

Drama Makes Meaning



Drama Australia – The National Association for Drama Education

What is Drama?

Drama is an artform highly accessible to young people. In education, it is a mode of learning that challenges and supports students to make meaning of their world and enables them to express and communicate ideas in the artform.

- Drama is the enactment of real and imagined events through roles and situations.
- Drama enables individuals and groups to explore, shape and symbolically represent ideas and feelings and their consequences.
- Drama has the capacity to move and transform participants and audiences. It can affirm and challenge values, cultures and identities.
- Drama includes a wide range of experiences, such as dramatic play, improvisation, role-play, text interpretation, theatrical performance and multi-modal/hybrid texts. It includes the processes of making, presenting and responding.
- Drama draws on many different contexts, from past and present societies and cultures.

Drama is one of the five arts subjects that make up the Australian Curriculum: The Arts.

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Drama Australia uses the term drama broadly to represent related fields of artistic activity including theatre and performance. Drama encompasses a range of activities that both share conceptual similarities as well as specific differences relating to form and purpose. Drama is recognised and celebrated as a relevant and significant art form that both reflects and contributes to culture.

An Education in Drama

Drama in the school curriculum can develop students' artistic skills and creative dispositions.

It can also enable students to generate new knowledge and skills that are transferable to a variety of artistic, social and work-related contexts.

An education in drama can:

- Humanise learning by providing lifelike learning contexts in which students can actively participate in non-threatening, safe and supportive ways.
- Empower students to understand and influence their world through exploring roles, situations and modes of symbolic expression and communication.
- Develop students' non-verbal and verbal, individual and group communication skills.
- Develop students' intellectual, social, physical, emotional and moral domains through learning that engages their thoughts, feelings, bodies and actions.
- Develop students' capacity to work collaboratively with others.
- Encourage students to critically reflect and become active members of the Australian community through their engagement in dramatic contexts relating to societies, cultures and ideologies.
- Develop students' knowledge, understanding and skills in drama to participate in one of the oldest yet most dynamic art forms, as part of their rich and diverse cultural heritages.
- Promote students' experience in and understanding of other artforms.

Drama involves aesthetic learning

Within the curriculum, students engaging in drama activities are participating in aesthetic learning. This is a mode of learning in which students engage with their senses, cognitively and affectively. It is a means of enquiry that contributes uniquely to students' understanding of the world we live in.

The focus of learning is on students making, presenting, understanding and valuing drama in a variety of contexts. An education in drama involves:

Drama students as artists

- In making, creating and presenting drama, students learn to control and manage the elements of drama in order to structure and make their own drama, or to interpret and recreate existing published and unpublished drama texts.
- Students develop skills to think and communicate critically and creatively through using the elements of drama. They learn specific skills related to the effective use of voice, gesture and movement as well as skills in acting, directing, playwriting, technical theatre and design.
- In working through themes and issues in making and presenting activities, students explore and test out values and ethics, develop empathy and understanding of self and others, and find ways to symbolically represent ideas and feelings.
- Students learn about the nature, function and purposes of drama, dramatic forms and styles in different cultures and contexts.
- Through participating in drama, students develop their capacities of expression and imagination with a focus on combining intellect, cognition and the senses.
- The process of making and presenting drama gives students opportunities to develop skills in interpreting, researching, negotiating, revising and refining, problem-solving, goal-setting and decision-making.
- In presenting drama, students share their work with others, learn about the importance of clear and evocative communication and in so doing develop self-confidence and communication skills.
- The democratic and collaborative nature of dramatic ensemble work develops social, intrapersonal and interpersonal awareness.

Drama students as critics

- Students engage in a range of responses to drama from the spontaneous to the critically analytical.
- Responding in drama involves cognition, emotion, and intuition, and engages students in describing, reflecting upon, interpreting, evaluating, and making judgments.
- Informed and knowledgeable responses to drama employ logical, conceptual and metaphorical thinking processes.

Drama students as historians and social commentators

- Students place their own drama in the context of contemporary Australian society. They consider past and present Australian drama, the drama of diverse cultures communities and societies, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and groups.
- Their involvement in an historical perspective on drama helps students to understand how communities' cultural and social identities are shaped and how they function in today's world.
- Through playing roles and situations in drama, students are able to gain new perspectives and develop empathy.
- Students create and perform dramatic texts with an awareness of how a sense of purpose and audience can contribute to sharing ideas and understandings with others.

Drama – The Cultural Industry and Employment

Drama and Cultural Development

- The Australian government recognises that culture plays an essential role in expressing identity for all Australians.
- The federal government's Cultural Policy Statement makes the concept of 'community' a priority. The policy aims to give the experience of 'culture' back to the community by providing more Australians with better opportunities to participate actively in the nation's cultural development.
- Australian students, through an education in the arts, can play a role in the developing cultures of Australia.

Drama, the Economy, and Employment

- The contribution of the cultural and creative economy to Australian GDP (2008-2009) was \$86 billion, ~7% of GDP. In 2010 private cultural spending was just under \$20 billion. The Arts, therefore, make a significant contribution to the nation's economy, both in terms of consumer expenditure and employment opportunities.
- In recent years the Australian Bureau of Census and Statistics has identified the cultural industry as one of the fastest growing employment areas.
- An education in drama provides essential learning for many areas of employment contributing to skills in: communicating ideas and information; planning and organisational skills; creativity, critical thinking and problem-solving skills; group negotiating and decision-making skills; skills in working as a team and independently; intercultural understanding; goal-oriented and self-disciplined behaviour.
- Study in drama leads directly to employment in the Arts, Communication and Entertainment Industries. Many tertiary courses are available throughout Australia to prepare young people for specific roles in these industries.
- Employment opportunities in hundreds of different careers and jobs are enhanced through a background in drama. Many occupations, particularly those in the tourist and hospitality industries as well as those which involve close contact with the public, actively seek recruits with a drama background.
- Drama helps individuals develop confidence in dealing with other people, confidence in developing new skills and confidence in presenting an appropriate public image.

Careers and Occupations related to Drama

Here are some jobs related to the rapidly expanding Arts, Communication and Entertainment Industries.

- Actor (stage, film, TV)
- Advertising agency worker
- Arts administrator
- Applied theatre practitioner
- Camera operator
- Casting director
- Choreographer
- Cinematographer
- Community arts worker
- Continuity person
- Costume designer
- Costume maker
- Dancer
- Movement coach
- Dance teacher
- Director (stage, film, TV)
- Disc jockey
- Dramaturg
- Education officer in Arts organisations
- Film/TV editor
- Floor manager
- Journalist – print/TV/radio
- Leisure officer
- Lighting designer/technician
- Make up artist
- Marketing professional
- Mime artist
- Singer

- Musician
- Playwright
- Pre-school teacher
- Primary teacher
- Production manager/assistant
- Properties person
- Publicity manager
- Public relations consultant
- Public servant in Arts-related departments
- Radio announcer
- Scriptwriter
- Secondary drama teacher
- Set designer
- Sound recordist/technician
- Stage manager
- Stunt performer
- Technical producer
- Television presenter
- Lecturer/academic
- Theatre critic
- Theme park entertainer
- Voice coach
- Wardrobe supervisor
- Workshop leader/facilitator
- Youth worker

Advocacy – Drama Australia Position Statements

These position statements are for use in any education or community forum or context where advocacy for the place of the arts and drama in educational settings may be necessary.

1. The arts have been endorsed as one of the key components of the Australian Curriculum. This curriculum provides access to quality arts learning to all Australian students regardless of location or circumstances.
2. All arts curriculum areas within a school have equal status. Drama, like all the arts in schools, should be supported with adequate staffing and funding, and with suitable facilities provided. (For examples see Drama Australia's Guidelines for Working Conditions for Teaching and Learning in Drama.)
[View website »](#)
3. Drama, within the Australian Curriculum: The Arts, is a separate subject area in its own right with a clearly delineated scope and sequence of content.
4. In multidisciplinary contexts and when facilitated by expert teachers, drama is an effective pedagogy, which can provide a frame for deep and rich learning in other subject areas.
5. There is a strong recognition that interaction between drama and the other arts, especially at preschool and primary levels, can contribute to the diversity and richness of the arts experience.
6. An education in drama, as in all the arts, is 'vital to students' success as individuals and as members of society, emphasising not only creativity and imagination, but also the values of cultural understanding and social harmony that the arts can engender' (Ewing, 2010, p. 5).
7. Drama provides rich opportunities for aesthetic education, allowing students to engage sensuously, imaginatively and cognitively in a mode of enquiry that contributes uniquely to the students' understanding of the world we live in. Those parts of the community that directly influence educational policy should recognise the importance of an aesthetic education for all students.
8. Pre-service primary teacher education should include learning about and implementing a drama curriculum for the primary classroom. There is an onus of responsibility on teacher educators in tertiary institutions to be well informed on drama education in the primary classroom and to be proactive in raising its profile in the primary curriculum.
9. Drama education at all levels of schooling should recognise Australia's social and cultural diversity and make every effort to be socially and culturally relevant to all students.
10. Drama education is an opportunity to engage students in thinking critically about the world's future and fostering awareness of the role of the arts in developing social and environmental sustainability. (See Drama Australia's Guidelines for Sustainable Drama Practice and Drama Teaching.)
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11. Drama education at all levels of schooling should provide opportunities to learn about the Indigenous cultures and dramatic traditions of this country. (See Drama Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Guidelines for Drama/Theatre Education.)
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12. Drama Australia is committed to principles of equity and diversity and the rights of all students to an education in drama, and for participation in the arts. Drama Australia understands the important ways that experiences in drama can work to counteract discrimination and practise inclusion and equity. Drama Australia highly recommends drama educators become familiar with the equity and diversity guidelines presented on drama and diversity of ability, gender, sexuality, cultural and linguistic background, and socio-economic background. (See Drama Australia Equity and Diversity Guidelines and Statements.)
[View website »](#)

Professional resources

On the Drama Australia website www.dramaaustralia.org.au you will find links to:

- **Publications**
 - *NJ: The Journal of Drama Australia*
 - *Drama Australia Monographs*
- **Professional Association Guidelines**
 - *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander guidelines for drama/theatre education*
 - *Acting Green: guidelines for sustainable drama/theatre practice and drama teaching*
 - *Equity and diversity guidelines for drama/theatre education*
 - *Working conditions guidelines for teaching and learning in drama*

Additional useful online resources

DICE Consortium. (2010). *The DICE has been cast: research findings and recommendations on educational theatre and drama*. Hungary: DICE Consortium & European Commission.

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Ewing, R. (2010). *The Arts and Australian Education: realising potential*. Camberwell, Vic.: Australian Council for Educational Research.

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Instinct and Reason. (2010). *More than bums on seats: Australian participation in the arts*. Sydney, Australia: Australia Council.

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DRAMA AUSTRALIA

The National Association for Drama Education – Australia

Drama Australia is the peak Australian professional body representing the national interest of drama educators at every level of schooling. The following state and territory associations are affiliates of Drama Australia:

- ACTDA – ACT Drama (Educators’) Association
- Drama New South Wales
- Drama Queensland
- Drama Tasmania
- Drama Victoria
- DramaWest
- Drama South Australia

Drama Australia aims to:

- encourage and promote all facets of drama in education at all levels of education;
- provide a national focus for drama activity in Australia;
- promote awareness of the value of drama in education in the wider community;
- provide a national forum for the exchange of ideas on drama and education;
- promote qualitative and quantitative research in drama and education.

Drama Australia is a member of the peak arts education body, the National Advocates for Arts Education (NAAE) chaired by Julie Dyson (AM). NAAE advocates for arts education in schools, develops arts education policy, promotes quality teaching and learning in the arts, and works with government agencies, teachers, schools and tertiary institutions. As the recognised peak association in the arts learning area, the NAAE provides access to an extensive network of arts educators and artists, and represents the interests, concerns, values and priorities of arts educators across Australia.

Drama Australia is an affiliate of IDEA, the International Drama/Theatre and Education Association. IDEA advocates in the international forum for the universal right to an arts education and, in particular, for the place of drama/theatre in the education of each person.

For further information about Drama Australia, the state and territory associations, IDEA or NAAE, please contact:



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