general, into sharp focus.

I see placement schools where Drama is thriving, and some where Drama is disappearing. There are many expert, proactive, subject mentors, guiding and modelling, engaging and innovating; and some well-meaning hard working but a little-lost non-subject specialists who are struggling to support trainees. Then for every trainee who flourishes and finds the ECT school of their dreams, there is a new qualified teacher who never makes it to the classroom.

These are, perhaps, anecdotal observations, but the challenges are real, and National Drama outlines them comprehensively in their submission to the House of Lords' Enquiry into Secondary Education. In summary:

- Teacher numbers are down in all subjects: Drama teachers by 18%;
- Drama provision is reducing at KS3;
- Examination entries in arts subjects are reduced by almost a half.

I am a member of National Drama and this, along with my work in ITE, is one way for me to advocate for our subject and pedagogy for young people and teachers. So, when I saw the Áine Lark Research Bursary announced, I knew I wanted to try and affect further change by combining my involvement with ND and my work in ITE.

Given the recent changes to ITE itself, and the new two year ECT, I

wanted to look into that crucial time for teachers: the first qualified year; and at such a crucial time for Drama Education. I wanted to research:

- How can an Early Career Drama Teacher flourish?
- What do ECTs need from a National Association?
- How can ITE help?

My plan was to:

- Interview Early Career Teachers, ECT mentors, school leaders and HE lecturers.
- Seek out and highlight good practice.
- Kickstart an ECT specific strand of work for ND, by producing an initial resource for new teachers.
- State recommendations for future work.



Harley Kinnear, University of Huddersfield PGCE trainee 21/22 and ECT 22/23, joined me in my research. I like Harley: he teaches to his values, and he knows his pedagogy. He did this throughout his training, and now he is really enjoying being an Early Career Teacher. He is a flourishing ECT, and I wanted to know how and why.

ECTs need to feel valued, and trusted; while being supported,

starts Harley, and talking to him, I am drawn to the quote,

May your paths be always of your own making and not copies of others,

from Dorothy Heathcote, the provocation to the editorial of *Drama* magazine, Spring 2022. I paraphrase this often as: 'Consider: the teacher you want to be versus the teacher you're allowed to be'.

There are a number of influences that might prevent us from being the teacher we want to be or for an ECT to flourish: school processes, the curriculum, mentors, and, not least, allowing ourselves – but these can also be factors that empower us.

Harley continues:

Ask yourself, 'Why Drama?' Why do you teach this subject and what does this subject mean to you? If you have a clear understanding of why your subject matters, then you will naturally advocate for your subject in and out of your lessons. Your ITT and ECT years are all about experimenting with your practice and finding what works best for you and your students. Once you feel confident with your pedagogy you can use this as your toolkit for building lessons that stay true to you.

I think about my own training, I felt very excited and privileged to be doing what I was doing, and as I reflect, I was really encouraged and allowed, to find myself and the teacher I could be by my NQT mentor, Eleanor Aldous, who said when I interviewed her:

It is important to make and treat trainees as part of your team. Having a trainee on placement means that there is an additional person to collaborate with and learn from too.

What does it look like in practice? I ask.

- Allowing space for creation of new lessons, sessions, and SOW.
- Planning, delivering, and observing other teachers – together.
- Making links outside your organisation with other schools, practitioners, theatre companies & more.

Matthew Milburn, Drama Teacher and former Headteacher, and the head at the school when I trained ITE, agrees:

So many times I said to colleagues – I give you license, creative license, and new staff were often surprised.

'I give you license' is a powerful phrase, a companion clause to Dorothy Heathcote's vision – Find your own way, and if the time comes, allow others to do the same: trust and empowerment comes top down.

Harley talks me through this in action with relish, at a school where he says,

The head talks about Drama as the heartbeat of the school.

Harley has taken *Darkwood Manor*, originally taught by Cecily O'Neill, and applied other ideas and techniques from ITT, CPD from Hywel Roberts, and his own view on what are pertinent issues in the world right now.

In Drama we should cover topics that are relevant to the world our young people live in. This year I have been able to develop a scheme exploring, 'What it is like to be a young person in 2023?', inspired by the work of Dorothy Heathcote, in which we use Teacher in Role to search an abandoned Victorian factory and discover the factory's secrets. We then move on to look at child labour and how this exists in today's climate focusing on the experiences of young people living in poverty. We are lucky to teach a subject where we can marry playwrights, practitioners, and cross-curricular topics to develop curriculums rich in engagement for young people to explore and critique the world around them.

Harley's work to me seems to show the ITE – ECT – CPD throughline working well: teaching a seminal piece of work, by a pioneer, influenced by his ITE teachers and work of other practitioners, with his own innovation weaved in; and is sharing it with his subject association, National Drama.

So how does that happen? Must we rely on passionate



individual headteachers and ECT mentors who 'get it'?

Ellen Green:

Experience is important, but mentors can and should improve and develop – becoming an active member of a subject association will give you access to support and advice from other professionals, provide you with reading material, and the opportunity to attend conferences and training. Attend your local professional learning network where you will find opportunities for support and knowledge sharing, and finally seek out more experienced mentors and observe.

Provide mentors with the opportunity to learn from each other and promote research on effective mentorship and the impact of mentorship on trainee outcomes. Create a repository of mentorship resources. Acknowledge and celebrate in school mentorship, highlighting the importance of the role and motivating mentors.

Perhaps a National Association can work with mentors more closely, in collaboration with schools and universities?

Zeena Rasheed, a Head of Drama – explains how she nurtures this space to innovate and experiment:

Trust, not judgement, being there and available enough. A role model but not one to copy exactly. Just good practice and ways of doing things. I think being positive about teaching without being uncritical of our system – and how it treats Drama teachers and students – is tricky but possible.

Harley's colleagues and mentors (and students) are happy, and so is Harley. He feels like he can be true to himself. He is able to draw on quality training, experience, and advice, and is allowed space to teach with imagination and integrity. So, is Harley flourishing because of the culture of his setting, the approach of his mentor, or school leaders? Or is it because of his initial training or his understanding and development of his own practise? A little bit of all. He has stuck to his values, and he has done what he thinks is the right thing to do with the children. And he has used pedagogy that he trusts: 'You first need to trust in your own practice to experiment,' he says.

Indeed, what often strikes me is how many teachers find it hard to answer the questions: Why teach? And why Drama? How do children learn?

Perhaps ITE should start providing clearer answers and subject associations and mentors could continue. John Rainer, current FE/HE Officer for National Drama, outlines 'good drama ITE':

a variety of theoretical and practical inputs incorporating the history of drama education, key issues and debates, key concepts, and drama pedagogy suited to a wide range of contexts.

'Is there a good link between ITE and ECT?' I ask Harley.

During my time on ITE my subject mentors were incredibly influential and inspiring. I had a clear idea of why Drama matters when I started my first placement and had the pleasure of working with a superb mentor whose excellent practice shaped who I wanted to be in the classroom.

Zeena agrees:

To be able to talk to other students and other mentors through the university was really valuable.

Maybe our subject association can find space for ECT sharing and experimenting, with live CPD with children?

The newly commissioned report, *Arts in Schools* (2023), states that there are fewer opportunities for teachers to access quality CPD in the arts; and National Drama's Submission to the House of Lords outlines that the effects of recent Government policy means that there are limited opportunities to attract funds for Drama research grants or teacher development; hence, it is left to the subject associations to attempt to fill the gap in provision. (See *Drama*, Vol 30.1, Spring 2024).

Zeena and Ellen share ideas:

Zeena: *Maybe access to a qualification or seminars or an ideas lab for mentors would be a lot of fun and useful.*

Ellen: *New teachers need both a sound philosophical understanding of the subject and then the chance to hone this through careful, reflective practice. By bringing mentees into 'communities of practice', a group of teachers committed to their students and to teaching. Drama teachers often work alone for much of the time and being able to interact regularly and share with other teachers is vital.*

I think back to my own training, and I had the best of all these strands:

ITE delivered by subject experts; school and mentor culture of agency, innovation, and support; subject association support and network; a wider educational climate that valued Drama.

And things come full circle, as I write for National Drama and work in Drama ITE.

Our Early Career Drama Teachers are the next in line; and I think in many ways trainee and newly qualified teachers could well play the biggest part in the next few years for Drama in schools.

As we at National Drama continue to build a membership, perhaps we should focus on ECT, and ECT mentors, and continue to promote a clear stance. Hopefully, this article and the accompanying resources are the start of a wider platform for new Drama teachers to come together, seize the day, play their part, and claim our subject for ourselves and the young people we work with.

After my interviews and school visits at the end of my research period, I am re-reading Dr Geoff Readman's outline of National Drama's impressive 'Year of Advocacy' in *Drama* magazine Vol 29.2, Summer 2022.

Our subject association gives us statements to help articulate our position, not only as new teachers but also as any teacher; and to be able to advocate for it to students, parents, colleagues, leaders, governors, and ourselves: a shared vocabulary.

I share Dr. Readman's weariness, in the article, of the view of Drama as simply transferrable skills, and I frame Drama very much as he does, as an art form.

Speaking to John Rainer, FE/HE Officer for National Drama, and recently retired Drama PGCE course leader at Manchester, good ITE should

help in developing and sustaining our own subject beliefs; and then explore a repertoire of teaching techniques applicable to most contexts – Overall though, it means inducting trainees into a community of drama educators, with history and values.

Here are some of my recommendations on how we might do that:

Recommendations:

- It is already the view of National Drama that teacher training courses need to be taught by experienced practitioners: my research supports that. Can National Drama offer free membership for all Drama ITE courses? And collaborate in more delivery?
- ITE Drama courses should include practical work that exemplifies key aspects of pedagogy and theory, as well as time for critical reflection and the assimilation of relevant research.
- ECTs should be mentored by subject specialists: perhaps National Drama can introduce a 'mentor accreditation'?
- Affordable/subsidised Drama ECT and ECT mentor workshops hosted in schools or universities, with our subject association leading, with theatre industry support, during school hours if possible, and featuring live CPD with children.
- ECT section in *Drama* magazine and ND website.



Contributors

Eleanor Aldous is Head of Creative Arts & Drama Teacher at Outwood Academy Hemsworth, and has been a teacher there for 15 years. She is an ITT and ECT subject mentor, and contributor to the Outwood Institute of Teaching ITE programme.

Ellen Green is a drama teacher who has headed the subject in schools across Yorkshire and Lancashire for the last twenty-three years. She was also appointed as the SLE for Drama in Oldham and Tameside and is an active committee member of NATD.

Harley Kinnear is Drama Teacher and Head of Y7 at Penistone Grammar School. He has just completed ECT1 and is enjoying ECT2.

Matthew Milburn began his career as a secondary school drama teacher and became a Curriculum Leader for Creative Arts, before spending seventeen years as Headteacher, first in Barnsley then in Oldham. He has been a member of NATD for over 35 years and is a Patron of the Association.

John Rainer is a founder member of National Drama, and a previous Chair. He is currently FE/HE Officer for National Drama. He is semi-retired after over 35 years as a teacher, Drama PGCE course leader, and author.

Zeena Rasheed is a Drama teacher in Penistone, Barnsley, Vice-Chair for National Drama, and Chair of LUNG Theatre.

Dr. Geoffrey Readman is Chair of National Drama Executive Committee who has worked as a Drama specialist in most phases of education, including Special Educational Needs, Primary, Secondary, and HE, teacher education and professional theatre.



Paul Bateson is a teacher and writer in Yorkshire and has completed an MA (Education) with focus on Mantle of the Expert. After 12 years as a secondary teacher, he is currently subject tutor for University of Huddersfield Drama PGCE, and a practitioner for Chol Theatre, and Leeds Playhouse. He writes for *Drama* magazine, *Drama and Theatre*, and Bloomsbury Press.

Note: The Áine Lark Bursaries were set up in 2022 to support ND members to develop drama projects, conduct drama research and attend conferences to continually enhance their careers in drama and theatre education. If you want to know more about what we offer or wish to apply for our bursaries, visit National Drama website at **www.nationaldrama.org.uk/bursaries/**