

# Drama Education in the Primary Classroom



## Why consider drama in your classroom programme?

Students enjoy drama. It draws on their curiosity and extends the creative play that comes naturally to them. A personal and social form of learning, it can deepen engagement across the curriculum, and promote the key competencies.

Drama stimulates creative and critical thinking. As one of the arts, it involves a special way of knowing and experience. Drama enhances communication, enriching literacy in all its modes. It is a rich medium for learning, which is embedded in talk and also includes other literacies, such as visual and digital ones.

Drama involves two kinds of learning. *Learning through* drama is a creative form of inquiry that enables students to explore their own lives, questions, and larger worlds - in fictional contexts. This process also builds relationship and learning conversations; here feedback, reflection and choice are built into all stages of the process. The thinking is immediate and collaborative.

*Learning in* drama involves the students in exploring the languages and forms of theatre. Activities range from improvising, reading scripts, designing, technological problem-solving, composing and playing music, dancing and filming. These can be for the moment and also contribute to the goal of a formal performance. As young play-makers and actors, students gain a sense of agency and share the satisfaction of making something of value.

Drama can also boost student achievement. It can enhance communicative competencies, improve reading comprehension, and establish the relevance of writing as part of learning. Through drama, students come to take viewpoints other than their own. Such role-playing leads to an increase in empathy, and to a participation in worlds and cultures wider than their own. This includes Pasifika contexts and Te Ao Māori.

## Where might Drama fit into your classroom programme?

**English** – Drama is a text rich-subject that integrates the multiple literacies of contemporary language use. As a language, it is immediate and involves all the senses. It enables children to make connections to their own experience, to create meaning in an expressive and imaginative way. Describing, recounting, reporting, explaining, instructing, persuading, negotiating- drama offers opportunities to exercise these different language functions across the genres and to produce appealing works, from plays to news reports, from documentaries to advertisements. Drama is a powerful way to stimulate children's imaginations, providing authentic ways into creative writing. Dramatic performances provide rich evidence for assessment.

**Social studies** - Through process drama, students can work in role to explore many real world contexts and historical events. Roles can provide safe distance to investigate and reflect on many aspects of human experience as well as providing opportunities for children to conduct social inquiries and to take on and voice a range of perspectives on social issues. Students may work as investigative journalists, historians, documentary makers or explorers. In drama-aided inquiry, the students' questions remain open. Drama also provides the means for students to present their findings more effectively.

**Health education** – A number of strands of the Health and Physical Education learning area can be explored through drama. Issues of personal well-being, identity, friendship, conflict and risk-taking are often explored and enlivened through the use of drama processes. Drama allows for creation and exploration in a safe atmosphere, where actions and consequences can be examined, discussed, and in a very real sense 'experienced' without the dangers and pitfalls that such experimentation would obviously lead to in the "real" world.

**The Arts** – As an art form, Drama allows students to develop their practical know-how in creating and presenting original artworks. This includes taking on roles and creating worlds to tell all sorts of stories, bringing issues and characters to life. Students learn to work together to develop creative ideas and to explore ideas and issues through movement and the use of drama elements and conventions. Students gain presentation and performance skills as they employ all the key competencies to convey creative ideas. This work invites the use of imagination, expression and the use of metaphor, symbol, myth and may include a range of engaging theatre forms – such as puppetry, mask, mime and more. This allows students to reflect and process learning about our communities and their own experiences in a fun and engaging way.

**Inquiry learning** – Drama provides numerous possibilities to explore questions from across the curriculum. This may include using pedagogical approaches such as the Mantle of Expert, employing drama processes as a means to explore particular contexts and issues in an embodied way, or using drama as a way of presenting findings.

## Who is Drama New Zealand?

Drama New Zealand is the national subject association for drama education in New Zealand. Members include teachers from all education sectors as well as theatre educators, drama therapists and applied theatre practitioners. Drama New Zealand is an Incorporated Society, run by an executive committee working on a volunteer basis. New Zealand is split into six key regions, and branches operate in most regions. (Some areas have more than one cluster operating given the geographical distance the region covers).

## How does Drama New Zealand support primary teachers?

Membership to DNZ provides access to a range of benefits and support from this community. Members can access **resources** through the DNZ website, including fully resourced **units of work** and ideas for **assessment**.

DNZ hosts an **annual national conference**, where workshops and presentations are targeted to primary contexts. A **print journal** and **an e-journal** are annually produced for members. DNZ also advocates for teachers at the level of government policy. At a regional level, members can **network** with other primary and secondary drama teachers during **branch meetings** and locally-run **professional development workshops**.

DNZ can also help to identify experienced drama teachers who can work alongside you to provide **in-house professional development** for small groups or whole staff; provide **constructive feedback** on planning and **guidance** on effective drama pedagogy; or help to create drama experiences for particular topics.

## How can you access this support?

- Visit the Drama New Zealand website: [www.drama.org.nz](http://www.drama.org.nz)
- Contact the Primary Coordinator on DNZ Executive, your regional representative or any other member of the Executive committee. A list of these contacts is available on the website.
- Visit the Drama New Zealand Facebook page:
  - <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Drama-NZ/182928978490756>
- Attend a professional development opportunity offered by your region or DNZ's annual national conference held in April.

## Where else can I go to learn more?

If you are interested in exploring further professional readings about Drama in primary settings you may like to investigate the following:

- Ministry of Education. (2006). *Playing our stories: classroom drama in years 1-6*. Wellington, NZ: Learning Media [DVD & handbook] *\*was distributed free to schools*
- Ministry of Education. (2004). *Telling our stories: classroom drama in years 7-10*. Wellington, NZ: Learning Media [videorecording & handbook] *\*was distributed free to schools*
- Fraser, D., Aitken, V. & B. Whyte. (2013). *Connecting Curriculum, Linking Learning*. Wellington, NZ: NCER Press.
- Greenwood, J. (2005). *Playing with the Curriculum: How drama can enhance your curriculum coverage in the junior school*. Invercargill, NZ: Essential Resources.
- O'Toole, J., & Dunn, J. (2002). *Pretending to learn: Helping children learn through drama*. Frenchs Forest, NSW: Pearson Education.
- O'Toole, J., Burton, B., and A. Plunkett. (2005). *Cooling Conflicts: A New Approach to Conflict and Bullying in Schools*. Sydney: Pearson Education.