

---

## **Drama Teacher Education: A longer view perspective**

*Robin Pascoe, Honorary Fellow, College of Science, Health, Engineering and Education (SHEE), Education, Murdoch University, Perth, Western Australia*

[r.pascoe@murdoch.edu.au](mailto:r.pascoe@murdoch.edu.au) [rpascoe@stagepage.com.au](mailto:rpascoe@stagepage.com.au)

The establishment of drama teacher education within formal university structures in the mid 20th century has been a remarkable success story. But there is increasing evidence that Drama Teacher Education in Australia (and elsewhere) is facing an existential crisis. The systemic provision of university-based courses is being eroded by government policy decisions, increasing managerialism in tertiary education and persistent failure to address the underlying causes of the situation. There is a passing of the baton from an ageing group of pioneers as well as burnout amongst a following generation.

The COVID-19 Pandemic may have accelerated but did not cause this decline.

This paper builds on a recently published chapter I wrote for the *Routledge Companion to Drama Education* (2022) edited by Mary McAvoy and Peter O'Conner.

### ***A Wicked Problem for Drama Education***

In this presentation I pose a problem: a wicked problem in Drama Teacher Education.

*A wicked problem is a social or cultural problem that's difficult or impossible to solve because it is complex and is challenging or impossible to solve. Either the issue is that there's not enough understood about the problem, or there are too many stakeholders involved and they all have varying opinions and solutions. Or the solutions cost too much or there are interconnecting problems that multiply the complexity.*

The problem is that we face a relentless frustrating circular problem of logic.

1. For drama education to grow we need more drama teachers.
2. In many places in the world, we are making fewer drama teachers. We need to make more drama teachers.
3. To make more drama teachers we need drama education to be recognised and accepted in its own right.

And so the circle continues...

### ***Learning to Teach Drama***

I have written and spoken before (Pascoe 2002) telling the story of when I was asked by Murdoch University to design a Secondary Drama Curriculum and Teaching course. The principles established then remain at the heart of what I propose as a model for Drama Teacher Education. Though the context has shifted and there are new possibilities offered by technology and circumstances, the principles hold steady..

1. We learn to teach drama in the way that we learn drama: experientially and practically. Drama teaching is a physical, cognitive and affective investment.
2. We learn Drama through experience, observation, modelling and being part of an ensemble. We learn to teach Drama through applying our direct experiences of

drama and theatre; observing and modelling from others teaching drama; and, belonging to a community of shared practice (what I sometimes call a Guild of Drama Teachers). Drama teaching is community building: In each classroom we create and sustain a community of learners (see, for example, Wenger, 1998), a community of drama practice. The first job of the drama teacher is to create and sustain these communities of trust (Wright, Pascoe et al. 2006) on shared learning journeys.

3. We learn to teach Drama by teaching Drama - by trying out strategies, concepts and approaches that help us refine our choice making as teachers. In Learning and Teaching Drama we identify the distinctive nature of Drama/Theatre as an art form and its role in people’s lives, society and community. We understand that Drama is aesthetic experience contextualised in the art forms’ histories, conventions and cultures. We also identify Drama as curriculum. We shape our practice in our Drama Teacher roles as teacher, curriculum leader, director, mentor, role model and resource manager.
4. We build our practice from the practical to the theoretical; we journey from experience to knowledge and understanding.

To put all of those ideas into one image, there are clear parallels between How we learn drama and How we learn to teach drama.

**When we learn drama:** We know, understand and use the distinctive features of Drama and know and understand its place in the Arts

**When we learn to teach drama so students learn drama:** We know, understand and apply the distinctive pedagogies of Drama curriculum and its place in the wider Arts learning and educational contexts.

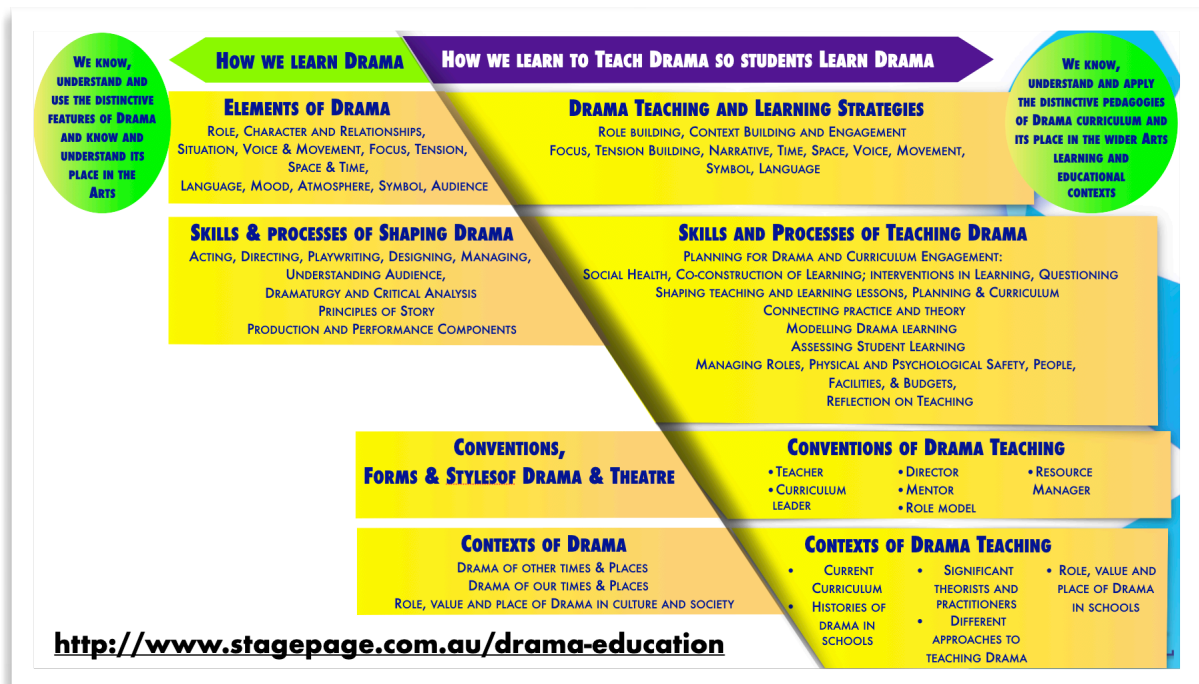


FIGURE 1: MODEL FOR DRAMA TEACHER EDUCATION

## ***Robust Schema for Drama Teacher Education***

Whatever approach is taken to drama teacher education, there needs to be an underlying robust, durable, practical schema to serve as a living and responsive guide to our work.

Learning to teach drama focuses on *embodied learning* in the arts (Bresler, 2004). Through practical, hands on experiences in the drama we model the ways that your students learn the arts and ways that you teach the arts. This engenders *embodied teaching*.

This approach is based on sound research about providing:

**analogue experiences** - analogue experiences are like the ones students in drama experience; providing teachers with similar learning experiences that they need to facilitate for their students (Borko and Putnam 1995, Morocco and Solomon 1999)

**content focus** - unambiguous content description (Shulman 1986, S.Garet, Porter et al. 2001, Desimone, Porter et al. 2002)

**active learning** - where teachers are engaged in the analysis of teaching and learning; learning from other teachers and from their own teaching; reviewing examples of effective teaching practice (Franke, Fennema et al. 1997, Franke, Carpenter et al. 1998, Morocco and Solomon 1999, Desimone, Porter et al. 2002)

**reflection and reflexivity** allied with **criticality and expertise** (Schön 1983, Eisner 1991)

**dialogue amongst teachers** - belonging to a community of drama teachers participating in discussion with practicing teachers (Guskey 1986, Guskey 2003, Virginia Richardson October 1990) (

**long term support and feedback** - support beyond the immediate experiences in the workshop through enrolling in community of drama teachers (Wolf, Borko et al. 1999, Guskey 2002)

This is an articulated theoretical framework for drama teacher education course design that steps beyond pragmatic functionalism. It is a framework informed by Dewey, Vygotsky, Bruner, Eisner, Greene and others. Learning to teach drama involves acts of purposeful meaning making that draw together personal experiences and those of others (Dewey 1938, Eisner 2002). No one learns alone (Vygotsky 1978, Grumet 2004). Drama teachers learn cognitively, somatically and affectively - mind, body and spirit (Peters 2004). They work with enactive, iconic and symbolic modes (Bruner 1990). Learning to teach drama engages aesthetic imagination (Greene 1995). Learning to teach drama involves proactive participation in communities of practice (Wenger 1998). Learning to teach drama organises drama knowledge, categorise it and uses strategies of paradigmatic thinking and narrative building (Bruner 1991).

## ***Changing the Learning Journey***

There is a saying: when the music changes the society changes. In education we need to keep in mind that when the society changes, education must change.

Some alternatives to the status quo should be noted. From Turkey and Singapore, there are two models of drama teacher education developed by professional drama education associations. Within the digital world, three entrepreneurial approaches provide another perspective.

Is there a role for IDEA and for the member associations of IDEA to step into the gap created by the erosion of conventional university based drama teacher education?

There are issues with self-accredited programs. Quality control and openness to innovation; curriculum content and design; recognition by Teachers Registration Boards; financial viability; reliance on volunteers; principles of adult learning; maintaining standards; and, the difficulty of agreement on who manages the programs. But, as has been shown in Turkey and Singapore, there is a potential role for professional associations to provide drama teacher education.

### ***Recognising the underlying problem that we all face***

But I also remind us that the issue of Drama Teacher Education is part of a broader and more insidious issue that we must face together.

We need to acknowledge that the real problem is about the recognition and valuing of drama education itself.

As teacher educators in a contemporary world we have come to recognise “the abyssal line” (Santos 2007), an invisible and unspoken line of presences and absences dividing worlds and world views into “us” and “them”. Things, people, ideas beyond that line are de-emphasised to the point that they are rendered null (hence in an Australian context, they become a *terra nullius* or “land belonging to no one”). This side of that line is what we collectively value, what we collectively think is important. In the eyes, minds and assumptions of many others both educators and the wider community, arts education is rendered as “other”, “peripheral”. Drama is negated, obscured, overlooked and rendered invisible, unimportant or non-essential (e.g., in course offerings in schools it is “optional”). When the dominant approaches to education consign arts education to this nether world, we have institutionalised “epistemicide” (Paraskeva 2016) that can be seen as a war on the knowledge(s) that we value, the destruction of existing knowledge and denial the possibilities of new knowledge(s).

There are misconceptions about drama in schools. Drama is just putting on scripted plays/musicals/Shakespeare. Drama is not a serious school subject/just something as a break from real learning. Drama is time filling/wasting/just games/pretending to be trees. Drama is touchy feeling/too emotional/too revealing. Drama is OK for the show-off kids but not for all kids/drama is only for talented kids not average kids. Drama is messy/noisy/disruptive/kids get too excited and they are high when they go to their next class. You also hear people say there’s nothing to learn in drama/there’s no writing/there’s no content. Drama is just pretending/a form of lying or dishonesty/unleashes undesirable thoughts and feelings/encourages rebellion/challenges authority/is subversive.

We may counter-argue these points of view

## ***There are other ways***

There's been another alternative hiding in plain sight.

Let me tell you about my mate John.

We first met in Teachers College though in a methods unit about teaching film and media not drama. We taught in different schools but in 1985 we found ourselves in the same school. It is fair to say that at that time John had reached a mid career crisis. I gently pushed him towards teaching drama. As he cheerfully admits he started with little knowledge other than a love of literature. He had no formal training in drama and scant knowledge of performing from being in the Albany Light Opera Company chorus. But he built a career in drama teaching on enthusiasm, openness to learning and trail and error, risk taking and a sense of adventure.

Key aspects in this learning journey were:

- **Team teaching** – by a quirk of circumstances we team taught all Year 11 and 12 drama students collaboratively; sometimes I would lead workshops with all 47 students; other times we taught in split groups. This team teaching provided an active modelling or practice and articulating of curriculum.
- **Ongoing sustained mentoring** – although John continued teaching while I moved to curriculum development, our active mentoring continued. John was a regular at Friday night dinner with our family and the mentoring kept happening informally and formally. And, over the years, I provided feedback on his productions that recognised achievement but also spurred the next challenge.
- **Belonging to a Community of Practice.** John was an active member of the local drama educators association. He was sustained through DramaWest and Drama Australia and through taking drama teacher students from Edith Cowan University into his classrooms
- **Taking risks and accepting challenges just beyond grasp.** John took on ambitious and challenging projects with his students. For example, he mounted promenade productions of Shakespeare and adaptations of *The Mysteries* as well as writing and developing original material with students.

Each of these concepts embody significant principles outlined already. Consider the ideas from Vygotsky (1978) about working with the “knowledgable other” and moving towards “Zones of Proximal Development”. In effect, all of the principles outlined earlier are present.

They are an embodiment of the principles of Drama Teacher Education outlined in this paper – though not in a formal teacher education program. In a way, this has been life long in action – my thirty plus years commitment to drama teacher education.

John has been telling stories about his time teaching on the StagePage Blog since his retirement from teaching and recently I have been working with him as he shares his ideas about writing for his students drawing on his many productions.

You can read about his *Adventures in Teaching Drama (2022)* at [stagepage.com.au](http://stagepage.com.au) .

## ***How do you Make a Drama Teacher?***

I promised that I would share with you (a little tongue in cheek) a ***How To Manual: How do you make a Drama Teacher?***

### **RECIPES FOR MAKING DRAMA TEACHERS**

Making a drama teacher is not constructing a robot – the mechanical bolting together of components bought off the shelf or from mail order catalogues. Though maybe, we need some AI learning emerging from that worldview.

A more organic metaphor is needed.

From nature we might see the seed, sprouting seedlings, searching out shoots toward the light; nurturing rain, soil and seasons; budding, fruiting, maturing; cycles of growth, decay, dormancy and rebirth.

### **INGREDIENTS**

Interest and desire – copious amounts

The inclination and desire to teach drama (rather than teaching something else)

A disposition for experiential learning – where priority is given to embodied learning

The vision to see the potential of drama for learning and teaching

- Knowledge, understanding and experiences in the art form of drama and theatre – dollops
- How drama grows from and extends play
- How drama works through taking on role – mimesis and identification
- How drama tells stories
- How drama enables us to express and share with others explores, ideas, emotions and experiences
- How drama uses the Elements of Drama – role, character, relationships, situation, focus, tension, space and time, voice and movement, language, contrast, symbol, mood, atmosphere and audience
- How drama uses skills and processes to make and share meaning
- How drama uses forms and styles

- How drama stays the same and changes across time and place
- Knowledge and understanding and experiences of teaching drama – spoonfuls
- How we learn about, through and with drama
- How drama curriculum is structured and used
- How we draw on a range of drama teaching and learning strategies so students learn drama
- How we we shape and plan drama learning experiences
- How we co-construct meaning with student
- How we shape learning and teaching environments and contexts responding to the emotional, social and physical needs of students
- How we learn from others making and teaching drama
- How we reflect on, assess and report student learning in drama and our effectiveness as drama teachers
- How, as drama teachers, we have a number of related but distinctive roles: teacher, curriculum designer, director, role model, mentor, resource and facilities manager.



SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP, PARIS 2013, IMAGE BY R. PASCOE

## **DIRECTIONS**

None of these ingredients on their own make a drama teacher.

It is how you bring them all together. It's the sifting, blending, creaming, combining, folding, together.

Remember: The process is never fully completed. It continues to happen even as we add more and more ingredients.

We taste test as we cook. The eyes, ears, taste buds of the cook are in play at every moment. Is this the right mix? Does it need more time? Are my directions clear and focused? Am I moving too fast? Too slow? Am I sustaining the tension, focus, sils and processes, mix of Elements of Drama?

We reflect. We learn. We sometimes fail. But we always keep trying and learning.

We ask questions. We belong to guilds of drama teachers who openly share discoveries and learn from each other.

## **FINISHING THE CAKE**

The drama cake is never quite finished. It is always in the process of being made.

And, one final essential for this recipe: in the end, as a drama teacher I am the sum of all that I know and do. Each time i step into the drama kitchen I bring with me knowledge and experience that i share with others in that specific place and moment, with that distinct group of people. It is not mechanical. It is not even following someone else's recipe. It is creating our own recipe. As a teacher I am the sum of all that I am – combined with the people in the learning space with me.

It is not so much what we do as much as who we are.

See [stagepage.com.au](https://stagepage.com.au) for this post

---

There are academic and theorised names for this stuff and researched realities to call on. See earlier in this paper. There are links between disciplinary or content knowledge of drama and pedagogical content knowledge (Darling-Hammond, Hammerness et al. 2005).

### ***A necessary optimism***

In concluding this paper, I remind us all that we need a necessary optimism about Drama Teacher Education. The world is changing around us and we must adapt to circumstances. This truly is a "wicked problem" because there is no convenient solution. We are inventing one as we stand in our drama classrooms. But then isn't that we have always been doing, improvising, problem solving and experiencing. Drama teaching is knowing, doing, feeling and being (Wright and Pascoe 2014).

I continue to play my role in that quest.

I invite you to visit the StagePage website and contribute.

Stay in touch.

## Bibliography

- Borko, H. and R. T. Putnam (1995). Expanding a teacher's knowledge base: A cognitive psychological perspective on professional development. Professional Development in Education. T. R. Guskey and M. Huberman. New York, New York: Teachers College Press.
- Bruner, J. (1990). Acts of Meaning. Cambridge, MA, MIT Press.
- Bruner, J. (1991). "The Narrative Construction of Reality." Critical Inquiry **18**(1): 1-21.
- Darling-Hammond, L., K. Hammerness, P. Grossman, F. Rust and L. Shulman (2005). The Design of Teacher Education Programs. Preparing Teachers for a Changing World What Teachers Should Learn and Be Able to Do. L. Darling-Hammond and J. Bransford, Jossey-Bass/Wiley.
- Desimone, L. M., A. C. Porter, M. S. Garet, K. S. Yoon and B. F. Birman (2002). "Effects of Professional Development on Teachers' Instruction: Results from a Three-Year Longitudinal Study." Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis **24**(2 (Summer 2002)): 81-112.
- Dewey, J. (1938). Experience & Education. New York, NY, Kappa Delta Pi.
- Eisner, E. W. (1991). The Enlightened eye: Qualitative Inquiry and the Enhancement of Educational Practice. New York, MacMillan.
- Eisner, E. W. (2002). The Arts and the Creation of Mind. New Haven, Yale University Press.
- Franke, M., T. Carpenter, E. Fennema, E. Ansell and J. Behrend (1998). "Understanding teachers' self-sustaining, generative change in the context of professional development." Teaching and Teacher Education **14**(1): 67-80.
- Franke, M., E. Fennema and T. Carpenter (1997). Teachers creating change: Examining evolving beliefs and classroom practice. Mathematics teachers in transition. E. Fennema and B. Scott-Nelson. Mahwah, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates: 255-282.
- Greene, M. (1995). Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, The Arts and Social Change. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.
- Grumet, M. (2004). "No one learns alone." Putting the arts in the picture: Reframing education in the 21st century: 49-80.
- Guskey, T. R. (1986). "Staff development and the process of teacher change." Educational Researcher **15**: 5-12.
- Guskey, T. R. (2002). "Professional development and teacher change." Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice **8**: 381-391.
- Guskey, T. R. (2003). "What makes professional development effective?" Phi Delta Kappan **84**(10): 748-750.
- Morocco, C. C. and M. Z. Solomon (1999). Revitalising professional development. The diagnostic teacher: Constructing new approaches to professional development. M. Z. Solomon. New York, Teachers College Press: 247-267.
- Paraskeva, J. (2016). Curriculum epistemicides. New York, Routledge.
- Pascoe, R. (2002). Admit me to this Chorus: initiating drama teacher education at Murdoch University. Drama Australia Conference. Fremantle, Western Australia.
- Pascoe, R. (2022). Drama Teacher Education - A Long View Perspective. The Routledge companion to drama in education. M. McAvooy and P. O'Connor. Abingdon, Oxon, Routledge: 471-483.
- Peters, M. (2004). Education and the Philosophy of the Body: Bodies of Knowledge and Knowledges of the Body. Knowing Bodies, Moving Minds - Towards Embodied Teaching and Learning. L. Bresler. Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic Publishers.



- S.Garet, M., A. C. Porter, L. Desimone, B. F. Birman and K. SukYoon (2001). "What Makes Professional Development Effective? Results From a National Sample of Teachers." American Educational Research Journal.
- Santos, B. d. S. (2007). "Beyond Abyssal Thinking: From Global Lines to Ecologies of Knowledges." Review **XXX**(1).
- Schön, D. (1983). *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, Basic Books.
- Shulman, L. (1986). "Those who understand: Knowledge growth in teaching." Educational Researcher **15**(2): 4-14.
- Virginia Richardson (October 1990). "Significant and Worthwhile Change in Teaching Practice." Educational Researcher **19**(7): 10-18.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Wolf, S., H. Borko, M. Mclver and R. Elliott (1999). "No excuses": School reform efforts in exemplary schools of Kentucky. CSE Technical Report No. 514. Los Angeles, University of California, National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing.
- Wright, P. and R. Pascoe (2014). "Eudaimonia and creativity: the art of human flourishing." Cambridge Journal of Education.
- Wright, P. R., R. Pascoe, J. Dinham, J. MacCallum, K. Grushka, T. Church and A. Winteron (2006). *From Behind the Mask: Revealing Visual Education*. Research Report to The National Review of Education in Visual Arts, Craft, Design and Visual Communication. Perth, CLCD, Murdoch University: National Review of Visual Education.