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**Editorial**

**Being human all the time?**

This autumn, minister of state at the Department for Education, Nick Gibb, has a lot on his plate. Unlike the four million children living in poverty in the UK. With weasel words and obfuscations, and despite an open letter from 240+ civil society groups, councillors, MPs, faith leaders and 90,000 teachers[[1]](#footnote-1), the minister has declined to offer free school meals to all those who need them.

At the same time, anyone familiar with the time-line of the Grenfell disaster will be finding eerie echoes in the recent RAAC[[2]](#footnote-2) debacle:

* In 2017, a ceiling beam collapsed in a school and a committee was asked to investigate.
* In 2018, a similar but more widespread collapse took place in another school.
* In 2019, a structural engineer warned the government of RAAC’s dangers.
* In 2022, construction experts warned RAAC was a “ticking time bomb” and estimated around “half” of the four million non-residential buildings in the UK were affected by the material.[[3]](#footnote-3)

The government responded with guidance and a questionnaire, but no action. During the school summer holidays it was discovered that there was a significant amount of these potentially hazardous materials in our schools and thus the start of term saw the closure of many schools. The exact figure of how many schools, at the time of writing, has not been revealed.

# Whether or not this particular buildings fiasco is a result of David Cameron’s bonfire of the building regulations,**[[4]](#footnote-4)** it is still the case that this is another disaster resulting from wilful neglect.

More recently, it has emerged that the DfE has mismanaged the national funding formula for schools. The result is that primary and secondary schools will be given ‘at least £50 less a pupil’[[5]](#footnote-5) than had been anticipated. This means that head teachers have had to revise their budgets, which in turn means that teachers’ jobs will be cut.

These are just three examples of the indifference, disregard and mismanagement that has become the hallmark of the DfE under the present government.

This autumn, in pursuance of our aims to foster a humanising curriculum and seek justice for the young, NATD sponsored two teachers to attend the *Dorothy Heathcote Now International Drama Conference 2023* at the University of Aberdeen; one from Sussex and one from Palestine. We also facilitated the attendance of a Palestinian teacher-educator. There will be a fuller account of the conference in our next issue, alongside some planning work we aim to do arising from it, in the meantime we’d like to share with you a quote emailed to us from the Palestinian teacher. Quite simply she said,

*‘thanks for being human all the time’.*

Given the barbaric events taking place in Gaza, Israel, Ukraine, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Yemen and Darfur there is no more important time for us to struggle for an education system that humanises. All of the material in this Issue approaches work with young people underpinned by being human all of the time.

In *On The Beach*, David Davis shares with us his visceral contribution to the book launch of the Trinity Publication of the papers that were given at the 2019 conference[[6]](#footnote-6). Four and a half years ago, his Keynote at that conference demanded that we face up to the climate crisis and understand the forces that continue to fuel it[[7]](#footnote-7). In 2023, his demand was even more urgent. He refers to the novel *On the Beach* which imagines the impact of a nuclear holocaust and follows through the logical impact of such a disaster. The parallels to our world are stark.

Davis takes us back to Gavin Bolton’s aims and in particular:

When (and when not to) adapt to the world [the student] lives in.

He goes on to credit the critical work of Bill Roper in foregrounding the work of Lacan:

As Lacan argues, that social order, the symbolic order, is in us from our unconscious to our conscious decision making. We are never free from it: never totally our own person.

He concludes:

I would argue that our responsibility is to work towards being socially aware of those influences; to work towards shaping for ourselves a human value system whatever that might be. And drama has been invented to play a key role in that process.

We have a choice.

We can stand on the beach with suicide pills to hand or work for a human future immediately here through our work with the art form of drama in education.

In *Process Drama in the Lowlands: My journey of exploration and discovery,* Bob Selderslaghs charts his pioneering work with process drama in Belgium. He was the first ever in the Low Countries to obtain a PhD in the arts with a focus on drama in education and education in drama. He identifies the cultural preconceptions at work with regard to what drama should be both within the school curriculum and in the education of teachers, some of which will be familiar to UK readers. Coming from this cultural context and at the same time grasping the value of Mantle of the Expert, Selderslaghs is inspired to formulate a research question that investigates a discourse between the two.

He salutes the seminal work of Luke Abbot and Tim Taylor, both for the courses they have provided and their Mantle of the Expert website, in enabling him to understand the pedagogic implications of this process. At the same time he becomes intrigued by the

…artistic development of students that (MOE) entails

and thus goes on to design a research programme to

…investigate the artistic added value of Dorothy Heathcote's approach in primary education in Flanders.

As the research unfolds Selderslaghs grows increasingly convinced of the quality of learning offered by Mantle of the Expert to the art form of drama and refines his research to focus on

…dramatic inquiry towards an artistic result in arts education.

He goes on to track the relationship between process and attainment:

…without a high-quality process, it is impossible to achieve a high-quality product.

In the light cast by his reflections on his research, slipping between Mantle of the Expert and process drama, Selderslaghs suggests a new development of Mantle of the Expert:

MoE 2.0: from dramatic inquiry towards an artistic result in arts education.

and he offers us an approach to this. He identifies four worlds of MoE 2.0. and delineates the interconnectedness and interplay between:

* The real world of the process = out of the fiction/process
* The imaginary world of the process = in the fiction/process
* The imaginary world of the product = in the fiction/product
* The real world of the product = out of the fiction/product

At the same time, he witnesses and advocates the enhanced authenticity and understanding that process drama offers to teachers, as those on the programme

…were introduced to constructivist learning theory from within.

Selderslaghs’ account of his pioneering work is absorbing, and his endeavors are impressive, and as he ventures into the territory of competencies and quality of product his four worlds offer us a useful thinking tool. It will be interesting to see how his work develops.

In *What’s going on? From narrative fiction to Process Drama*, Brian Woolland takes us on a journey. He shares with us his thinking behind the writing of his historical novel, *The Invisible Exchange* exploring the source material and his own fascination with it. In taking us into that world, he draws parallels with our own and identifies issues that concern us as human beings. In itself this is an intriguing process, particularly when we are in the hands of a highly skilled and creative author, but it becomes all the more relevant when Woolland brings to bear his vast experience as a playwright and a drama educator. He concludes with the beginnings of a piece of drama that could be transposed into a classroom. It is not a scheme of work but is far richer than that, offering us glimpses of what could be and how an author, a playwright and a drama teacher can mine the same source.

He concludes:

And so we proceed – sometimes enacting moments from the trial, sometimes using role play to unpick assumptions of misogyny and sexism, sometimes reconstructing events that led to the trial, sometimes creating the ‘evidence’ (much of it hearsay and gossip) that Coke insists is damning, and always finding ways to reflect on how this resonates for the participants and how the material relates to their world.

In *“Bullying is not ok” - A Scheme of Work,* Margaret Branscombe uses *My Parents* by Stephen Spender to show how a poem can offer a starting point for a piece of drama work and how that process can fold back and illuminate the poem itself. This is a description of work that Branscombe has undertaken with her students and comes vividly to life as she shares their writing with us. It is very clearly laid out and will prove useful to young teachers and teachers of English looking for more innovative and creative ways of exploring text.

In *On the Relationship of Living Through Drama and Bondian Theatre* Adam Bethlenfalvy shares with us the paper that has been published by Trinity (see above). His contribution to the Dublin Conference was born out of the work he undertook for his PhD. His extract articulates his intentions:

Living Through Drama is an approach within the field of Drama in Education that focusses on offering participants an experiential relationship to fictional situations that open human, moral dilemmas. This paper describes a process of matching this approach with the contemporary theatre theory and dramaturgy of the playwright Edward Bond, whose central aim is to create gaps in meaning for audiences. These gaps offer space for the audience members to make meaning of what they see on stage. The research reported here explored if gaps in meaning and the living through experience of improvisation can be created at the same time by bringing together these two approaches.

His approach is fascinating and draws us in the direction that Davis is imploring us to explore.

In *The Drama of Theatre-in-Education* Chris Cooper also shares a paper originally given at the Dublin Conference in 2019. It is a very powerful weaving together of the influences of a wide variety of practitioners, primarily David Davis, Gavin Bolton and Edward Bond. It is placed very clearly in a political context as he initially explores the history of TiE:

The TiE Movement has been all but destroyed in the UK because it enables young people to think independently and critically, and they - the ruling class - will not allow that.

For Cooper:

In my work, I understand the political in the personal to mean the relationship between self in society, and society in self.

He goes on to illustrate his argument with examples drawn from China where he works extensively:

While TiE faces a precarious future in the UK and much of Europe, it is all the more surprising that new shoots of growth are emerging in a country where a repressive state manipulates the public’s emotions to demobilise dissent and social protest (Hou, 2019).

He also provides examples from work in Birmingham, UK, carefully building an argument for a form of Theatre that has Drama at its heart. The young actors he is working with provide the evidence to help us understand the central concepts of Bond’s work.

Ultimately, he is working towards an approach,

…creating drama that removes the ideological spectacles of actors, audience and participants, so that the confrontation between self and society can occur.

This is a provocative and challenging piece of work that demands much of the reader but even more of us as adults working with young people:

Theatre in Education (TiE) is a radical, discrete theatre form which enables young people and children to make meaning of the world they inhabit and the future they can shape.

In reviewing *Botheredness: Stories – Stance – Pedagogy* by Hywel Roberts, Margaret Branscombe shares her enthusiasm for his energy. Roberts’ teaching is,

…ensuring schooling is about children…

She concludes saying,

In summary, ‘Botheredness’ is worth reading because of the real life student stories that have occurred as a result of the stories that Roberts has told in classrooms and what they have collectively *done* with those stories to create meaningful lessons.

As an Association, NATD is committed to working for a child-centred, humanising curriculum with an internationalist perspective. The climate catastrophe, the barbaric acts that humans are committing upon one another, the increasingly corrupt and careless austerity that neoliberal governments inflict on the most vulnerable in our world demands that we act. As Drama educators, our first actions are in our classrooms and our schools. We hope that this Issue empowers your action.

**Chair’s Report June 2023**

by Matthew Milburn

The tragic loss of the OceanGate Titan, a small submersible that took wealthy passengers to the bottom of the ocean to look at the wreck of the Titanic, provides an opportunity for deep learning.

Any news event like that of the OceanGate Titan provides a rich canvas for the drama teacher. By sharing early news clippings, pupils become interested and start talking about what is happening; their imagination is sparked. It takes moments to mark out on the floor of the studio or classroom the exact dimensions of the tiny vessel. These dimensions and the fact that passengers can’t open any doors, provide tight constraints within which drama can occur.  It is part of human nature to imagine what would have been said at the final briefing prior to embarkation. The wording of the liability contracts or waivers signed by the passengers. The final words to loved ones and the exact positions of the passengers when the pre departure photos were taken. Understanding the back stories of the five passengers, Hamish Harding, Paul Henri Nargeoloet, Shahzada and Suleman Dawood and Stockton Rush (the CEO of OceanGate) are pictured on the mother ship, waving farewell.

The children could create the sound of the watertight door clanging shut and being bolted down. For teachers who have access to a drama studio, lights could be used to represent the darkening environment as the submersible descends to the depths.

As the tragedy unfolds, and contact with the submersible is lost, our humanity insists that we imagine what it must be like to be trapped inside that tiny vessel under the sea? What are the first signs that the vessel is in trouble? What is said between the passengers? When contact with the mother ship is lost, how do the passengers react? How does the CEO react?

With the children immersed in the story, a huge raft of learning areas open up. For example:

* The history of the Titanic.
* The “industry” that surrounds the Titanic.
* What is the deep sea environment really like?
* The impact of pressure on various shapes.
* How does sound travel in water? Sonar and radar.
* The human need for oxygen and how to conserve oxygen in a confined space.
* Who are the great adventurers through history?
* What motivates risk taking and walking towards danger?
* How contract and liability influences decision making.

I recall Dorothy Heathcote saying; avoid asking children questions that you know the answer to. As a teacher, there are a million questions that I would like to find out more about in relation to the OceanGate Titan disaster. Art should be about exploring such questions and understanding why five millionaires chose to take such risks. Is it a coincidence that they were all men?

As an association NATD is concerned with fighting for a humanising curriculum. It is concerned with making sure that children get opportunities to experience and learn through drama at school and beyond. For the last nine years the Association has been chaired by Liam Harris. His contribution has been extraordinary. At times, he has single-handedly kept the Association from sinking. I am sure that many members of the association will have been touched by his thoughtful, sensitive and caring approach. Liam has got a new job in a secondary school in Sussex and has rightly recognised that he simply does not have the capacity to Chair the association any longer. Liam has been acting in a number of roles for NATD whilst also being Chair! He’s at times been head of IT, bursar or at least in charge of all banking arrangements, and secretary – making sure that minutes are uploaded. His efforts have been Herculean, and our association would not exist if he’d not committed so much to it.

I have agreed to step in as Chair for one year only, working alongside a wonderful Executive Committee. We all understand that we are seeking to further re-energise our association and we invite **all members to be more actively involved**. In 2024 there will be a new Chair and new members of the NEC. If you think you could commit to greater involvement, please get in touch. Being a part of the NEC feeds your understanding of drama and education more widely and it gives you the chance to help shape the future of our association.

Membership of NATD should mean that you commit to making sure that we support other drama educators via a formal democratic association. There are many forums, podcasts and individuals online who offer support to drama teachers for nothing. What makes NATD different is that it has paying members, a constitution and is run democratically by its members. In a bid to make the association more relevant and to attract greater membership, the NEC is currently working on key priorities that we would ask members to really get behind. These include:

1.       A series of set text workshops to support those teaching drama / theatre at GCSE and A level.

2.       A KS3 workshop that is available to specialists and non-specialists alike.

3.       Providing an exceptional Journal that supports the promotion of educational drama theory and practice.

4.       Actively seeking to collaborate with National Drama to build bridges and alliances on behalf of drama teachers.

5.       Representing Drama teachers on the Drama and Theatre Education Alliance group lobbying for greater arts provision in schools.

6.       Supporting members who want to attend the Heathcote Now conference in Aberdeen in October 2023.

What else should we be doing and how else can we support classroom drama teachers and those working in theatre education? Please contact the NEC if you have ideas, want to be more involved or look at our website [natd.co.uk](http://natd.co.uk/) to find out what is going on and what how you might be able to offer greater support.

1. No Child Left Behind Campaign- National Education Union [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Reinforced autoclaved aerated [concrete](https://www.independent.co.uk/topic/concrete)- lightweight, porous and recognised as having limited durability [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [Timeline: The RAAC concrete ‘ticking time bomb’ that schools were warned about years ago | The Independent](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/raac-concrete-schools-closure-collapse-b2403764.html) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. UK Prime minister 2014 Cameron boasted of presiding over the “first Government in modern history to leave office with fewer regulations than when it entered,” before revealing plans to tear out vast chunks of the rule book that govern the size and quality of our new homes. [What Cameron's bonfire of the building regulations will do to our homes | Architecture | The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/architecture-design-blog/2014/jan/27/david-cameron-bonfire-of-building-regulations-future-homes) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. # England’s schools to be given less money after DfE admits bungling figures. The Guardian Fri 6 Oct 2023

   [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. 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-6)
7. For the full text see *The Journal for Drama in Education* Volume 36, Issue 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)