

Drama in the national curriculum education essay



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The aim of this report is to understand where Drama stands in education within England at present. It searches for its' mention within the National Curriculum and interprets what this means for the teaching of the subject. It looks at primary and secondary schools' current trends towards Drama as a discrete subject, and argues the benefits and disadvantages of it having its' own subject heading within the National Curriculum. The evidence will be evaluated and a conclusion formulated.

1. Drama in the National Curriculum.

The National Curriculum website provides the most up to date information on how Drama is placed within the curriculum. At first glance Drama is absent but mention of it can be located, mainly within the subject of English. [See Appendix One for a description of the requirements and activities for Key Stages (KS) 1 & 2. (National Curriculum, 2011a)]. Whilst there are aims and objectives published for KS1 & 2, at KS3 & 4 there is mention of selected playwrights as subjects to be studied and the expectation that at least one Shakespearean play will be explored in depth at each stage (National Curriculum, 2011b & c). References to the use of Drama appear under Literature [See Appendix Two] (National Curriculum, 2011d).

For England the Teachernet (Teachernet, 2011), DFES Drama Objectives (DFES, 2011) and QCDA (QCDA, 2011) resources have been/are being decommissioned with edited highlights appearing in the National Archive. In fact most of the Government resources advocated by the Initial Teacher Education website for English are no more (ITE, 2011a). The Department of Education website is replacing it, but the only suitable material found for

Drama is an item for the Speaking and Listening element at KS1 & 2 dated 2004 (Department of Education, 2011).

In Ireland drama is within the 'arts' sector, alongside visual arts and music. The strand is "Drama to explore feelings, knowledge and ideas, leading to understanding." They expect that when this subject is taught correctly it can help children at a young age to understand/relate and deal with life situations that can occur (Irish Curriculum, 2011). Whilst Drama is placed firmly in Arts Education as a trio with the visual and aural mediums, there is little support to be found in their Curriculum Planner as well (NCCA, 2011). Compare this to 52 resources for Drama in the Scottish Curriculum (Scottish Curriculum Resources for Drama, 2011). In Northern Ireland Drama is mentioned in Language & Literacy and has its own subject within The Arts and resources are well provided (N. Ireland Resources, 2011).

At KS1 & 2 the statutory subjects that all pupils must study are art and design, design and technology, English, geography, history, information and communication technology (ICT), mathematics, music, physical education and science. Religious education must also be provided at KS 1 and 2 (National Curriculum, 2011e), although there is a non-statutory program of study. From the National Curriculum (2011e) for Religious Education there are the following two points:

- 1). Explore how religious beliefs and ideas can be expressed through the arts and communicate their responses.
- 2). Using art and design, music, dance and drama to develop their creative talents and imagination.

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Art and design does not mention drama until KS 2 as follows from the National Curriculum (2011f): Exploring a range of starting points for practical work [for example, themselves, their experiences, images, stories, drama, music, natural and made objects and environments].

Yet making puppet theatres, and also creating atmosphere in sounds, lighting, backdrops and costumes for full size plays would make the subject more fun whilst defining a practical purpose for the work.

Drama in a similar way should be a fertile ground for scenery and special effects within Design and Technology yet it is not mentioned at all (National Curriculum, 2011g & 2011h). Music and Physical Education in a similar vein have a relationship to Drama through Dance but there is no credit for it. History could conceivably use period dramas to illustrate points and the appreciation of accuracy in the texts and writers' bias would then be covered in Drama. Stenhouse (1981, p. 29) is against the idea that Drama is for teaching other subjects in the curriculum and rejects the imagined realities of Drama for the authenticated realities of pure history. ICT could provide a multi-media back drop similar to that of exhibition trade stands and modern performances that use computerised effects and giant screens.

When the National Curriculum was being formulated teachers were vocal in their disapproval of the many curriculum subjects being loaded into the National Curriculum, such that subjects were curtailed following Music and Art (Baldwin, 2011). As the (NCCCE, 1999, p. 75) report states '...there are more than ten subjects in the world.' It also notes that Dance is not found with sport, games and athletics after education and that Drama is not just

verbal. (NACCCE, 1999, p. 76) points out that of all the countries in the QCA/NFER INCA archive, England was unique in having 10 discrete subjects from KS 1-4.

“ When the National Curriculum was introduced, specialist drama practitioners eagerly awaited the National Curriculum for Drama. They are still waiting.” (Baldwin, 2011).

Drama as part of English in the National Curriculum.

One of the ongoing debates about the nature of English centres around its relationship [sic] the creative arts. “ Is English an Arts based, creative discipline, or a much more functional, competency led subject?”, and “ Is Drama itself an Arts based discipline or a method of education, a form of learning?” (ITE, 2011b)

The role of drama in the curriculum remains in practice very much in doubt. It is believed that future employers have been unhappy with general educational standards of school leavers.

A contributory factor to this low estimation (for the subject) has been the political shift from a liberal view (of the centrality of aesthetic and artistic experience in education) towards a more vocationally – orientated view in which the secondary curriculum is seen rather as a feeder of commercial, industrial and post-industrial requirements as they have been immersing in recent years. (Morton, 1984, p. 56).

The Arts Council England (2003, p. 6) explains that all pupils’ minimum statutory entitlements for the study of Drama are acknowledged within the

National Curriculum for English. According to Ashcroft & Palacio (1995, p. 196), "The national curriculum firmly places drama within the English domain." Neelands (2008, p. 1) refers to the National Curriculum as the English Model where, "Drama was first introduced into the secondary curriculum through the English curriculum and timetable". He amusingly cites the fact that Shakespeare was English to explain how we arrived at this unique position, which has not been followed elsewhere in the world except maybe Wales (Welsh Curriculum KS 1 (2008) & Welsh Curriculum KS 2-4 (2008) where Drama is mentioned within English and to a lesser extent Welsh.

Drama as a subject in its' own right is not present in the primary curriculum, but as a part of English or R. E, or furnishing other areas and cross curricular themes. Even though Drama is absent from the curriculum for primary schools, it is still present through the activities and lessons which are taught using drama, "...many primary schools already include drama in their curriculum, without realizing that the activities the children are involved in are actually drama." (Arts on the move, 2010).

For High School teachers, it can be a problem for them to know what to expect of pupils entering KS 3, this is because of the lack of continuity in Drama across all the Primary Schools, therefore only an educated guess can be made on the pupils' prior drama experiences. Neelands (2004, p. 9) offers 6 points of common reference which can be found in Appendix Three.

According to Neelands (2008, p. 2) statistics show that,

...many schools in England do offer drama as a separate timetabled subject in Key Stage 3 and this makes drama the only 'subject' in the English system which is 'unregulated' in terms of a nationally agreed curriculum beyond the references to speaking and listening in the Orders for English".

So only at KS 3 do some pupils get the opportunity to take Drama as a separate subject but it is still an unofficial one. Whilst this offers a complete freedom in how the subject is taught and presented [see Neelands (2004, p. 5) for three different approaches at secondary level], it also means there is little in the way of a safety net for its practitioners that standards, assessments, guidelines and official support can provide. So it would appear that Drama has become a Cinderella subject that is busy working in the shadows whilst the Ugly Sisters of English and Religious Education take all the credit.

1. 2 How we got to where we are now.

"Most of what young people know of the world, they know through representations of it." (Neelands, 2008, p. 9), suggesting that schools have a moral obligation to help shape the citizenship of their students.

"There is little time allotted in the daily routine for drama in early childhood education settings, due to the pressure that many teachers feel to cover too many materials in too little time." (Jones and Reynolds, 1992, p. 7). This suggests that head teachers and teachers are forced to focus their concentration and resources on the subjects the 'really matter' For example, those subjects that are recorded as National statistics, showing how many A* - C students have obtained; in particular on Maths, English and Science.

Drama being mentioned in the curriculum saw a mixed reaction.

Some celebrated the “ fact” that Drama would now have to be taught. Others were quick to point out that there was a fundamental flaw here. There were few trained Drama teachers left. The reality has been, that hardly any Drama is happening (in Primary) despite the fact that it is deemed statutory. (Baldwin, 2011).

Yet Neelands (2008, p. 1) states that, “ In the English education system, all students in the 5-16 age range have an entitlement to drama within the National Curriculum Orders for English.” Baldwin (2011) the president of the International Drama/Theatre & Education Association provides a background to how Drama fell from grace, how a timely reaction to the rigid curriculum being built subject by subject stopped it being included at the eleventh hour and then, as it was no longer a subject, support for it fell away. Practitioners were left high and dry, as Drama was no longer part of Ofsted unless a fee was paid to assess it, which in one case ended up being marked as a ‘ Satisfactory’ P. E. lesson. Dearing tried to soften the curriculum but then came the constraints of the National Literacy Strategy which concentrated on reading and writing for the ‘ Literacy Hour’ at the expense of speaking and listening. However Winston & Tandy (2001, p. 75-86) in their chapter entitled ‘ Drama and literacy’ provide some ideas for including Drama within the hour.

Then at Secondary level we find a carte blanche where anything goes with Drama either as a separate subject taught by a Drama specialist or as a continuing addition within English or as another entity, which perhaps suits

the more pronounced different streams of ability. Neelands (2004, p. 5-6) noticed that the various sources of national guidance for Drama, for example the specific references to Drama in the Programs of Study for English showed a general agreement for the aims and objectives for Drama, such as:

Drama as personal, social and moral education

Drama as English

Drama as a subject in its own right.

As stated earlier he cites three very different secondary schools each illustrating one of these points as their individual approach to Drama.

The demands of a nationally prescribed curriculum put considerable pressure on teachers to “fit everything in”; each subject has its own expectations and makes its own particular demands. Finding the time for Drama, however highly you and your class may value it in its own right, can be difficult- the more so if we are going to give the Drama time to develop, deepen the children’s involvement and understanding, and reach a satisfactory conclusion. (Winston & Tandy, 2001, p. 54)

Ashcroft & Palacio (1997, p. 6) infer that longer serving teachers will find the prescribed nature of the National Curriculum and all its revisions to be a bone of contention. On the other hand –

The lack of core guidance for Drama, the parallel development of Drama within English with its development as a discrete Arts subject, together with the diversity of models of curriculum and assessment to be found in schools

make it a particularly problematic area of English teaching for trainees. (ITE, 2011c)

Especially as:

School Drama Co-ordinators disappeared almost overnight, as did LEA Drama Advisers and advisory teachers. Drama courses became few and far between, relying more and more on professional organisations, which were and are run voluntarily, by increasingly stretched full time teachers and lecturers. (Baldwin, 2011).

CHAPTER TWO – ARGUMENTS FOR DRAMA BEING A DISCRETE SUBJECT

“ As part of a broad and balanced curriculum, drama has a significant contribution to make” (Winston & Tandy, 2001, p. 73). “ Drama, more than any other subject in the curriculum, mirrors life as it is lived and experienced” (Winston, 2004, p. 18). Please see Appendix Five for some positive results Winston (2004) notes as being seen in children’s writing due to their involvement with Drama.” At least a national agreement provides some external, relatively objective and visible materials to discuss” (Neelands, 2004, p. 6).

However, the absence of a nationally agreed framework for Drama gives two points of concern;

The individual Drama teacher has no external framework to follow, therefore the success of the Drama class is completely at the mercy of the ability or lack thereof of the teacher;

How Drama is perceived at the school may well be based on the head teachers' predilections and prejudices.

To illustrate this point I found at X High School, where the author has experienced Drama via a teaching training day placement, it was noticeable that Drama is thought of as a high priority subject. This was thanks to the Head realising that in a catchment area of high poverty Drama provided interest and expression for children that found reading and writing difficult. The school used Drama also as a marketing tool to promote itself to the wider community and its governors. It held annual Drama productions, school assemblies were punctuated with Drama in the form of funny sketches or more serious pieces designed to entertain and inform, it supported fundraising activities etc. Drama here is a timetabled subject throughout all the year groups, and is offered as an A-level subject.

As Ashcroft & Palacio (1995, p. 196) advocate, " Primary school pupils can develop through drama an extensive range of language uses, including the majority of those referred to in the national curriculum." "...drama is a social process of making meaning...the framework and method of drama provides a unique context for developing a sense of identity and productiveness." (Morton, 1984, p. 37).

" All Our Futures" had already clearly recognised the importance of Drama, both as a creative teaching and learning medium and as the most powerful pupil motivator: " OFSTED data on pupil response to learning indicates drama to be at the very top in motivating learning" (NACCCE, 1999, p. 77). Drama in education can help pupils learn and understand whatever is

required, in ways that are emotionally, aesthetically and cognitively connected and meaningful to children who are natural dramatic players.”

CHAPTER THREE – ARGUMENTS AGAINST DRAMA BEING A

DESCRETE SUBJECT

“...drama is a process that cannot be divided into a series of discrete and accessible outcomes in the kind of way that curriculum theorists have managed to do with many other subjects in the curriculum” (Young, 1981, p. 94). Baldwin (2011) states:

Trainees are likely to encounter a diverse range of arrangements for drama within schools. In the absence of national orders and a statutory subject framework, schools are free to design their own local variations of a drama curriculum based on the specific value given to drama in a particular school. Cynics were heard to mutter, that with an assessment driven curriculum emerging, process based drama would be too problematic for SCAA (as it was then) to deal with.

Assessment in Drama has always been tricky as so much goes on cognitively and emotionally during the Drama process that is not easy or even possible to assess. It is noted that this argument appears amongst many professionals, but no suggestions as to what criteria could be used is suggested. Is this because they believe there is to be none.

Baldwin, (2011) continues. “ Assessment records were being revealed as lists of statements of attainment tick boxes and needed to be based on easily

observable, extrinsic outcomes” suggesting that Drama specialists were not sure they wanted such a meaningful and aesthetic art form measured and graded in this way..

Neelaands appears to contradict his issues by stating

The local curriculum can be based on a highly idiosyncratic and ideologically motivated selection. What is taught may be left to the whim of an individual teacher and may reflect personal prejudices and interests rather than the breadth of depth of study which is a pupil’s entitlement (Neelands, 2004, p. 6).

Yet according to Neelands on the Initial Teacher Education website (ITE, 2011d),

The non-statutory Framework drama objectives might usefully form the basis of the programme of study for drama at KS3. However, these specific objectives are unlikely to be considered sufficient as core objectives for drama as a discrete subject because they do not cover physical, visual, design and technical aspects of drama.

This suggests that although the concerns of Patrice Baldwin are relevant, the concerns of the ITE is that without a defined structure and specific objectives, the importance of Drama could be overlooked. This point of view is rejected by Way (1967, p. 12) who

points out, “ If we make drama another subject, then we make another ‘ progressive straight line’ – in fact many straight lines, one for infants, one for juniors, and so on through the different age groups.”

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Again, because of its ' uniqueness' there is a concern over how Drama can be ' measured' i. e. marked. Way (1967, p. 3) wrote, " Education is concerned with individuals; drama is concerned within the individuality of individuals, with the uniqueness of each human essence. Indeed this is one of the reasons for its intangibility and its immeasurability."

As Drama is not in the National Curriculum as its own subject, it might be seen as unimportant. With the pressures on schools to be ranked via league tables on the core subjects of English, Maths and Science, it is perhaps not surprising that schools focus on these subjects to the detriment of all else. However, the subject still has its own written examinations and an external examiner is called in to mark performances. It is therefore unclear as to the reasons behind why the subject is deemed by some to be difficult to assess.

CONCLUSION

" Ultimately, drama is a valuable tool, but first the tool itself must be fashioned." (Way, 1967, p. 7).

There appears to be a divide in international practice over whether Drama should be used across the curriculum or as a subject within its own right and/or as part of the arts agenda.

There were those who thought that if assessment was going to be the name of the game, then drama could and should be made to fit, in order to ensure its place in the new curriculum. And there were those who breathed a sigh of relief that drama did not fit and had been left outside the new curriculum,

where at least it would allow a greater freedom of practice and content, within the broader curriculum (Baldwin, 2011).

Therefore, unless the individual schools value Drama, and encourage Drama teacher training, the concern is that the level of teaching Drama will not be sufficient to add any value to teaching within the school as a whole.

According to Ashcroft and Palacio (1995, p. 203) there are two types of Drama within the National Curriculum spectrum, one being performance based activities, such as assemblies and school plays, and the other being educational Drama, which involves children in the active creation and exploration of situations based on fact or fiction.

“...it is regarded by many teachers as a learning method rather than a subject area because it can be employed to deliver many aspects of the curriculum very effectively.” (Ashcroft and Palacio, 1995, p. 204).

Art is useful, not because it is true but because it is truly edifying. It is because drama - as - art functions in this way that a dramatic work cannot be explained, paraphrased or deconstructed into essays. Like any other art form, drama is unique and non - convertible... it resists crassly utilitarian efforts to corral it into the service of geography, history or management training as much as it refuses to be the acquiescent servant of personal, social, or political education. In a secular age, the usefulness of drama lies in its ability to articulate meaning in particular direct and accessible ways so that we, in turn, can make better sense of the world in which we live. For these reasons, drama is an indispensable part of the arts curriculum. (Hornbrook, 1991, p. 40-41).

Whilst we cannot expect the commitment of the National Theatre at every Primary School (Turner et al., 2004) they offer a model of best practice that can be used within the subject of Drama to really bring out the confidence and intellect of young children and this should be the ultimate goal whether Drama is housed within English or is a subject in its own right.

Does this then mean that drama is yet another subject that has to be fitted into an already overcrowded curriculum? No. Drama is not another subject; theatre might be, with its ground work in history and its study of playwrights and their works but not drama. Drama is as intangible as personality itself, and is concerned with developing people. Indeed, it is as necessary to discard educational conventions as to disregard theatre conventions (Way, 1967, p. 7).

The arguments will rage on but only the will of the government can make a difference to the position Drama as a subject or non-subject is in. The conclusion drawn from all the evidence in this report is that Drama should be included as a subject in its own right in the National Curriculum, but not as the curriculum currently stands. There appears to be insufficient structure and no definitive way that the success of pupils taking Drama can be measured. To try and 'fit' it into the current curriculum could restrict its usefulness as a holistic well being tool for the personal growth of pupils. How could this be measured in academic terms? There could be pupils who come alive as actors and give wonderful performances, but cannot translate this successfully into a written piece of work. How does one measure personal growth? How can we mark a student who has grown in confidence, can express themselves better than before the introduction of the Drama lesson,

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and interacts well with other students in the class? Whereas before the use of Drama they may have been antagonistic, dealing with personal issues which had no voice except in eruptions of violent behaviour.

One can set tests to measure the knowledge of the literacy greats, the search for meaning in the works of the playwrights but should this lie here or within the realms of English Literature, such that it cannot be used as a mark of success or failure for Drama students.

The conclusion gathered is that this testing should be left within the English subject, thus allowing students of Drama more freedom to express themselves through this wonderful medium. It has been shown that Drama is a useful tool in the understanding of other subjects, but it should first be enjoyed and understood in its own right.

The greatest problem for Drama being included in its own right in the National Curriculum appears to be the way the success of subjects are currently judged. There does not appear to be current procedures that can fairly measure the true success and positive impact Drama can have on a student's life. For example with a Mathematics exam there is a definite right answer with marks available for showing your workings out, but what is the 'right' answer in Drama?

The division between the teaching professionals as to the inclusion or not of Drama in the National Curriculum can be understood after researching and investigating this question. The concerns are that the importance of Drama within the schools is currently dependant on the will of the head teacher and the ability, passion and commitment of the Drama staff. Drama teachers'

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experiencing schools who class Drama as a ' fill-in' subject and not that important will have experienced first hand the argument that Drama should be included.

It could be very demoralising to the Drama teacher who feels that their work, however committed they are, maybe seen as unimportant. However those Drama teachers experiencing and enjoying a school that appreciates Drama and uses it throughout school life for example in assemblies, community gatherings and the annual school performance may enjoy the freedom of the subject not being included in the National Curriculum, as they do not feel threatened about the validity of their teaching skills.

There appears to be no straightforward conclusion over Drama's inclusion in the National Curriculum, however it must be pointed out that other parts of the British Isles make Drama a subject in its own right and provide excellent support for it. Perhaps there are lessons to be learned from the way they have gone about this by an exchange of ideas on best practice. For example what criteria are they using to measure Drama's success as a subject; are more or less students choosing Drama as a subject at Secondary level; has its status had a positive or negative effect on the teachers? Without knowing the answers to these questions and many more besides we cannot hold these countries up as shining examples.

There needs to be a way of trying to take the best from the arguments for and against Drama's inclusion in the National Curriculum. For example this research has shown that most of the Drama professionals feel that both the subject and they benefit from its inclusion to put them on a level playing

field with other subjects. They believe that they may be taken more seriously and have more support from training being given. The concern of its inclusion appears to be that it could stifle the very creativity and freedom of expression some professionals believe Drama should be. They all appear to agree that Drama cannot be measured in academic terms as easily as other subjects as no ' marks' are awarded for students personal development.

Therefore after research and investigation into this question, the final conclusion is that Drama should be included in the National Curriculum as a discrete subject but only after the creation of relevant success criteria is added. Once there is an acceptable measurement formula in place Drama would then benefit from inclusion. As it stands at present there does not appear to be sufficient steps in place to recognise Drama students' success.