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**Editorial**

Spring 2023

When we began writing this editorial, China and the US were arguing about balloons in the sky, each accusing the other of invasive/spying practices.[[1]](#footnote-1) Division, threat and discord were fostered in the press and media.

At the same time, rescue personnel and equipment from around the world were arriving in Turkey and Syria to save people buried by the earthquake. Teams from China and the US worked together to provide humanitarian aid;[[2]](#footnote-2) they would have needed their government’s support to go.

So, which is the real picture?

Under Prime Minister Thatcher, the UK government of the 1980s, in pursuit of their free-market capitalist ideology[[3]](#footnote-3), consciously triggered competition and division, splitting one force for human-centred living from another. One of their goals was to ‘smash’ the unions and to some extent they achieved this, most memorably the National Union of Mineworkers; other unions were left seriously weakened. Drama associations were no different; falling into acrimonious argument leaving a bitter taste in the mouth for decades to come.

But that is an old picture. In the past two years, for example, NATD has been sharing goals and practices alongside other drama associations, working together driven by forces both outside and inside.

Whilst history did not end or begin with ‘Thatcherism’, it did have a deep and lasting impact. There are those that say Thatcherism broke Britain, and indeed ‘broken’ is a term that is used frequently by the media and Members of Parliament. People say Education is ‘broken’, the NHS is ‘broken’, unions are ‘broken’, the implication often being that they are beyond mending, with a further underlying insinuation that privatisation will fix the problem. That some think this way should not be surprising, living as we do in an economic system built upon conspicuous and symbolic consumption.

But something else is going on too. A new picture has emerged…

People who work in the public sectors that have suffered privatisation, that is to say, those sectors attacked by the Thatcher government and successive governments since, have had enough. Yes, the people who work in those sectors have sustained privation and the erosion of rights, leading to hardship, misery and increasing physical and mental sickness. Many nurses, for example, whose wages have been consciously held down by the government, must go to food banks in order to make it through the week. But they are not broken. There is a growing strength not just in the leadership of the unions but in their membership.

Here in the UK, thousands of teachers have recently joined the National Education Union (NEU), which has forged links with those on the ever-growing list of unions that are striking. The train worker unions, the nurses, physiotherapists and doctors, ambulance workers, civil servants, postal workers and tube workers, journalists and Amazon workers are all taking industrial action, and have been since late 2022. Half a million workers went on strike on Wednesday 15th March 2023. Passport Office workers are planning a 5-week strike.

Young people are affected too. Of course they are. Across England young people protested against school strictures regarding uniform and toilets. In some cases it was reported that the students became violent, and that in one case the police were called.[[4]](#footnote-4) The students protested because toilets were being locked during lesson time. It was also reported that protests arose as girls in one school were made to have their skirt length inspected by male teachers. These reports, however, were scant, and in some cases the ‘riots’ were blamed on ‘TikTok’, as though communication on social media is the problem rather than the conditions in our schools.

We are not alone in our deep exasperation with the ways human lives are being mistreated. In Greece, tens of thousands have marched and demonstrated against their government’s mismanagement. Sparked by a deadly rail disaster, the protests have included a twenty-four hour national strike.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Is it that these unstable times are offering us the chance to work out how to work together? The pandemic, the very real global financial crises, austerity, the recognition of the impact of human activity on our planet, rapid changes in governmental leadership, the death of a very long serving monarch have all contributed to a sense of instability but at the same time, a shared experience. Had the current government had the same ideological drives as those of the Thatcher government, we may have seen a co-ordinated and authoritarian reaction to such instability. As it is, the UK government, having an aversion to scrutiny and a flagrant disinclination to regard themselves as representatives of the people, bounces from one back-room manoeuvre to another. They have been busy generating legislation that restricts our right to strike, to curb the nature of our demonstrations, to challenge our right to boycott. As it turned out, the first demonstrators to fall foul of the new legislation were campaigners against the monarchy trying to stage a protest at the recent coronation of the British King. They had planned the protest according to the law and informed the police of their plans. Nevertheless they were arrested as the police claimed that they had contravened an aspect of the new legislation. After being detained for hours (one for sixteen hours) they were released with no charge.

At the same time, the government is also working hard to close our borders to the desperate and the needy, disregarding a human practice rooted in ancient times – the right to refuge.[[6]](#footnote-6)

One voice that was raised against the Home Secretary’s Immigration bill (regarded as illegal by many and condemned by the United Nations refugee agency) was that of a former footballer turned presenter, Gary Lineker, who has a contract with the BBC.[[7]](#footnote-7) His criticism was made on his personal social media account, in his own time. Nevertheless, this raised an uproar of condemnation from both the BBC and members of Parliament. He was asked to step back from his very popular BBC sports programme. Within a very short time, Ian Wright, another former footballer and media pundit and then other sports commentators stood down from sports reporting in solidarity with Lineker. These are not unionised workers; they are employed individually and come from a world that is highly competitive. But they brought BBC Saturday sports reporting to a standstill, for one day, through an immediate and unplanned act of solidarity.

Anger is leading to action on immigration, on the climate catastrophe, on child poverty. Within education in the UK, the tragic death by suicide of Headteacher, Ruth Perry[[8]](#footnote-8), has finally triggered a challenge to the bulwark of the Education Reform Act of 1988, Ofsted. Teaching Unions are building the argument to transform or remove altogether, this brutal sledgehammer to the education of working-class children and the morale of teachers. As the outgoing Chair of the Association, Liam Harris, says in his final Chair’s Report,

While the dust has settled on the Covid-19 pandemic, as a society we continue to live through its aftershock. Despite theatres reopening and schools resuming business as usual, we have returned to find that the schools and institutions that we knew were creaking before the pandemic are no longer fit for purpose.

In naming the crisis, Harris is arguing for the key role that NATD must play in defending Drama and defending education. As an Association, NATD continues its drive to place itself effectively within the contradiction, fully aware of destructive forces, and seeking to build a humanising curriculum that is focussed on the needs of the young in building a compassionate, informed and democratic world for us all.

Four years ago we planned an issue marking and celebrating the work of Drama pedagogue, David Davis. Last year we published the first of the articles to emerge from the Dublin Conference.[[9]](#footnote-9) The first of the articles published in this Issue is the paper presented by Selen Korad Birkiye. 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. Birkiye’s article explores the enormous influence that Davis has had on the development of Drama in Education in Turkey placing it in the socio-political context of the past one hundred years. It is a fascinating piece of work as she describes the struggle for the very existence of Drama within a reactionary, conservative culture facing authoritarian hostility and creating a climate of fear. She concludes:

I hope we can give our students this democratic way of thinking against neoliberal, fundamentalist, conformist, dehumanised value systems that ignore the value of being and living as an honourable human being. We know that if we can share these core values without manipulating, humiliating, or oppressing the students in the education system, we will develop critical, analytical, and creative generations who will do their best to reach a "humanist" level rather than one of polarised "others".

In the second of the two articles arising from the Dublin conference, Guy Williams recounts his experiences and development across four decades. This absorbing personal history offers us a view of two developing, overlapping pictures; the intensifying impact of the neoliberal agenda on schools, and the impact of NATD and Davis on Williams and his classroom practice, and it poses a key question,

How do I as an individual teacher, now working in a Pupil Referral Unit, and as a member of NATD continue to teach ethically whilst being marginalised?

This question speaks to us all, then and now. As Williams outlines how the policies of NATD generated a creative energy in the 1990s, in their advocacy and application we are given a clear picture of how they can root a teacher’s practice and confidence. As we go on to read of his time in an academy we see how the ideological stranglehold on schools challenged ethical teaching, not to mention ordinary sanity, and Williams’ account illustrates the terrifying madness of the system at work and how teachers become a casualty of it. *Teaching Ethically in the Marketplace or Baby-sitting the Trauma* concludes by describing how a teacher can advocate for marginalised young people and the obvious need for lifesaving change.

In *Dorothy Heathcote’s ‘Four Levels’ Charts with Commentary,* David Allen’s thorough and impressive research both illuminates her pedagogy and addresses important aspects of Heathcote’s work. There had been a debate that drama teachers in general, and in particular Dorothy Heathcote, were focussing too much on ‘process’ to the detriment of the art form. Allen points out that,

In her Keynote, she stated that she designed the chart ‘because of current debate about whether teachers should be teaching theatre arts or using drama as an education medium’. The four levels ‘move between considering using *some* dramatic system, down to, considering the art form of theatre’……. In a note preserved in the Dorothy Heathcote Archive, she described the chart as: ‘My attempt to break down into detail what I use as my progression with classes. (As mine is always instinctive: in practice it is “triggered” by my observation of the group I'm teaching!)’

The keynote referred to is one that Dorothy Heathcote gave to an NATD conference, in which the first version of the charts appeared.

Allen further makes the point that the charts should be used as a continuum, rather than as a series of graded levels through which the class advances. This spiral-like progression is typical of other works of Heathcote’s (e.g. the Levels of Progression) - the identifying of the key parts of a process and how they work together as they are visited and re-visited.

The analysis offered in this article further clarifies Heathcote’s guidelines for classroom practice, with insightful and practical examples, making clear that from the start the application of the art form is present. A further strength of his work is that Allen brings together many voices that understand and interrogate Heathcote’s work as they mine the Dorothy Heathcote Archive. We look forward to the next discovery.

At the last Annual General Meeting the National Association for the Teaching of Drama made Edward Bond a life member. He has been a long standing supporter of NATD and of the association’s stance. He is also recognised internationally as the UK’s greatest living dramatist. He says,

I write plays because we need a new drama that will look us in the face so that we can know ourselves and the world we are in. Otherwise the world will destroy us.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Alongside a recent production of Bond’s *Have I None* director Lewis Frost interviewed Bond. The short extract published in this issue is by way of an invitation to view the entirety of the fascinating and timely interview.

It is with great sadness that we mark the death on October 5th 2022 of Roger Wooster, a long-standing member and friend of the Association. Roger was also a member of the Journal Committee for several years and continued to proof-read the Journal even after he’d left. In tribute to Roger we have published in full an interview conducted at his request with Chris Cooper two months before he died. It is a fascinating read, charting Roger’s journey into TIE and in many ways is a history of TIE in the UK. What is also fascinating is his own humble description of his search for meaning, claiming that he didn’t know what he was doing. It was that search for coherence and a pedagogy that typified his approach to his work and the clarity that he brought to his work on the Committee. He had a lively and incisive mind; he was a lovely warm and caring friend to those of us on the Committee and as with the many others who knew him, he will be badly missed by us.

**Chair’s Report: Reflection on a Year Gone By**

by Liam Harris

While the dust has settled on the Covid-19 pandemic, as a society we continue to live through its aftershock. Despite theatres reopening and schools resuming business as usual, we have returned to find that the schools and institutions that we knew were creaking before the pandemic, are no longer fit for purpose. As an NEC we have spent the year pondering the NATD’s place in this strange new world and whether an Association that is built on foundations of social responsibility, deep thought and child-centred pedagogy has a place in this fast paced, consumerist, neoliberal world.

The AGM 2022 charged the incoming NEC with two primary tasks, both of which have brought their own challenges:

* To develop a series of regional workshops to support members in exploring texts and pretexts.
* To collaborate with like-minded individuals and associations to advance child-centred, humanising pedagogy.

Despite facing some significant setbacks in our endeavours this year, it is clear there continues to be a need for the Association: we simply need to find the means to enable those who need to access the Association’s wealth of knowledge to do so.

**Regional Workshops**

The subcommittee responsible for planning, organising and delivering regional workshops focussed on developing work around approaches to GCSE set texts. It was felt that by looking at ways to approach GCSE content in child-centred, humanising ways it would enable the Association to access a new generation of teachers and increase the number of participants who would be afforded the time and funding to attend by their schools.

Unfortunately, the number of bookings received for events in London and Sheffield have been extraordinarily low. This has led to the cancellation of the Sheffield event and some rethinking of the London event (which will also be attended by students from the PGCE course at The Institute of Education - IOE). While a huge blow to the confidence of the NEC, the success of the recent Oldham event has reaffirmed the importance of the work of the Association and has provided the motivation that we needed to push forward with similar work in the future.

**Collaboration with other Associations**

The NATD continues to be represented on the steering group of the Drama and Theatre Education Alliance, although attendance at recent meetings has been hampered by my movement into a new role within my professional life. We have consulted on the recent SeizeTheDay campaign and have supported the DTEA’s lobbying efforts. With intermittent attendance, it has been difficult to influence the direction of the collective, though I remain convinced that our involvement is important for the collective voice of Drama and Theatre.

Perhaps the most significant work has been in building a closer relationship with National Drama. Geoff Readman continues to reach out for opportunities to collaborate and, as a first step, both Associations jointly published an article written by Sandra Heston on the Dorothy Heathcote Archive.

The Association remains a silent partner in discussions around the placement of the Dorothy Heathcote Archive, which is being driven by David Allen. Theo Bryer has been the most involved member of NATD in the discussions, which are attended by a significant number of prominent practitioners who continue to search for the most appropriate location, form and organisation for the Archive.

**The Passing of Notable NATD Members**

Unfortunately this year saw the passing of two notable members of the Association in John Airs and Roger Wooster. Both men were members of the Journal Committee when I first joined the Association, each of them making a young Applied Theatre student feel welcome and supported in joining and taking increasing levels of responsibility within the NEC. I will forever be indebted to them for placing their confidence in me to lead the Association and being ever-present, friendly faces in times of need. Their absence at the 2023 AGM left a smiling, reassuring hole: they will be truly missed and their passing has been marked by the Association through articles in the Journal for Drama in Education and posts on the website.

**The Need for a New Generation of NEC Officers**

Perhaps the most pressing issue facing the future of the Association is the need for a new generation of NEC officers. Historically, one of the greatest strengths of the NATD is that it is led by teachers for teachers. Over recent years, the number of serving teachers on the NEC has fallen and therefore we must find ways to hand the reins over to a new generation of practitioners. Motion 2, passed at this year’s AGM, seeks to charge the incoming NEC to achieve this, fuelling the future of the Association by driving up the active engagement of the membership.

**A Personal Thanks**

I can’t quite believe that I have been Chair of this incredible Association for the past 9 years. Having recently taken on a position as a Senior Leader, it is no longer feasible for me to continue in the position and give it the energy and headspace required to take the Association into its next phase. I also hope that by stepping down we can begin the journey to finding a practising Drama practitioner to pick up the mantle in the not too distant future. While I continue on the NEC after being elected to the position of Treasurer and therefore will not be disappearing from the NEC completely, I would like to take this opportunity to make a number of ‘thank yous’.

To Paul Gibbins who, as Chair of the NATD when I first joined the NEC, once warned me that if I carried on the way that I did I would end up as Chair. I laughed in disbelief at the time! To Pavla Beier, Gemma Grubb and Ruth Saxton who were my partners in crime during my first stint on the NEC. To Theo Bryer who gave me a place on the IOE’s PGCE and has supported me ever since. To Matthew Milburn who, when I proposed the motion to close in 2017, rallied those present to have one more roll of the dice which rejuvenated the Association. And, most importantly, to Maggie Hulson and Guy Williams who have had an immeasurable impact on my practice as teachers, mentors and the intellectual custodians of the Association. Without the two of you, I certainly would not have made it this far!

A final thank you goes to each and every single member of the Association. The membership is the lifeblood of the NATD and your support, guidance and challenge fuel the Association to continue its work. I feel privileged to have matured as a practitioner through the nurturing of such exceptional pedagogues.

When the Association looked set to close in 2017, two extraordinary things happened: there was an international outcry that the Journal for Drama in Education would cease publication; and Matthew Milburn encouraged colleagues to have one last throw of the dice to see if we could use our remaining funds to rejuvenate the Association. In that time we moved from having 6 members, to now having over 100 members and subscribers. I look forward to supporting Matthew, the new Chair of the NATD, as he moves us into an exciting new future.

**Incoming National Executive Committee of the NATD**

**Chair:** Matthew Milburn

**Vice-Chair and Secretary:** Sorrel Oates

**Treasurer:** Liam Harris

**Committee Member:** Chris Green

**Committee Member:** Ellen Green

**Journal Committee:** Guy Williams and Maggie Hulson

1. e.g. [Chinese foreign ministry says US also flies balloons over China | China | The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/13/chinese-foreign-ministry-says-us-also-flies-balloons-over-china) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. alongside those from India, Switzerland, the UK, Japan, Australia, Poland, Taiwan, Switzerland Pakistan, UAE, Iraq, Spain, Russia, Greece; a long list growing longer as the need grows stronger; even the Ukraine stands by to offer support. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Theirs was not a new idea, but a refashioned one built upon reaction to the welfare state developed after the World War 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [Police called to schools across the country as pupils ‘riot’ over toilet rule changes | The Independent](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/schools-toilet-protest-riot-uk-b2288977.html) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. [Clashes in Greece as thousands protest train tragedy (rte.ie)](https://www.rte.ie/news/world/2023/0316/1363618-greece-train-protest/) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The Dawn of Everything – A New History of Humanity; David Graeber and David Wengrow; Penguin Random House 2021 pp 520-521 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. British Broadcasting Corporation [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. [Headteacher killed herself after news of low Ofsted rating, family says Ofsted | The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2023/mar/17/headteacher-killed-herself-after-news-of-low-ofsted-rating-family-says) 17th March 2023 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. On the 9th and 10th March 2019, Drama practitioners from around the world gathered at Trinity College, Dublin. The contributors having worked with David Davis over many years were invited by Carmel O’Sullivan (Professor in Education in the School of Education) to deliver a paper to mark his eightieth birthday. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. [BENCHMARX Deeply shockingly bad and irresponsible | Morning Star (morningstaronline.co.uk)](https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/c/deeply-shockingly-bad-and-irresponsible) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)