

DRAMA AUSTRALIA

WORKING CONDITIONS

FOR TEACHING & LEARNING IN DRAMA

A position paper and guidelines on teaching
and learning in Drama in Australian schools

Released
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DRAMA AUSTRALIA POSITION PAPER:

WORKING CONDITIONS FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING IN DRAMA: a Drama Australia position paper and guidelines on teaching and learning in Drama in Australian schools.

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Executive Summary

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This Executive Summary distils the key principles, expectations, and recommendations articulated in *Working Conditions for Teaching and Learning in Drama* (Drama Australia, 2026). It is intended to inform and guide teachers, school leaders, employers, and policymakers by clearly articulating the conditions required to ensure safe, equitable, and high-quality drama education in Australian schools. This summary should be read in conjunction with the full position paper, from which it is derived, as the complete document provides the evidence base, detailed rationale, and comprehensive guidance necessary for informed decision-making and implementation.

Introduction

This revised position paper (2026) sets out national expectations and minimum standards for the provision of safe, equitable, and high-quality drama education in Australian schools.

Drawing upon national consultation, surveys of Drama Australia Liaison Officers and members, input from the Drama Australia Executive, and a review of national and international literature, this 2026 edition updates and supersedes the 2001 and 2009 position papers. It responds to the complex pedagogical, technical, and wellbeing demands inherent in drama as both a discipline and a mode of embodied learning.

Background and Purpose

This fully revised edition reflects research conducted by the authors in partnership with the profession. Its purpose is to safeguard the conditions under which drama is taught and learned by establishing clear, system-wide expectations that support compliance with occupational, environmental, and health and safety requirements, promote equitable access to quality provision, and recognise the specialised expertise of drama educators.

Scope of Application

The guidelines apply to all drama learning environments, including classrooms, studios, multipurpose spaces, theatres, and outdoor areas, and to all personnel engaged in drama lessons, rehearsals, productions, workshops, or technical operations.

The Role of Drama in Education

Drama is affirmed as a distinct art form, a curriculum discipline, a pedagogical approach, and a mode of embodied learning. Through these intersecting roles, drama contributes significantly to students' intellectual, social, emotional, and cultural development.

Drama Across Schooling Contexts

Early Childhood: Structured dramatic play should be supported by educators with knowledge of drama processes.

Primary: Drama should be taught continuously as a formal arts subject, ideally by trained teachers, with access to specialists and artists-in-residence.

Secondary: Drama should be taught by qualified specialists, aligned with contemporary curricular documentation such as the Australian Curriculum (V9), and supported through appropriate staffing and resources.

Co-curricular Drama

Productions, festivals, drama clubs, and community partnerships are integral to quality drama provision. These activities require adequate resourcing, robust safety structures, and formal recognition of teacher workload and expertise.

Guiding Principles

Drama is multifaceted, an art form, subject, pedagogy, and learning mode. Effective provision is underpinned by commitments to equity, safety, wellbeing, and recognition of specialist professional knowledge.

Collective Responsibilities

Leaders should maintain safe facilities, provide appropriate training, and ensure compliance. Teachers should conduct risk assessments, implement safe practice, and monitor physical and emotional wellbeing (of both students and themselves). Students should follow safety protocols and report hazards.

Access to Performances

Students require access to diverse live and digital performance experiences. Such access supports artistic literacy, cultural engagement, and inclusive participation regardless of geographic location or socioeconomic circumstance.

Production Work

Productions should balance creative ambition with safety, sustainability, statutory compliance, and realistic recognition of teacher workload and remuneration where possible. Inclusive practices and adequate rehearsal time are essential to safe and meaningful participation.

Professional Development

Schools should support teachers' membership in professional drama associations, fund high-quality professional learning, and enable student access to artists, workshops, and excursions.

Environmental and Occupational Health & Safety

Drama involves inherent technical, physical, and emotional risks. Safe sound levels, electrical compliance, appropriate storage, trained technical personnel, hazard management, and safe flooring are essential components of safe practice.

Wellbeing

The embodied and affective nature of drama requires deliberate structures to safeguard the wellbeing of both students and teachers from fatigue, strain, and emotional overload. Warm-ups, de-roling strategies, trauma-informed practices, realistic timetabling, and collegial support are critical to sustainable participation.

Duty of Care

Drama teachers hold a significant duty of care to create emotionally, physically, and psychologically safe learning environments. As students engage in vulnerable, imaginative, and embodied practices, teachers must maintain clear boundaries, ethical conduct, and attentive supervision. By modelling professionalism, consent, inclusivity, and empathy, teachers ensure that creative risk is appropriately balanced with wellbeing, enabling students to feel secure, respected, and valued.

Class Sizes

Drama Australia recommends a maximum class size of 25 students, with 20 considered optimal, in recognition of the supervision, movement, and emotionally engaged nature of drama learning.

Lesson Duration and Frequency

Secondary lessons should be no shorter than 50 minutes, with at least one double period of 100-minutes per week to support rehearsal processes and developmental learning.

Learning Spaces

Drama spaces should be safe, flexible, accessible, acoustically appropriate, well-ventilated, providing approximately one square metre per person. Adequate storage and technical infrastructure are essential.

Budgets

Effective drama programs require sustained funding for materials, props, costumes, technology, professional learning, copyright, production costs, and engagement of industry professionals.

Conclusion

Drama education is both a student entitlement and a professional responsibility. Upholding the standards articulated in this paper ensures that drama programs across Australia remain vibrant, safe, equitable, inclusive and transformative for all teachers and learners.



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Preamble

Background

Drama Australia is the peak national body for drama education in Australia. The drama education associations in each state and territory are members of Drama Australia. In the late 1990s Drama Australia conducted a major national survey to determine the working conditions of drama educators across the states and territories. Whilst it was found that drama is taught in Australian schools in a wide variety of contexts, there were some principles that commonly underpinned its pedagogical working conditions. This resulted in a document which was published by Drama Australia in 2001 entitled, *Position Paper on Working Conditions for Teaching and Learning in Drama*. The paper was intended to be both a support for enhanced working conditions for drama teaching and learning in pre-schools, primary schools and secondary schools and a guide to teachers on issues of health and safety in their drama teaching. A revised edition was produced in 2009 after surveying members and facilitating an extensive consultation process. Now seventeen years later a third, fully revised edition has been produced applying a similar methodology. The 2026 edition has been informed by the following:

- A survey of state and territory Drama Australia Liaison Officers (DALOs)
- A survey of Drama Australia members (drama associations and teachers across the country)
- Input from members of the Drama Australia Executive
- A literature review of comparable national and international documents.

Purpose

This position paper establishes minimum standards for safe, equitable, and sustainable working conditions for drama teachers and students within schools. It ensures that teaching, rehearsal, and performance activities are conducted in compliance with relevant Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) and Environmental Health and Safety (EH&S) legislation and that the wellbeing of both staff and students is safeguarded. Drama Australia recommends that it be adopted by school leadership, drama departments, and governing authorities to support best practice in drama education.

Scope

This position paper applies to:

- All drama classrooms, school theatres, multipurpose spaces, and outdoor areas used for drama activities.
- All teaching staff, students, contractors, and volunteers involved in school-based drama activities.
- All drama-related activities, including lessons, rehearsals, productions, workshops, and technical operations.

NB: In this position paper the writers use the term 'drama' to be read as 'drama' or 'drama/theatre' as applicable.

The Role of Drama in Education

Drama Australia affirms that:

- Drama should be taught and learned as a distinct arts discipline.
- Drama may also serve to complement and enrich learning across the broader curriculum.
- Co-curricular activities in schools should incorporate drama as a central component.
- Students should be afforded opportunities to experience live performance, both as active participants and as members of an audience.

Furthermore, Drama Australia advocates that:

- Explicit and comprehensive curriculum statements on drama be developed and implemented for all young Australians.
- All young people are entitled to access quality drama education during their schooling and should have equitable access to drama education.
- Students with additional needs should be provided with full access to drama in schools, with classrooms designed to meet their learning requirements (Drama Australia, 2015).
- The diversity of all individuals engaged in drama education—teachers, students, and communities should be acknowledged, respected, and celebrated (Drama Australia, 2015).
- The working conditions required for the effective teaching and learning of drama should be explicitly recognised by schools, educational authorities, and the wider community.
- Drama education should be delivered within a healthy, secure, and safe learning environment underpinned by a strong duty of care.

Drama in Early Childhood

Drama Australia recommends that:

- Early childhood classrooms provide opportunities for both adult-structured and child-structured dramatic play and other improvised forms of drama including process drama and puppetry, giving children the chance to pretend, collaborate, adopt roles and engage in dramatic action.
- Early childhood educators be trained in, or possess knowledge of, drama processes to support the effective facilitation of drama-based learning.

Drama in Primary Schools

Drama Australia recommends that:

- All primary students should have continuous access to drama programs throughout their schooling.
- Drama should be taught as a formal arts discipline/subject within the primary curriculum.
- All primary students should have the opportunity to learn drama as an artform in accordance with the Australian Curriculum (V9) – The Arts – Drama.
- Drama should form an integral component of both cross-curricular learning.
- Drama teaching and learning programs should be developed and sustained in accordance with contemporary drama education philosophy, research and practice.
- Drama instruction should be delivered by classroom teachers who have undertaken training in, or hold knowledge of, drama pedagogy and processes.
- Where resources permit, schools should provide access to specialist drama teachers and/or artists-in-residence. These professionals should collaborate with classroom teachers in school-based, integrated programs, thereby enhancing teacher expertise and enriching student learning opportunities.

Drama in Secondary Schools

Drama Australia recommends that:

- Secondary students be provided with sustained opportunities to engage with drama throughout their schooling.
- Drama in secondary schools should be taught as a formal arts discipline/subject by teachers with recognised pre-service training in drama education.
- Each state and territory should maintain an explicitly stated curriculum for drama, informed by contemporary drama education philosophy, research and practice, including the Australian Curriculum (V9) – The Arts - Drama.
- Staffing levels for drama should reflect the unique demands of the discipline and the requirements identified in this document.
- Schools should provide access to artists-in-residence and additional specialist teachers, as appropriate, to support drama staff and enrich learning experiences.
- Drama subjects in post-compulsory and tertiary entrance years should be accorded appropriate status, resourcing, and staffing, ensuring that students are able to achieve strong academic outcomes and recognition.

Co-curricular Drama

Drama Australia maintains that:

- Students should be given opportunities to participate in drama through co-curricular programs.
- Schools should recognise and support the contributions of students, teachers, and community members involved in co-curricular drama activities, such as productions, drama camps, excursions, competitions/festivals, and community projects.
- Schools should acknowledge the additional workload undertaken by teachers in the coordination of co-curricular drama programs and ensure that appropriate support and resources are provided.

Guiding Principles of this position paper

Drama Australia asserts the following guiding principles for the teaching and learning of drama across educational contexts.

Drama is a complex and multidimensional discipline that operates simultaneously as:

- **An art form:** A significant vehicle for creative expression, storytelling, and cultural engagement
- **A nationally recognised curriculum subject:** A core component of the Arts learning area within formal education
- **A method of teaching:** An innovative pedagogical approach that fosters engagement and deep learning
- **A mode of learning:** A distinctive means of developing cognitive, cultural, social, and personal capabilities.

Drama Australia affirms the vital contribution of drama education to the intellectual, social, cultural, and emotional development of students. Accordingly, the association urges the Australian community to acknowledge publicly the expertise and commitment of drama teachers and the achievements of drama students publicly, thereby reinforcing the value and legitimacy of the discipline in educational and cultural contexts.

Equitable access to high-quality drama education should be ensured for all students, irrespective of cultural or linguistic background, gender identity, sexuality, disability, or specific learning needs. Drama education should be conducted within environments that uphold professional standards of occupational health and safety, as well as broader principles of equity and wellbeing. Such conditions are essential not only to safeguard students and teachers, but also to enhance the quality, credibility, and status of drama as a curriculum area.

This position paper is intended to guide the provision of effective and sustainable working conditions for the teaching and learning of drama in primary and secondary schools. The principles outlined herein are also relevant to other educational contexts, including TAFE, technical colleges, and institutions of higher or post-compulsory education.

It is recognised that fostering a safe, healthy, and productive environment for drama education extends beyond compliance with regulatory frameworks. It requires ongoing awareness, proactive measures, and a culture of responsibility and respect that supports excellence in teaching and learning.

Drama Australia acknowledges that teaching and learning in drama are often inseparable and thus are highly interrelated. Therefore, this document is relevant to both the teaching and study of drama in schools.

Collective responsibilities

Introduction

Drama, by its nature, involves physical movement, emotional exploration, and the use of technical equipment, all of which require thoughtful management to protect the wellbeing of students and teachers. Effective drama education relies on collaboration between school leadership, specialist teachers, and students, each assuming clearly defined responsibilities to ensure safe and purposeful engagement with curricular and co-curricular activities. This section outlines the essential environmental, health, and safety considerations that underpin high-quality drama provision, offering guidance on risk management, technical operations, physical practice, and wellbeing within school settings.

Key concepts

Duty of Care: Schools have a legal and ethical responsibility to provide safe learning and working environments for drama staff and students.

Compliance: All school-based drama activities should comply with national and state/territory Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) and Environmental Health and Safety (EH&S) education regulations.

Equity and Access: Drama facilities and activities should be inclusive and accessible to all students.

Wellbeing: Drama teaching practices should promote the long-term health and wellbeing of teachers and learners.

Who's responsible, and what are they responsible for?

School Leadership:

- Provide and maintain safe, functional, and purpose-appropriate spaces for drama.

- Ensure all drama equipment is regularly maintained, tested, and compliant with safety standards.
- Support staff with appropriate professional development in health, safety, and subject-specific training.
- Establish clear emergency procedures, ensuring all staff and students are aware of evacuation and first aid protocols.

Drama Teachers:

- Conduct risk assessments for lessons, rehearsals, excursions, incursions and productions.
- Supervise students and provide instruction in the safe use of materials and equipment.
- Incorporate warm-ups and injury-prevention strategies into drama programs.
- Ensure students use personal protective equipment (PPE) where required.
- Monitor students' emotional wellbeing, particularly when engaging with sensitive or challenging dramatic material.

Students:

- Follow safety instructions and use all facilities and equipment responsibly.
- Report hazards, incidents, or injuries immediately to a teacher.
- Participate in safety inductions and use protective equipment when instructed.

Access to Live Performances

Access to performances is a fundamental component of drama education. Attending performing arts events fosters aesthetic appreciation, deepens students' understanding of theatrical languages, and provides invaluable insight into artistic processes. Engagement with professional and community performances not only enriches students' critical and creative capacities but also strengthens their connection to the broader cultural life of their communities. For many young people, these experiences serve as a catalyst for lifelong participation in the arts, whether as practitioners, informed audiences, or cultural advocates.

Schools should ensure that students experience a diverse range of performances and practitioners through a combination of in-school activities and excursions. In-school experiences may include workshops, artist residencies, incursions (such as theatre for children/young people productions), youth theatre programs, or digital performances. These opportunities can be particularly important for schools in rural or remote settings, or where access to professional theatre venues may be limited. Digital resources, including livestreamed performances, online archives, and virtual workshops offer further means of ensuring equitable access to high-quality dramatic works, while also expanding the repertoire of performance styles and traditions available to students.

Excursions to theatre companies, festivals, arts centres, and community venues provide students with authentic experiences of performance in purpose-built and/or site-specific environments. Through exposure to professional practice students gain a more holistic understanding of the collaborative nature of theatre. Such excursions also promote social, cultural, and civic engagement, affirming drama's place within the wider cultural ecology of Australia. Experiencing live performance is a fundamental component of drama learning.

Students should also be given opportunities to engage with live performances across other art forms, such as music, dance, and visual arts, to broaden their artistic literacy. Interdisciplinary/cross-curricular engagement supports students in recognising the interconnectedness of the arts and fosters holistic creative development. Cross-artform appreciation enhances students' ability to analyse, interpret, and reflect on performance elements, cultivating more sophisticated arts reviewers and practitioners.

Equitable access should underpin all performance-related opportunities. Schools should ensure that cost, transport, disability, cultural considerations, or geographical location do not limit students' ability to participate. Subsidised ticketing, community partnerships, and inclusive planning are strategies for ensuring that students can encounter a wide spectrum of artistic opportunities.

Production Work and Co-Curricular Activities

All curricular and co-curricular production work should balance educational integrity with workload management, resource allocation, and statutory obligations. Productions are a highly valued aspect of drama education and the wider school program, providing powerful experiential learning opportunities for students; however, they also require time, labour, and logistical coordination. Ensuring that production activities are educationally purposeful and conducted within sustainable working conditions is therefore essential.

When planning co-curricular activities, schools should also take into account the purpose of the activity, participant needs, intended audience, and available resources. Co-curricular drama, such as school plays, musicals, theatre clubs, festivals, drama camps, or community partnerships should enrich the curriculum and extend students' artistic experiences, rather than create curricular workloads without support. Activities should meet duty-of-care expectations and comply with established health and safety standards, including supervision ratios, risk assessments, safe movement practices, and appropriate use of technical equipment.

Inclusivity should be embedded in all production and co-curricular planning. Students with diverse abilities, cultural backgrounds, or personal needs should be able to participate meaningfully, whether onstage or in production roles such as directing, design, stage management, or technical operations. Flexible casting practices, differentiated tasks, and accessible rehearsal spaces help ensure that drama remains equitable and welcoming for all.

Ultimately, production work and co-curricular activities should celebrate creativity while operating within frameworks that prioritise safety, wellbeing, workload sustainability, and

educational value. When thoughtfully planned and properly resourced, these activities enrich school culture, strengthen community engagement, and support vibrant, high-quality drama education.

Schools should carefully consider student and teacher workloads across all learning areas when planning productions. Drama teachers, in particular, often manage extensive responsibilities including directing, designing, producing, technical coordination, administration, and communication with families and external stakeholders. Without appropriate structural support, these responsibilities can lead to undue workload stress. It is therefore imperative that scheduling is aligned with the annual school calendar, avoiding peak assessment periods or clashes with other major school events.

Adequate timetabling for rehearsals, production meetings, technical preparation, and performances should be provided, recognising that high-quality creative work requires sustained rehearsal time and safe working conditions. Teachers contributing to co-curricular drama activities should be recognised through financial remuneration or workload trade-offs (e.g., time in lieu, reduced administrative duties). Remuneration should align with comparable responsibilities in other co-curricular domains, such as sports coaching or subject coordination.

Access to Professional Associations, Professional Development and student workshop programs

Schools should actively encourage and support their (drama) teachers to become members of professional drama education associations at the state or territory level. Such membership strengthens teachers' professional identity, ensures their connection to current disciplinary knowledge, and embeds them within a national and international network of practitioners and researchers. Once teachers become members of their state/territory association they are affiliated with Drama Australia, the national association, at no extra cost. As a part of Drama Australia and IDEA, the International Drama/Theatre and Education Association, teachers situated their work within a global community committed to advancing drama/theatre education.

Participation in high-quality professional development and professional learning activities is fundamental to enhancing teaching and learning outcomes in drama. Drama is a dynamic, practice-based discipline that continually evolves in response to new artistic practices, pedagogical innovations, cultural contexts, and wellbeing research. Ongoing engagement with workshops, conferences, seminars, artist-led training, and research-informed development programs equips teachers with contemporary skills in performance, devising, direction, design, curriculum planning, assessment, trauma-informed pedagogy, and inclusive practice. Such activities deepen pedagogical expertise and strengthen the quality, safety, and creativity of classroom and production work.

Schools should recognise that professional development is not an optional enrichment activity but an essential component of effective drama education. To facilitate this, schools should allocate dedicated funding to support teacher membership in professional drama associations and ensure access to relevant professional learning opportunities. Financial

structures should enable teachers to attend conferences, training programs, and networking events without personal financial burden. This support may include payment of registration fees, accommodation, travel expenses, and teacher release, where appropriate, to ensure teachers can participate fully in scheduled activities during work hours.

Workshops led by professional artists and theatre companies provide drama students with invaluable opportunities to deepen their artistic understanding and extend their practical skills beyond the classroom. Through direct engagement with industry practitioners, students gain insight into contemporary performance techniques, creative processes, and professional standards that shape current theatre practice. These encounters expose learners to diverse artistic perspectives, foster critical and imaginative thinking, and support the development of authentic performance skills rooted in real-world methodologies. Professional workshops also enhance students' confidence, broaden their cultural literacy, and strengthen their capacity to collaborate, problem-solve, and take creative risks. Importantly, such experiences help bridge the gap between school-based learning and the wider arts industry, inspiring students to envision future pathways in the performing arts and affirming the relevance and vibrancy of drama education. Drama Australia recommends that students be given access to professional artists and theatre companies either as an excursion or through an artist-in-residence incursion program.

Logistical support is equally important. Schools should provide adequate time for teachers to engage in professional learning, collaborate with colleagues, and reflect on emerging practices. Support should also be given to facilitate excursions and/or incursions that expose students to professional practices and programs outside of their classroom. Leadership teams should value and formally acknowledge the benefits of participation in professional communities, including the sharing of new knowledge, the strengthening of drama programs, and the improvement of student outcomes.

Environmental/Occupational Health and Safety in Drama Education

The teaching and learning of drama within schools is inherently dynamic, involving a wide range of physical, technical, interpersonal, and creative practices. Such activities, while deeply educational and artistically enriching, carry potential physical, psychological, and environmental risks that require diligent and proactive management. It is therefore the responsibility of schools to ensure that drama classrooms, theatres, multi-purpose rooms, outdoor performance areas, and related facilities comply with all Environmental/Occupational, Health, and Safety (E/OH&S) requirements as mandated by relevant state or territory education departments and governing authorities. A culture of safety must be embedded across all drama programs to protect students, teachers, and community participants.

Sound occupational safety practices must inform all technical aspects of drama education. These include maintaining safe sound levels to prevent hearing damage, ensuring electrical equipment is regularly tested and tagged, and securely storing hazardous substances such as paints, solvents, adhesives, or cleaning agents used in production processes. Responsibilities also extend to the safe use of ladders, scaffolding, and rigging equipment,

particularly when installing lighting, sets, or drapes. Only trained and authorised personnel should undertake such work, and stringent protocols must be observed to prevent falls, crush injuries, or electrical hazards. It is recommended that students do not climb ladders, and if they do, under strict teacher supervision, and must be in accordance with any governing principles at their school. Regular inspection and maintenance of staging, rostra, seating blocks, curtains, and technical infrastructure is essential to ensure structural stability and prevent equipment failure.

The use of pyrotechnics, fog machines, flying systems, or other specialist technical devices introduces heightened risk. Such practices must be employed only when absolutely necessary, and only by qualified personnel who hold relevant certifications. Detailed safety plans, emergency procedures, and rehearsed contingencies must accompany any specialist effect.

Drama often involves high-energy physical activity, including movement, ensemble work, choreographed action, and stage combat. Teachers must evaluate the suitability of activities, taking into account student age, experience, physical capability, and any individual needs. Safe floor surfaces, ideally sprung or impact-reducing, must be provided, and all obstacles or trip hazards must be removed before practical work begins. Warm-ups and cooldowns should be embedded into lessons to minimise the risk of muscular strain or vocal fatigue.

Central to the safe delivery of drama is the implementation of comprehensive risk management strategies. These strategies must systematically identify hazards, assess the likelihood and potential severity of injury, and establish clear preventative procedures. In drama contexts, risk extends beyond the physical: expressive and affective learning processes can evoke strong emotional responses, requiring teachers to anticipate and mitigate potential psychological vulnerabilities.

Ultimately, ensuring robust environmental and occupational health and safety practices is fundamental to sustaining high-quality drama education. When risk is managed thoughtfully and proactively, drama becomes a safe, empowering, and transformative learning experience for all participants.

The Importance of Wellbeing in Drama Education

Ensuring the wellbeing of both drama teachers and students is fundamental to the creation of a safe, vibrant, and sustainable learning environment. Drama is a highly embodied and emotionally engaged discipline; it asks students and teachers alike to draw upon physical energy, imagination, empathy, and personal experience. Such richness brings immense educational value, yet it also places unique demands on those involved. Safeguarding wellbeing is therefore not merely a professional obligation but an ethical foundation for high-quality drama education. ***In this way, wellbeing becomes not an adjunct to drama education but its underpinning condition.***

For students, drama frequently involves physical movement, voice work, improvisation, and the exploration of emotionally resonant themes. Without appropriate safeguards, students may experience fatigue, vocal strain, or become emotionally overwhelmed. Similarly, teachers, who are required to simultaneously model technique, manage group dynamics,

and hold the emotional space of the classroom, are vulnerable to physical injury, voice misuse, and burnout. Thus, wellbeing is central to enabling creative risk-taking, authentic expression, and sustained engagement with the artform.

Promoting wellbeing begins with the cultivation of a supportive, well-structured learning environment. Clear expectations, predictable routines, and thoughtful preparation all help students feel safe enough to explore and experiment. Warm-ups that integrate physical, vocal, and mental grounding are essential, preparing the body and mind for the demands of performance-based activity. Teachers should adapt activities to suit age, abilities, and individual needs, ensuring that every student can participate safely and confidently.

Drama teachers carry a profound duty of care, grounded in the creation of learning spaces that are emotionally, physically, and psychologically safe for their students. Through clear boundaries, ethical practice, and attentive supervision, they protect students as they engage in vulnerable acts of expression, imagination, and embodied learning. Drama classrooms often invite personal stories, strong emotions, and close collaboration. Consequently, teachers must be attentive in fostering consent, respect, and trust, while responding promptly and sensitively to any signs of distress or harm. By modelling professionalism, inclusivity, and empathy, and by upholding school policies and safeguarding protocols, drama teachers ensure that creative risk is balanced with wellbeing. In doing so, they enable students not only to explore ideas and identities with confidence, but also to feel seen, valued, and secure within the collective environment of the classroom.

Teachers should establish respectful group norms, utilise de-roling strategies when exploring challenging material, and enact agency for students to discuss concerns. Where sensitive issues arise, teachers should draw upon trauma-informed practice, ensuring students are never coerced into disclosure or emotionally unsafe work.

Teacher wellbeing requires explicit attention. Professional learning in voice care, physical safety, and classroom management helps prevent injury and strain. Access to appropriate facilities, adequate rehearsal spaces, safe flooring, well-maintained equipment and so on, reduces physical risk. Collegial support, opportunities for reflection, and realistic workload expectations also contribute significantly to sustained teacher health.

Schools should adopt a whole-of-community approach. Leadership teams should prioritise safe working conditions, provide time for collaborative planning, and recognise the emotional labour inherent in drama teaching. Regular review of safety procedures, access to wellbeing resources, and strong communication pathways reinforce a culture in which both teachers and students feel valued, protected, and supported.

Section summary

This section (above) outlines the essential responsibilities, safety expectations, and wellbeing considerations that underpin effective drama education in school settings. It emphasises that drama, being a physically active, emotionally engaged, and technically complex discipline, requires clear structures of duty, compliance, and care to ensure the safety and healthy participation of both teachers and students.

Schools carry a legal and ethical duty to provide safe, functional, and inclusive learning environments that comply with relevant Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) and (local) education regulations. Whilst current (at the time of publication) regulatory inconsistencies across Australian jurisdictions present challenges, adherence to both local requirements and broader best-practice standards remains imperative. Leaders are responsible for maintaining appropriate facilities, ensuring equipment is regularly tested, supporting staff through professional development, and establishing clear emergency procedures. Teachers should conduct regular risk assessments, supervise students in the safe use of equipment, implement warm-ups, monitor emotional wellbeing, and ensure the use of personal protective equipment where needed. Students are expected to follow safety instructions, report hazards, and engage responsibly with all drama activities.

Class sizes, Learning Spaces, Duration and frequency of lessons and Budgets

Class Sizes

Class size has a demonstrable impact on teaching and learning in drama/theatre education. Smaller classes enable greater opportunities for participation, individual attention, and improved instructional quality, with research indicating significant gains in student achievement when class sizes are reduced (Finn, 2019) and class/classroom processes (Blatchford and Russell, 2020).

In drama education, the interplay between physicality, performance, and emotional expression makes the benefits of smaller class sizes particularly significant. Smaller classes enable safe movement, build emotional trust, preserve rehearsal and reflection time, and support the development of confidence and creativity.

Drama Australia advocates that classes should be limited to a maximum of 25 students, ideally a cap of 20 students. This recommendation recognises the practical and collaborative nature of drama, which requires group work, active participation, presentation, and intensive teacher supervision to ensure both effective learning and appropriate duty of care.

Below we summarise evidence from educational research and drama-specific studies on the advantages of smaller class sizes, with a particular focus on implications for drama education.

Class sizes and - Enhanced Teacher–Student Interaction and Feedback

Smaller class sizes create opportunities for higher-quality interactions and more individualised feedback, enabling teachers to adapt their instruction in ways that significantly improve learning outcomes. The Education Endowment Foundation (2021) notes that such benefits typically emerge when class sizes fall below 20 students, and only if teaching strategies are adjusted accordingly. In classrooms with fewer students,

more pupil-initiated responses, questions, and voluntary contributions were observed, indicating a more engaged learning environment.

Class sizes and - Improved Teaching Quality and Learning Engagement

Smaller classes allow more individual attention and foster student engagement and active participation, enhancing the overall quality of teaching. Advantages extend beyond improved assessment outcomes to include better student behaviour, higher engagement, and improved attitudes toward learning.

Class sizes and - Positive Impacts on Teacher Wellbeing

Teachers working in smaller classes often experience enhanced morale and a stronger sense of self-efficacy, both of which are vital for sustaining motivation and reducing burnout.

- Schools should acknowledge the physical and vocal demands placed on drama teachers.
- Teachers should have access to training in vocal care, safe body use, and classroom ergonomics.
- Workloads, including rehearsal and performance schedules, should allow for adequate rest and recovery.

Class sizes and - Equity and Inclusion

Drama programs should be accessible to students of all abilities. School theatres and classrooms should accommodate students with mobility needs through ramps, rails, and appropriate seating. Casting, participation, and workload distribution should follow inclusive, non-discriminatory practices.

Class sizes and - Practical Advantages Specific to Drama Education

Drama education presents unique conditions that magnify the importance of class size. Studies have shown that smaller classes in drama are characterised by enhanced critical thinking and decision-making, strong teacher and student rapport, and ample time for assessment-focused instruction (Bowie, 2010; Education Endowment Foundation, 2021; Finn et al., 2001). Research has shown that students receive rich individual feedback and discipline issues are much reduced. Whilst larger drama classes can bring benefits such as greater peer interaction, exposure to diverse performance styles, and rich collaboration; however, these can be offset by challenges relating to space, time, and reduced individual attention.

Class sizes and - Broader Educational Context

Meta-analyses affirm modest but meaningful academic gains, especially in early grades and among disadvantaged students, when class sizes are reduced to 20 or under. Research also highlights threshold effects: smaller classes yield the most impact when teachers adapt their pedagogy to leverage individual attention and differentiated instruction.

In drama education, the interplay between physicality, performance, and emotional expression makes the benefits of smaller class sizes particularly significant. Smaller classes enable safe movement, build emotional trust, preserve rehearsal and reflection time, and support the development of confidence and creativity. Empirical research confirms that reduced class sizes foster stronger teacher and student relationships and more personalised instruction (Education Endowment Foundation, 2021; Finn et al., 2001). In the context of drama, smaller cohorts have been observed to create efficient rehearsal conditions, enhanced rapport, and increased opportunities for detailed feedback (Bowie, 2010). These findings provide strong evidence for advocating smaller class sizes as a means of improving both teacher working conditions and student learning outcomes in drama.

Lesson Duration and Frequency

Research confirms that the duration and frequency of arts-based lessons significantly affect student learning (Burton, Horowitz, & Abeles, 2000). Sustained developmental learning is particularly important in drama.

Schools should provide students with regular, ongoing access to drama tuition to ensure progressive and cumulative skill development.

Drama programs should be coherent, sequential, and carefully planned to build connections across units and stages of schooling. Isolated or disconnected experiences fall short of accepted standards in contemporary arts education (Burton, Horowitz, & Abeles, 2000).

Drama lessons should be scheduled for sufficient duration to enable:

- practical and flexible learning delivery
- collaborative group work
- appropriate time management to meet the diverse needs of students
- engagement with professional artists
- meaningful skill development.

Drama Australia recommends that in secondary schools, local timetabling permitting, single drama periods should be no shorter than 50 minutes and that, where timetabling permits at least one double period (i.e. 100 minutes) lesson per week for the duration of the subject.

Learning Spaces

As with other curriculum areas, drama requires purpose-built or suitably retrofitted teaching and learning spaces, supported by appropriate equipment and resources (Araca, 1986; Arts Council England, 2003). Drama classrooms should meet mandated national and state/territory standards for health, safety, and environmental compliance. Purpose-designed spaces are essential because drama is a kinaesthetic, collaborative, and highly active discipline that relies on movement, embodied learning, and flexible configurations of

space. Unlike traditional classroom subjects, drama demands environments that facilitate whole-group interaction, improvisation, ensemble work, rehearsals, and performance-based activities.

A suitable drama space should be adaptable, allowing teachers to reconfigure the room according to pedagogical intent, for example, clearing the floor for movement-based learning, creating performance zones, or establishing small-group rehearsal or 'break-out' areas. It should be of a suitable floor space (approximately one square metre per person) to facilitate movement and performance activities. Adequate floor space is essential, ensuring that students can move safely without risk of collision or obstruction. Where possible, floor surfaces should be appropriate for physical activity; sprung floors or smooth, non-abrasive surfaces are preferred, as they reduce the likelihood of injury and support safe practice. Unsuitable flooring poses unnecessary risk and negatively affects both student comfort and performance quality.

Environmental factors should also be carefully considered. Good ventilation, appropriate temperature regulation, and sufficient ceiling height contribute to both student wellbeing and the versatility of the space. Drama teaching often involves vocal projection, singing, and expressive sound work; therefore, effective acoustic treatment or sound isolation is essential to protect both participants and adjacent learning areas. The space should, where possible, accommodate blackout capability, theatrical lighting, and a safe, stable power supply to support technical theatre work. Ideally, facilities should include access to three-phase power, a lighting grid or rigging infrastructure, and the flexibility to incorporate sound systems, projection, and digital technologies.

Storage represents another significant consideration. Drama programs require secure, easily accessible storage for props, costumes, scripts, art materials, and technical equipment. Inadequate storage often leads to cluttered classrooms, compromised safety conditions, and diminished learning experiences. Purpose-built storage solutions protect resources, reduce hazards, and enable teachers to organise equipment efficiently.

An effective learning space also supports inclusive practice. Drama classrooms and theatre spaces should accommodate students with diverse physical, sensory, and learning needs. This includes accessible entry points, appropriate wheelchair manoeuvring room, adjustable lighting and acoustics, and safe seating or audience configurations. Ensuring accessibility is not only a legal requirement but a pedagogical obligation that strengthens equity across drama programs.

Overall, the design and resourcing of drama learning spaces have a direct impact on the quality of teaching and learning. Safe, adaptable, and well-equipped environments enable teachers to deliver rich, complex drama pedagogy and allow students to participate confidently, creatively, and safely.

Budgets

Drama, as a practical and highly participatory subject, requires sustained and purposeful financial investment. To provide equitable, safe, and high-quality learning experiences, all

curricular and co-curricular drama programs should operate under a clearly defined and adequately resourced budget. The teaching and learning of drama requires a dynamic assortment of consumable, technical, and creative resources, each contributing directly to students' engagement, skill development, and artistic growth.

Budget - Essentials

A foundational drama budget should include provision for essential classroom materials such as play scripts and textbooks. Practical work also necessitates a stock of adaptable props, versatile costumes, essential make-up supplies, stationery, rostra blocks and so on, ensuring students can engage in drama in authentic ways. Increasingly, technology plays a central role in drama education; this may involve budgeting for ICT equipment such as lighting and sound software, recording devices, editing tools, and subscriptions to digital archives, streaming platforms, or theatre education portals. However, Drama Australia acknowledges that materials such as those recommended here can be built up over time.

Budget - Professional learning

Professional learning and affiliation costs, such as professional association membership fees and those for state and national drama conferences and events are additional essentials. These memberships and fees not only provide teachers with current pedagogical research and industry insights but also connect schools to wider artistic networks, festivals, and professional development opportunities. Such connections strengthen the overall quality and currency of drama programs.

Budget - Co-curricular costs

For co-curricular drama activities, including school productions, festivals, ensemble groups, and community partnerships, budgets require further detail and (often) a greater scale. Financial planning should account for copyright licensing and royalties, which are legal obligations when performing published works. Venue hire, whether for external performance spaces, represents another cost that should be considered. Additional expenditure may include lighting and sound equipment rental, set construction, costume purchase or hire, front-of-house materials, and marketing or promotional design.

Co-curricular programs benefit enormously from engaging professional artists, such as directors, designers, choreographers, musicians, and dramaturgs whose expertise elevates the artistic standard while modelling industry practice for students. Budgets should anticipate these professional fees as integral, not optional, components of a high-quality program. Transport for excursions, festival participation fees, and technician support for bump-in/bump-out are further considerations that contribute to a holistic and enriching student experience.

Overall, clear, transparent, and adequately funded budgets enable drama departments to plan strategically, operate safely, and offer inclusive learning experiences that reflect the creative, technical, and collaborative nature of the arts. A school's commitment to funding drama, within its means, is, ultimately, a commitment to fostering creativity, confidence, cultural understanding, and community engagement among its students.

Conclusion

This position paper reaffirms that high-quality drama education in Australian schools is both an entitlement for all young people and a professional imperative requiring sustained commitment, appropriate resources, and safe working conditions. Drama, as outlined throughout this document, occupies a vital place within the Australian educational landscape, not only as a distinct arts discipline/subject, but as a mode of learning, a pedagogical methodology, and a means through which students develop essential cognitive, social, and emotional capacities. Ensuring the integrity of drama teaching and learning therefore demands more than minimal compliance with occupational health, safety, and wellbeing requirements; it necessitates an active, ongoing partnership between teachers, schools, communities, and educational authorities.

Across the varied Australian school contexts in which drama is taught, the need for consistent, equitable, and sustainable conditions emerges as a recurring theme. The evidence presented in this position paper demonstrates clearly that the physical, emotional, and technical demands of drama are distinct from those of many other curriculum areas. Purpose-built (or retrofitted) spaces, appropriate flooring, safe and well-maintained equipment, and suitable acoustics should not be viewed as optional enhancements but necessary requirements. Similarly, staffing structures, such as class size, lesson duration, and access to specialist expertise, should be designed to reflect the real pedagogical and safety demands of the subject. These conditions directly affect the quality of student learning, the professional wellbeing of teachers, and the broader standing of drama within the school community.

Central to the sustainability of drama education is the prioritisation of teacher and student wellbeing. Drama invites deep emotional engagement, physical expressivity, and creative risk-taking. When supported by strong structures of care, duty, and respect, these qualities can produce transformative learning experiences. Without such structures, however, the same qualities may expose teachers and learners to injury, fatigue, or emotional harm. As this document highlights, wellbeing is not an adjunct to effective drama education but the condition upon which it rests. Trauma-informed practice, warm-ups and cooldowns, vocal and physical care, collegial support, and safe school cultures are critical components of safe drama pedagogy.

This position paper also underscores the vital role played by professional learning and student engagement with the broader drama education community. Membership in professional associations, access to contemporary research, and participation in meaningful skill-development activities all contribute to improved teaching practice and stronger outcomes for students.

Drama Australia urges policymakers, educational leaders, and school communities to adopt the guidelines in this position paper as a framework for consistent best practice across all states and territories. Only by upholding these standards, through adequate resourcing, safe facilities, equitable access, and strong professional recognition, can schools ensure that drama education remains vibrant, inclusive, and future-focused. In doing so, we collectively affirm the right of every student to experience high-quality drama learning, and the right of every teacher to work in conditions that enable excellence, creativity, and wellbeing.

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