

NATD

The National Association for the Teaching of Drama

Policy Document

Introduction

The National Association for the Teaching of Drama exists to promote and develop drama as an essential part of the child's entitlement to a full and balanced arts curriculum.

Drama in schools, along with other subjects, nationally and internationally continues to be under attack. The aim of this brief document is to provide a succinct statement of the case for its place in the curriculum, to aid those who seek to defend and develop the teaching of drama.

This document does not seek to argue to extend drama's place within the National Curriculum. It argues for a broader, richer, more human curriculum. To this end NATD continues to call for the repeal of ERA. Drama in Education, as a method of artistic enquiry in to the social world, stands in direct opposition to attempts to use education as a way of processing young people to meet the demands of the economy: to use Edward Bond's phrase 'a world of means without ends'.

This document focuses upon drama in schools but does not imply that drama, or learning, are matters confined to schools.

A full educational entitlement

An educational system needs to give all young people access to the full range of human culture. (Culture is seen here as the total of current and developing gains in human understanding and practice – in the arts, in the sciences – physical and social, in technology etc. It is the totality of what humanity, the major learning species, has learnt to know and to do). Young people, like every generation, have the task of developing human culture, of taking it on and participating in the struggle for human values. If the curriculum is to genuinely serve the needs of all young people it needs to:

1. have genuine breadth and range and not neglect some aspects of human culture at the expense of others;
2. help young people to grasp the unity and interconnectedness of culture – for example, how technology both shapes and is shaped by the social and political context; the crucial value judgments it raises; and the powerful influence technology has on the development of the arts;

3. assist young people to enquire critically into human culture – if they are to build on past gains their initiation cannot be a passive one: they need to understand the limitations, as well as the extent of those gains.

The Arts as part of a full educational entitlement

The arts are no less crucial to a full educational entitlement than any other aspect of human culture. Drama, dance, literature, music, the plastic and the visual arts and film and television are all ways of knowing the world, that humanity has developed through history to interrogate and make sense of the world and our experience in it. They employ our intuitive responses along with our analytical abilities to do this. Without these forms of knowing, huge areas of human experience and understanding are simply blocked out.

A curriculum which marginalises or omits the arts cannot serve young people any more than one which neglects science or technology. All must be present and in balance.

Drama in the Arts as part of a full educational entitlement

Drama, like all the arts, is an activity with its own inherent value. It is a powerful way of knowing, which harnesses feeling and thinking in an enquiry into the social world. In addition some of its key features as an art form make it a powerful means of learning across the curriculum.

Drama as an examination of human interaction and its roots

It allows young people to enquire into the values which inform society and the forces which shape it, and gives them an opportunity to formulate the values by which they wish to live.

Drama is a fiction

Because it allows us to step into any context we wish, and develop a perspective on it, drama allows us to expand enormously the range of contexts we can explore in the classroom. Drama offers the safety of exploring sensitive issues at one remove.

Through operating in role together, teachers and students can interact in a rich variety of ways which go beyond conventional classroom relationships. Through working on the inside in this way, teachers can both challenge and support young people in their learning in very powerful ways.

Drama is a social art form

It allows young people to tap the creative energy of the group and collectively take responsibility for shaping their work and their learning.

Drama works through metaphor and symbol

It enables young people to make connections between apparently dissimilar things, to see the extraordinary in the ordinary, and to 'catch' the essence of complex areas of human experience in a compact image.

Drama develops imagination

Drama begins with a felt disturbance in human affairs, which generates a tension and a struggle in action to resolve that disturbance. This is the role of the imagination.

It therefore creates precisely the conditions learning requires. Learning begins with a felt disturbance or disequilibrium in the learner's mind caused by a contradiction or incompleteness or a felt lack of coherence in the phenomenon to which the learner is attending. This arouses curiosity, and leads to a struggle to resolve the tension by achieving a better grasp of the phenomenon. The imagination is fired into productive work.

Drama deals with the concrete and specific contexts – particular people in a particular relationship in a particular place at a particular time.

It allows any facet of human experience that can arise in that context to be explored, and for different facets (e.g. the technological and the ethical) which might normally be kept apart to be brought into a relationship with each other. So, drama can act as a significant integrating force in the curriculum. It provides a rich opportunity for language development since language is shaped by (social) role, relationship, context and intention.

In drama two 'worlds' operate – the world of the fiction and the real world of those creating the fiction

This duality means that there is a built-in reflective dimension to the work, which develops in the learner an unusually high degree of awareness of their own thoughts and actions. It also means that they are not merely immersed in the particular, they are selectively using particulars to find in them abstractions and generalisations about human experience.

Drama uses the full range of human signing

It therefore plays to children's strengths in reading human interactions. Their own use of language in drama is embedded in, and supported by, other forms of signing.

A Statement in Support Of Drama in Education

The mind's various elements – reason, emotion, imagination, instinct, the perception of public and private – have no naturally integrated relationship. The relationship is created culturally – which is to say, we create the 'self' socially. It is this which makes us human. It is achieved through drama and other arts and cannot be properly achieved by other means.

All societies express their identity in art. There has never been a way of social living, a religion, a code of morality, a system of rule, without its art. Wittgenstein's understanding of language as game can be extended to see all personal and social relationships as drama. Always in the past, young people developed their profoundest intellectual ability in learning to be competent in this drama. In it they – just as a character in a play – learned who they were.

The games young children play amongst themselves involve their body and their mind. As they grow they naturally turn more and more to their society for involvement in their games: young people throw open to us all the doors – and if we do not enter the doors we estrange the young, making them society's enemies or (surely worse) its submissive, irresponsible automatons. This is the punishment we bear for our irresponsibility.

Drama helps young people to understand what they do and to create in themselves the ability to accept personal and social responsibility for it. That is why Drama in Education is so important. It enables us to learn these things in reasoning, creative ways.

All past societies used drama to achieve this end. We must not fail to use it now precisely when technology increasingly comes between us and the culture, customs and learning we inherit. Without it, Democracy – even bare civility – will not be possible.

EDWARD BOND

NATD, The National Association for the Teaching of Drama believes that:

The needs of the child must be placed at the centre of the educational process.

Teachers must be valued as professionals, responsible for assessing and meeting the needs of children.

Drama must be seen as an integral and equal partner in the teaching and learning opportunities in all our schools.

The arts are a crucial element in human development and therefore must be part of education.

Therefore we must continue to oppose ERA and to build a humanising curriculum which develops all young people to their full potential.

Education is the foundation stone on which a rich and human society is built.

NATD is a growing professional organisation for all concerned with Drama in Education. Its policy is one of supporting and promoting drama as part of a full and balanced education for all. It would support initiatives for work through unions and political parties to achieve these aims.