**Contents**

Page

Editorial 4

Chair’s Report 8

###### Who Am I? Who Can Tell Me Who I Am? 12

David Davis

Countering the Insistence of Neoliberal Consciousness and Mentality 37

Materialist Approaches to the Intensive Practices of Speaking and Acting:

Lacanian Analysis and Drama in Education.

Bill Roper

Response to Bill Roper 58

David Davis

An interrupted discussion with Bill Roper 63

Konstantinos Amoiropoulos

Approaching the real: Attempts in early years classrooms. 68

Konstantinos Amoiropoulos

Response to Kostas Amoiropoulos 82

Bill Roper

Remembering Bill Roper 86

David Davis

Bill Roper 89

Konstantinos Amoiropoulos

Biographies 90

**Editorial**

This edition of the Journal has been a long time coming. Three years ago we planned an issue marking and celebrating the work of Drama pedagogue David Davis. In the intervening years we have tried to manage a hiatus not of our making, nor of Davis’.

And in those years there have been great changes. We are sure you will be all too familiar with them, and the havoc they have wreaked, not least in education. Teachers and those who work with the young have had to sustain challenges and demands far beyond what was once regarded as ‘normal’.

What do we do when confronted by a bewildering, if not terrifying, series of shocks and crises? How do we navigate the landscape revealed to us by a world-wide pandemic, a war on our doorstep and a planet that grows increasingly hostile under the strain of the lifestyles practised by so many of us who live in the ‘developed’ countries?

Perhaps taking stock for a moment can help us orientate ourselves; taking time to step back from the ricocheting, often reactive behaviour some schools demand of their teachers. Pausing a moment to think, reflect, and ask ourselves how is it that we have got to where we are?

Which is something David Davis does rather well.

The first of the articles published in this issue is the keynote paper presented by David Davis to a conference held in his honour.[[1]](#footnote-1) While Davis was at the heart of the conference, the aim was to enable a range of voices to discuss their own practices in drama and theatre education in relation to how they engage with the social/political in drama and theatre education. The Journal is (jointly) publishing some of those voices.

In the Abstract to the paper he offers us an analysis of the processes that work to create the world we now live in, and what lies behind them. Before the seismic upheavals of the last three years Davis argued that

… the forces dominating the social and political at the present moment are the policies and practices springing from neoliberal approaches to economics. These in turn are dominant driving forces for climate change which threatens all our futures. Neoliberal ideology promotes the individual before the social. This ideology tends to dominate the outlook of young people.

It is not difficult to see that now, in 2022, the impact of the neoliberal agenda has drilled down deeper. The poor and the vulnerable are now even poorer and more vulnerable than they were in 2019. For example, at a recent NEU (National Education Union) conference, it was reported that in a class of 30 at least 8 children will be living below the poverty line. Yet, with no regard for the well-being of the young, the government remains focused on pushing all schools to become academies, an idea born from the ‘free market’ ideology of the Thatcher government. Of course, when they use the word ‘free’ we have to think what they mean by that. Kevin Courtney, the Joint General Secretary of the NEU pointed out[[2]](#footnote-2) that, instead of looking, for example, at the mental health crisis amongst the young, in fact the government’s Education White Paper[[3]](#footnote-3) has, as its central obsession, structural reform. He asked why they would do this and followed the question with a warning; that they are giving themselves powers to become the direct chief executive for every school, whilst at the same time atomising schools and teachers. We are reminded of Mhairi Black’s recent comment in Parliament - that this government is sleepwalking to fascism.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Davis is unapologetically political in his analysis both of the social context and the impact this has on the individual child. He goes on to suggest that,

…young people see themselves as in charge of their own lives and decision making. They think they are deciding who they want to be and what they want to do as they grow up. The personal dominates. All the time the young person is seemingly making up her or his own mind but all the time these forces are at work. This is the existential dilemma. Drama provides the opportunity to try to see more clearly the reality in which they are enmeshed.

He concludes with his grandson’s question that formed the title of the Conference and the ensuing questions that it begs for us as educators and drama teachers:

Who am I? If I am other, who are the others who live inside me and have become part of me? Do I want these uninvited visitors to stay? How can drama help young people ask themselves these same questions?

For many years, Bill Roper worked closely with David Davis. He regularly contributed to the PGCE and MA courses at Birmingham Polytechnic, The University of Central England and Birmingham City University. He was also a friend of NATD and his keynotes at Conference were always provocative and challenging. This Issue includes two tributes to a very kind and gentle man with a massive intellect. He is very much missed.

Roper and Davis were close friends as well as colleagues. Although he was unable to attend the Dublin Conference, he was invited by Davis to critique his keynote. His response is typically insightful and presents a challenge to the reader. This is not an easy read but rewards close attention and several re-reads. In conjunction with Davis’ open and honest response and Kostantinus Amoiropulous’ development of his thinking, this is an excellent introduction into the work of Lacan[[5]](#footnote-5) and his potential application to our work. In Davis’ words:

Rather than attempt to paraphrase any more of Bill’s critique and elaboration of my keynote I leave those rich pickings to future readers. I found all his contributions extremely enlightening and will be for the rest of my life grateful to Bill for so gently but firmly pursuing his line of argument. His paper should be key reading for all those entering education and especially for drama teachers.

*Countering the Insistence of Neoliberal Consciousness and Mentality - Materialist Approaches to the Intensive Practices of Speaking and Acting: Lacanian Analysis and Drama in Education* is a tribute to the man in his own words and a provocation to us to dig deeper and in new directions. Roper concludes his piece with these very positive thoughts:

However we are in an era of the ego, of images, of leaders and others who try to engage us in the imaginary, divide us from others, ………but all is not yet lost. The human is an animal who by virtue of being possessed by language, can have the purpose of seeking to preserve itself as a species and the planet on which it emerged. (Lacan in Vanheule, 2016:7)

In *Approaching the real: Attempts in early years classrooms* Konstantinos Amoiropoulos offers us his paper from the Dublin Conference. He has also written a Foreword *An interrupted discussion with Bill Roper* in which he teases out the key Lacanian concepts that Roper is exploring in his work before sharing with us Roper’s response to his paper. It is a rich and generous giftfrom both men.

In the introduction to his Dublin paper, Amoiropoulos shares feedback from a parent of one of the children he taught:

You teachers think that life is a fairy tale with a happy ending. But you know nothing of real life. In this world, you have to be the winner, or else you will be the victim. I want to prepare my kid to live in it – to fight for itself, even if this means kicking and punching. This is what the world *is* like. (A parent’s feedback)

He proceeds to analyse the language in terms of the formation of self in relation to story, culture and ideology, linking it to both a Lacanian analysis and the thinking of Edward Bond. He argues through the imagined example of an early years lesson based on the fable of The Hare and the Tortoise that the danger of exploring the story uncritically is to share a worldview that:

…reflects the unconscious ideological assumptions of participants *and* of teachers as determined by our own contemporary dominant ideology.

We offer this powerful Issue as a challenge to us all; to reach for an understanding of the impact of neoliberalism on our lives and the challenges it presents to our teaching.

**Chair’s Report: ‘Hello. Can you hear me?’**

by

Liam Harris

Just as many of you will have experienced over the last few weeks and months, I recently saw my UVIth head into their final A Level Drama exam. They are an exceptional group of young people who have had to confront more than their fair share of troubles and traumas during my time with them. They joined the school when I joined the school and coincidentally will be leaving at the same time I will be leaving. In many ways I have developed a very special bond with them – I have certainly ‘grown up’ as a teacher alongside them and they have presented me with some of my greatest professional challenges.

One boy, Dejan[[6]](#footnote-6), was in the first lesson I ever taught at the school. Dejan is markedly dyslexic, has a reading age significantly lower than his chronological age and used to be so conscious of this that he feared showing his teachers written work in case they thought badly of him. He was not a strong performer, could easily disappear into a crowd and preferred the logical, sequential nature of Maths and Science. I have distinct memories of Dejan from those early Drama lessons, as he told me, with great pride, that he was Croatian and that his Baba and Deda[[7]](#footnote-7) had lived through the war we were exploring dramatically. He was an otherwise shy boy in a Friday period 6 class who were coming straight from PE (you can imagine the productivity!). Yet amidst the chaos he stood out as having an innate and instinctive desire to use drama to make sense of this thing he could not understand. He interrogated soldiers, stepped into the shoes of politicians and, most poignantly, when looking at the world’s inaction towards the Bosnian War, asked the question: ‘Why isn’t anyone listening to the people living there? Can’t we find a way to get their voices heard?’ A brilliant question and one which fuelled our work for the rest of term.

Fast forward to his A Level years, Dejan decided to study Maths, Further Maths, Business and Drama. Eyebrows were raised by the school who questioned why on earth he would choose to study Drama. Dejan seemed confused about this attitude as to him studying Drama was as logical as studying Maths.

Dejan went on to produce one of the most memorable moments of my teaching career. I sat with immense pride watching his A Level Devised performance, where he had transformed an interview he had conducted with one of his peers into a verbatim performance that explored the experiences of young people within war zones. It was an exceptionally powerful piece of theatre that has had a profound impact on our school community – at least two members of the audience have cited the experience as a key influence in them offering their homes to Ukrainian refugees. Dejan named the performance ‘Hello. Can You Hear Me?’ It turns out that while he hadn’t found an answer to the question he first pondered in our lesson all those years ago, he had never stopped asking it.

Dejan is one of the most creative, sensitive, thoughtful and empathetic young men I have ever had the privilege to teach. He is also one of the most intelligent, having regularly interrogated the politic of the world around him through his creative work. And yet, as I watched him enter the exam hall, he was crippled with anxiety about expressing himself in the written form. After the exam he looked traumatised, disenchanted and was left feeling worthless.

I have learnt so much from Dejan, not least that we must continue to wrestle with questions that do not have the easiest of answers. Reflecting upon Dejan’s experience, seeing one of the most creative and thoughtful individuals chewed up and churned out by a broken education system, I’ve found myself asking: *who is listening to the people in education and how can we get their voices heard?*

The outgoing NEC have preoccupied themselves with these questions over the last year, largely focussing our attention on developing the 7 principles of a child centred assessment system[[8]](#footnote-8). It is for our newly elected NEC to pick up this work and develop it to ensure meaningful change occurs within our education system.

My thanks to all those who attended the recent AGM where, as a membership, we elected the following officers to run the Association as an NEC:

* *Liam Harris – Chair*
* *Ellen Green – Secretary (Vice-Chair)*
* *Theo Bryer – Treasurer*
* *Matthew Milburn – Committee Member*
* *Sorrel Oates – Committee Member*
* *Margaret Branscombe, Maggie Hulson and Guy Williams – The Journal Committee*

The following motions were also passed, unanimously:

***Motion 1: Social Media Sub Committee***

*The Association calls upon the incoming NEC to create a social media sub-group. The work of the group will be, in the first place to:*

* *Develop strategies to promote the aims of the Association as embedded in The Policy Document;*
* *Promote the content that is held within The Journal for Drama in Education;*
* *Explore and, if appropriate, use social media specialists to help develop a strategy for the Association.*

***Motion 2: Three Step Workshop Programme***

*The Association calls upon the incoming NEC to develop a three-step programme focussed on the teaching of set text and pretexts.*

*To this end, the NEC of NATD will organise a series of workshops focused on A-level and GCSE set texts and KS3 pre-texts or stimuli/stories.*

*The workshops are to be promoted to practising teachers and lead to face-to-face workshops during a school afternoon.*

*Participants will be charged a reasonable rate to cover the costs of the Association in running the events.*

*The work is to be co-constructed with the teachers.*

*All events are to be organised on a regional basis.*

***Motion 3: Collaboration With Practitioners who seek to advance a child centred, humanising education***

*Preamble: This Association believes that we are living through a moment when Drama, politics and the world are in crisis. The old ways of working are being challenged, previous practices are splintering and people are searching for new ways of working.*

*Motion: The incoming NEC of NATD is committed to cooperation whilst holding to the principles as laid out in the policy document. It will strive to bring together those practitioners who seek to advance child-centred, humanising education. Where possible, the NEC will plan events and develop practices that build bridges and work towards collaboration on common ground with other Associations and individuals.*

Work has already begun on each of the motions above, with Sorrel Oates and Matthew Milburn taking the lead in planning regional events and Ellen Green taking the lead on the Social Media subcommittee. I look forward to sharing more with you in the coming months.

Meanwhile, I continue to represent the NATD as a member of the Drama and Theatre Education Alliance (DTEA). Most recently, the DTEA has begun planning for their #SeizeTheDay event which coincides with World Theatre Day. Should members wish to become more involved in the event, please see the DTEA website[[9]](#footnote-9) for more information.

The year ahead promises to be an exciting one for the NATD and we go into it with a strong sense of who we are and what we stand for. The Association is currently in a position of strength and there is a growing determination within schools and beyond to argue for change. Our young people deserve better. Extraordinary people like Dejan deserve much better. And, for the first time in my 10 years on the NEC, I feel as though we are genuinely in a position to enable voices like Dejan’s to be heard.

1. On Saturday and Sunday, the 9th and 10th March 2019, Drama practitioners from around the world gathered at Trinity College, Dublin. All the contributors had worked with David Davis over many years and had been invited by Carmel O’Sullivan (Professor in Education in the School of Education) to deliver a paper to mark his eightieth birthday. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Also at that NEU conference [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The first education white paper since 2016; tabled in March 2022 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Mhairi Black, Scottish Nationalist Party Member of Parliament 23/5/22- her whole speech can be seen on [Mhairi Black's incredible speech on Tory fascism - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nVZ3QwA5wy8) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Jacques Lacan developed a theoretical system that explains the mind, behaviour and culture through a structuralist and post-structuralist extension of classical psychoanalysis. In Lacanian theory, three ‘orders’ structure human subjectivity – the imaginary the symbolic and the real. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. NB Dejan’s name has been changed to protect his identity. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Croatian for ‘Grandmother’ and ‘Grandfather’. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. These can be found on our website: [www.natd.co.uk](http://www.natd.co.uk) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. https://www.dtealliance.co.uk [↑](#footnote-ref-9)