

Submission  
No 40

## INQUIRY INTO ARTS AND MUSIC EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN NEW SOUTH WALES

**Organisation:** Drama Australia and Drama NSW

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Drama Australia  
&  
Drama New South Wales

Joint submission: Joint Select Committee on  
Arts and Music Education

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## INTRODUCTION

[Drama Australia](#) is the peak national professional teaching association and represents drama teachers, academics, applied theatre workers and theatre in education practitioners at a national level and provides leadership and connections to the state professional drama associations.

[Drama NSW](#) is the state professional teaching association that represents and advocates on behalf of our members. Drama NSW represents hundreds of drama teachers in primary, secondary and tertiary contexts and their students. Additionally, Drama NSW provides quality professional learning opportunities for Drama teachers across the state.

Drama NSW (DNSW) and Drama Australia (DA) have actively supported the development of the Australian Curriculum: The Arts and its central principle of the *entitlement of every young Australian to an arts education*, one that includes a foundation in all five art subjects – Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Art.

## BACKGROUND

This joint submission is the result of consultation with members of Drama Australia and Drama NSW, leaders in the field of Drama Education in NSW and with the Drama NSW Committee and Drama Australia Board.

## OPENING COMMENTS

Drama Australia and Drama NSW commend the Joint Select Committee for opening an inquiry into Arts and Music Education and Training in NSW. This is an opportunity for NSW to demonstrate cultural leadership that could have profound positive impacts for arts educators and students in NSW.

We advocate that the Creative Arts, as a Key Learning Area (KLA) particularly Drama is prioritised across the NSW K-12 curriculum. The Arts, and Drama, are currently devalued and not priorities within NSW education, yet The Arts and Drama have the capability to connect the curriculum as a meaningful, in-depth, and creative learning system.

We acknowledge that Arts Education in NSW encompasses multiple layers of engagement, from early childhood through to tertiary levels and extending into, and from, the creative industries. We also recognise a diverse range of art forms including Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music, and Visual

Arts. We advocate for equitable consideration across the depth and breadth of these art forms throughout this important inquiry.

Considering the depth and breadth of the Arts, we are concerned with the erosion of time allocated in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Bachelor/Master of Primary Education courses allocated to Creative Arts. In many cases, the four Creative Arts subjects mentioned within the NSW Creative Arts Syllabus are thrown together in one 12-week course/unit. This is totally inadequate and does not serve the needs of the children and young people these teachers will work with in the future.

Additionally, we are concerned about the decimation of creative arts discipline pathways for young people intending to become secondary specialist arts educators, teaching artists or artists working in industry or community settings. In recent years universities and tertiary providers have cut important courses and degrees that educate the next generations of arts teachers and artists. In NSW and around Australia there are fewer programs where secondary arts educators can receive adequate discipline training and appropriate, face to face Initial Teacher Education in The Arts. This lack of tertiary access in turn impacts schools, which struggle then to staff arts courses and increasingly rely on teachers out of discipline teaching arts subjects. Such a devaluing of arts education, influences student subject choices and opportunities significantly, as schools in turn reduce the arts education offerings available. Our associations strongly believe in proper investment in arts education and young people's creative futures. It is important to understand that the arts education sector functions as a creative ecology (see Hatton & Mooney, 2017), where each context impacts the other. Strong arts in industry and community impacts the vibrancy of teacher education, which in turn impacts the opportunities for young people to gain important creative and critical skills offered by each art form.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. We recommend that the Joint Select Committee acknowledges the central entitlement that *all* Australian students have equal access to the five Arts subjects included in the *Australian Curriculum: The Arts* (Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Arts) agreed to by all education ministers.
2. We recommend that Drama is mandatory in Early Stage 1 to the end of Stage 3 (primary school) and that students are required to undertake Drama in Stage 4 before selecting electives in Stages 5 and 6. We recommend that there is equality in mandatory hours across the five Arts subjects.

3. We recommend that the Education Act (1990) is updated to reflect a contemporary understanding of the Creative Arts subjects, which includes Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Arts as discrete arts subjects which all add value to student learning.
4. We recommend that NSW Creative Arts professional teaching associations, such as Drama NSW, are provided funding by the state government in order to increase professional learning and resources to support teachers from K to 12.
5. We recommend that Arts organisations and theatre companies that provide education programs for teachers and students receive additional and dedicated funding to support the consistency, quality and expansion of their work across the state. Their input into Arts education is fundamental to the cultural landscape of NSW and this country.
6. We recommend that NSW mandates that all Bachelor/Master of Primary Teaching in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs, accredited by NESA, include a **minimum** of two 12 week units/courses of Creative Arts curriculum, pedagogy and assessment covering all Creative Arts subjects. Primary ITE students should be able to specialise in the Creative Arts as a discipline depth, so that they can become champions of the arts in schools after graduation. NSW Universities offering Primary ITE courses must offer The Arts as an area of specialisation.
7. We recommend that arts discipline pathways are restored in tertiary institutions to ensure the next generations of primary and secondary teachers, and artists receive innovative and adequate education to support and help sustain their careers. It is important that primary and secondary students have equity of access to such courses, irrespective of their geographic location, cultural background or financial position.
8. We recommend that the Joint Select Committee acknowledges and recommends to The NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) that Media Arts is included as a discrete subject, specifically adding Media Arts to the Creative Arts K-6 Syllabus and developing State 4 and 5 Syllabuses.

### WHAT IS DRAMA EDUCATION?

The Arts are as old as humanity. They are part of every culture and central to the diverse and continuing cultures of First Nations Australians. The Australian Council for the Arts (2022) writes, “Creativity is the wellspring of culture. We are all connected through art and its expression. Our arts embody individual and collective stories, histories and identities and are vital expressions of human experience” (p. 6). Storytelling, in the form of the Arts, is the core pedagogical approach of the oldest living culture, yet we continue to prioritise Western modalities of teaching and learning in this

country. The rich tapestry of the Arts, deeply embedded in human history and culture, provides an approach to education that transcends Western teaching modalities and ensures an inclusive and engaging learning environment for all our children and young people.

Drama has been a subject in Australian Schools for many decades and Australian Drama Education has been recognised as a global leader in Drama curriculum development, largely due to high quality initial teacher education, a robust and collaborative teaching community, and a strong research community.

As the Australian Curriculum defines, Drama:

**[...] uniquely explores and communicates the human condition through the enactment of real and imagined worlds. Drama responds to our need to share and enact stories, and create and make meaning across cultures, times, places and communities.**

Drama is directly linked to play, the root of all creativity in children. At its core, drama is about taking on roles and “standing in the shoes” of another, and imagining and communicating with the world through different perspectives. Taking on roles involves an act of the imagination that relies on a learner’s ability to empathise and understand others. Actively taking on roles in a range of contexts, situations, and across different times and places fosters students’ development of personal, cultural and social understandings as they imagine, empathise and communicate through deep experiential learning. Drama is a powerful form of communication involving affective, sensory and aesthetic modes.

In Drama, students work individually and collaboratively as artists and audiences to create, perform and respond to drama. It is an active, embodied and aesthetically rich subject that engages students cognitively and affectively as they learn in, through and about drama. (ACARA, 2024).

### [RESEARCH: DRAMA AND THE CREATIVE ARTS FOR THE 21st Century](#)

We are encouraged by the inquiry to prioritise The Arts and the transferable **future skills** such as communication, collaboration, problem solving, design thinking, digital literacy, project management, critical and creative thinking and innovation (NESA, 2019, p. 5) that are developed by The Creative Arts and Drama. The Arts including Drama contribute to a **liberal curriculum** that offers more than the support of a vocational pathway by enriching and deepening the quality of an

engaged creative life. However, as there is no acknowledgement of The Creative Arts' (Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music, and Visual Arts) **powerful contribution to deep learning** and authentic engagement of these important 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and cross curriculum priorities that stimulate students' curiosity, discovery, wonder and passion.

There is extensive **Australian and international research** that provides evidence of how The Creative Arts, particularly Drama develops these skills (Robinson & Aronica, 2015; Ewing & Saunders, 2016; Harris, 2016; de Bruin & Harris, 2017; Jefferson & Anderson, 2017).

Drama Australia and Drama NSW have long argued that the central principle in the *Australian Curriculum: The Arts* "is based on the assumption that all students will study the **five arts subjects** from Foundation to the end of primary school" ([Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority](#), 2018). However, this entitlement is often not afforded to NSW students.

We strongly believe that the omission of **Media Arts** in NSW is problematic and leads to NSW students being disadvantaged. NSW is the only State or Territory in Australia that does not acknowledge Media Arts as a distinct subject. Media Arts is a growing area within other states and territories, particularly engaging male students in The Creative Arts. It is astonishing that NSW would have such a strong focus on ICT in education, and future focused skills, and yet neglects to include one of the five accepted Arts subjects in Australia.

The potential for the Arts to foster creativity and 21st Century capabilities within the educational system is immense. However, despite widespread agreement on the importance of this capability, the Arts community must continually advocate for its place in the curriculum. This ongoing need for advocacy highlights the low priority the education system places on the Arts. Ironically, this is the same system that has identified and prioritised the need to "**Equip every child to be a creative, connected and engaged learning in a rapidly changing world**" (Gonski et al, 2018, p. x-xi).

#### **RESEARCH: DRAMA AND LITERACY**

**Drama has a strong relationship with literacy.** The Creative Arts, and Drama particularly, play a significant role in the development of student literacy. The Early Years Learning Framework, *Belonging, Being and Becoming* states that:

Literacy is the capacity, confidence and disposition to use language in all its forms. Literacy incorporates a range of modes of communication including music, movement, dance, storytelling, visual arts, media and drama, as well as talking, listening, viewing, reading and writing. [...] In an increasingly technological world, the ability to critically analyse texts is a key component of literacy. (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009, p. 41).

Drama, and the Creative Arts, have strong relationships in the development of literacy, both as a pedagogy and as a discipline. As Bamford (2006, 2009) notes in her analysis of vast international data on the arts in schools commissioned by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) states that: “quality arts education programmes lead to improvements in academic achievement. Literacy is significantly enhanced through arts education. [And] arts-rich education enhances performance in language learning” (Bamford, 2009, p. 107).

It is important to emphasise the difference between **arts literacies** and using the arts for traditional literacy learning. As Kempe (2000), Livermore (1998, 2003, 2019), Pascoe (2002, 2003, 2019), Stinson (2015, 2018), and others have argued, the Arts develop arts literacies within each of The Arts subjects. “Literacies in the arts involve the ability to communicate and interpret meaning in the arts disciplines” (Pascoe, 2002, p. 64). However, The Creative Arts, particularly Drama (both as a discipline and a pedagogy) can also be used to develop more conventional elements of literacy, such as inferential comprehension, prediction, verbal communication/oracy, creative/imaginative writing, non-verbal communication, to name a few (Ewing, 2019; Saunders, 2019; Ewing & Saunders, 2016; Hunter, 2005; Bryce et al., 2004).

**Key studies exploring Drama and Literacy** provide a large body of evidence that demonstrates the strong relationship between Drama and the development of literacy. Below are several key studies, however many other studies cannot be included in this submission due to length.

An evaluation of drama programs for primary school students in the United Kingdom (UK) delivered by The Royal National Theatre in London (known as The National Theatre) over a three-year period found positive shifts in student self-esteem and confidence, ability to collaborate, increased enjoyment of school, shifts in creativity, positive increases in aspects of literacy, particularly in speaking and listening (Turner, Mayall, Dickinson, Clark, Hood, Samuels, & Wiggins, 2004). The



report also acknowledges that “drama promotes and supports children’s agency and engagement in educational processes” (p. 57).

In Australia, Hunter (2005) analysed the findings from a range of arts-based projects and found they enhanced the literacy ability of students. Hunter noted: “improvements in literacy were apparent” (p. 28) and that the perceptions from teachers and students about literacy shifts were:

- Students perceived that their ability in reading, spelling and story writing had improved.
- Students attempted more items on literacy tests than prior to the period of arts participation.
- In one study, students who had participated in an arts program showed an average improvement in reading age of 1 year, 8 months over an 8-month period. (Hunter, 2005, p. 28).

Bryce, Mendelovits, Beavis, McQueen and Adams (2004) evaluated a range of arts programs in Australian schools. Of particular note is their evaluation of *Arts@Direk*, a program at Direk Schools in South Australia. The program had some similarities to *School Drama* as it was also a professional learning program for the classroom teacher, focusing on drama. *Arts@Direk* “was part of a collaborative teacher research programme: Mentoring to enhance professional understanding of literacy learning through the expressive arts” (Bryce et al., 2004, p. 11). The research investigated the outcomes of ‘arts rich’ and ‘non-arts rich’ programs for Year 4 students at the school. Scores were measured for literacy, numeracy, writing, and four key competencies: problem solving, planning and organising, communication, and working with others (Bryce et al., 2004). The study found that of the two groups, the arts-rich students outperformed their non-arts rich peers across the three academic areas and four key competencies (mentioned above). The research also listed nine “enabling skills and attitudes acquired by students that appeared to be related to the experience of drama mentoring in the school” (Bryce et al., 2004, p. 21).

Since 2009, Sydney Theatre Company in partnership with Professor Emerita Robyn Ewing AM and The University of Sydney have delivered the [School Drama](#) program. *School Drama* is a teacher professional learning program that uses teaching artists to work alongside classroom teachers to use drama-based pedagogy with quality children’s literature to improve student literacy. Over the past fifteen years, the program has reached over 40,000 teachers and students across Australia and New Zealand. A large body of evidence has indicated the success of the program in using drama as a

teaching tool in primary English and literacy classrooms. Most recently, the analysis of data collected from 12 participating classes indicated “an average shift of 2.5 marks (just under a full grade shift of 3 marks)” was acknowledged (Saunders, 2019, p. 129). This was across a range of different English and literary foci including inferential comprehension, descriptive language, confidence in oracy and creative/imaginative writing. Students struggling with literacy, particularly male students, showed the greatest shift when comparing pre- and post-program testing (Saunders, 2019).

Professor Emerita Robyn Ewing AM published a monograph with Drama Australia exploring the relationship between *Drama-rich pedagogy and becoming deeply literate* (Ewing, 2019). We recommend the Review read this brief and important publication as it provides a comprehensive review of current research literature in the field of Drama and Literacy. Ewing concludes her monograph by reflecting:

Becoming deeply and critically literate does not develop through remembering, synthesising and repeating syllables, words and phrases. While these skills are part of the process, a deep understanding of what it means to be literate in today’s world and how we can take action that involves the whole person – body and mind, feeling and spirit. Drama rich pedagogies provide a rich and powerful base for transformative language and literacy learning, enabling us to be someone else, somewhere else, using our bodies, creating shared meaning through dialogic talk in an imagined world ... they are built on interactive collaborative experiences as well as reflection on the processes of talking, listening, reading, writing, viewing and provide opportunities to transform our stereotypical ideas and practices, potentially changing our relationships with others and the world. [...] It is clear that the relationship between drama, language and literacy development and literacy understandings are long and well established, and as compelling today as they were decades ago. [...] Learning through drama-rich, and arts-rich pedagogies more broadly, foster ways of making connections to the whole range of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills alongside a deep sense of personal wellbeing and agency that will enable learners’ ongoing commitment to understanding self and the other. (Ewing, 2019, pp. 40-41).

#### [RESEARCH: DRAMA, WELLBEING AND SOCIAL IMPACT](#)

Drama, as an educational tool, holds significant potential for enhancing the wellbeing of young people, particularly in the context of the current youth mental health concerns in Australia. The

varied definitions of drama highlight its flexibility and adaptability in educational settings, ranging from a specific subject area to a broad methodology for teaching and learning (Baldwin & Neelands, 2012). Core elements of drama, such as collaboration, storying, and character transformation, provide a unique space for students to explore and express their emotions and experiences (Heathcote, 2015). Drama fosters a heightened state of consciousness, or "metaxis," allowing students to navigate and reconcile their real and imagined worlds simultaneously, which is crucial for emotional and cognitive development (Bolton, 1984). **Research indicates that drama can significantly enhance various aspects of well-being, including belonging, engagement, problem-solving, and empathy** (Aitken, Fraser, & Price, 2007; Baldwin & Neelands, 2012; Bundy, 2017; Ewing, 2010, 2019; Gray et al., 2018; Haynes & Chalk, 2004; Jindal-Snape et al., 2018; Lambert et al., 2016; Mages, 2018; Özbek, 2014; Taylor, 1995; Wright, 2015). These benefits are particularly pertinent in addressing the mental health needs of young Australians. Drama provides a valuable platform for building confidence, communication skills, and a sense of community, which are essential for mental well-being (Baldwin & Neelands, 2012; Gray, Pascoe, & Wright, 2018; Lambert et al., 2016; Wright, 2015). Incorporating drama into educational practices not only supports academic learning but also plays a critical role in fostering holistic development and mental health support for young people.

Emeritus Professor Robyn Ewing AM's (2010) [paper](#), commissioned by the Australian Council for Education Research, provides an extensive review of research focusing on the value of the Arts in education, specifically within Australia. The benefits of the Arts (referencing Music, Dance, Media Arts, Drama, and Visual Arts) highlighted by Ewing are numerous. She particularly discusses **the social impact of the Arts**. Ewing aligns this argument with Wyn's (2009) research, stating that we can only hope to use the Arts to "...shift the patterns of school failure, under-performance, and low rates of competition among Indigenous Australians, young people from low socioeconomic areas and young people in rural communities, which have for the last three decades characterised Australia's educational provision" (Wyn cited in Ewing, 2010). Given the social impact of the Covid-19, including the profound impact on interpersonal relationships (see Salandino, Algeri, Auriemma, 2020), the role of the Arts in education has become even more critical. The Arts offer a powerful means to rebuild and strengthen social connections, support emotional well-being, and provide a sense of community and belonging in times of widespread disruption and isolation. The Arts pose a solution to the unique challenges arising post-pandemic and offer opportunities to foster resilience and recovery in our students and community.

## DRAMA AND OTHER LEARNING AREAS

The Arts, and Drama can play a significant role in **connecting and integrating learning across the curriculum** particularly in English literacy and the social sciences in project-based learning. In addition, non-academic capabilities – empathy, values, character, capacity, confidence, and well-being – will be a learning focus in an integrated Arts curriculum. Drama can be used as a pedagogy in primary and secondary schools, where the power of role play, and the immediacy of experiential learning through drama provides rich learning in other subject areas, such as Science, History, Geography and English. In this mode drama is used as a pedagogy of connection (Hatton, 2022) to activate learning across the curriculum. In recent years, with support from the International Teaching Artist Collaborative, Hatton has engaged students and young people in NSW schools in trans-disciplinary projects focussing on environmental education, where drama was used to lead the learning across different KLA's (Hatton, 2024). In many countries around the world, Drama is used as a pedagogy in schools and there is extensive research to suggest this can be ground-breaking for teachers struggling to provide rich curriculum depth despite challenging time considerations of delivery.

## DRAMA AND INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION

The Arts, and Drama have been eroded in initial teacher education courses for **primary teachers** over the last two decades. Many NSW universities offer a single 12-week unit/course covering all four NSW Creative Arts subjects (Dance, Drama, Music, and Visual Arts). This is totally inadequate and does not prepare pre-service teachers to teach the Creative Arts in primary schools. We argue for an increase in time allocated to the Creative Arts in initial teacher education courses.

In addition, Drama and the Arts have been eroded in initial teacher education courses for **secondary teachers**, with courses cut, delivery times reduced, and face to face modes so critical to teaching arts practice have been diminished.

## DRAMA AND THE THEATRE INDUSTRY

Drama in schools is supported through the rich ecology of the NSW theatre industry. Many NSW theatre companies offer extraordinary programs to support teachers and students in Drama and other learning areas. However, these often operate at a loss and since the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen a significant reduction in offerings as a result of financial hardship being experienced by some of these theatre companies and youth arts companies. We argue for dedicated funding through Create NSW and the Department of Education to support the education programs of NSW

theatre companies. This funding should also recognise the important relationships between arts organisations, artists, and educators, to ensure teachers have access to ongoing professional development and innovative partnerships throughout their careers.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Drama NSW and Drama Australia thank the Joint Select Committee for the opportunity to contribute the **significance of Drama** to this important discussion about the future Arts and Music Education and Training in NSW. The Arts, including Drama play an indispensable role in fostering creativity, critical thinking, and emotional well-being in children and young people. By providing an inclusive, engaging, and culturally rich educational experience, Drama education equips students with the essential skills needed to navigate and thrive in a rapidly changing world.

Our submission underscores the urgent need to prioritise and adequately resource Drama and the broader Creative Arts within the NSW education system. As leaders in Drama Education, we are committed to working collaboratively with policymakers, educators, and the broader community to ensure that every student in NSW benefits from a comprehensive and high-quality Arts education.

We urge the Joint Select Committee to consider our recommendations seriously and to champion the Arts as a vital component of the NSW education system.

### Authored:

This submission was developed on behalf of Drama Australia and Drama NSW members by Dr John Nicholas Saunders (Vice-President, Drama Australia), Dr Christine Hatton (Director of Research, Drama Australia), Dr Susan Davis OAM (Director of Strategic Partnerships, Drama Australia), Ms Kelly Young (President, Drama NSW), and Amy Gill (Vice-President, Drama NSW).

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