

The School Drama program 2009-2024

A Summative Report



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Acknowledgement

We acknowledge and pay our respects to our First Nations Australians. We recognise that Story and the Arts are at the centre of First Nations Australian ways of Knowing, Doing, Being and Becoming and we have much to learn about arts-rich pedagogy from our First Nations colleagues. We also thank our First Nations colleagues for their care of this beautiful country over tens of thousands of years and acknowledge that the land was never ceded. Always was, always will be Aboriginal land.

In addition, we warmly thank and celebrate all those who played a role in the School Drama story at Sydney Theatre Company, The University of Sydney; and the Teaching Artists, school leaders, teachers and students involved in schools and other learning contexts (see page 60).



*Teaching Artist Alyson Evans in action in Albury/Wodonga.
Photo Credit: John Nicholas Saunders*

Executive Summary

An extensive, highly significant body of research spanning more than three decades demonstrates unequivocally that critical and creative thinking, collaboration, communication, courage, compassion, connection and other important capabilities are nurtured through the artistic processes and experiences inherent in arts-rich pedagogies. Yet this research has not been applied consistently in many school contexts. The School Drama program, a teacher professional learning program developed by Sydney Theatre Company in partnership with The University of Sydney, and offered from 2009 until 2024, provided an important exemplar of why drama-rich processes and quality literary texts enhance learners' creativities, social imaginations (Greene, 1995) and deep literacy, enabling them to explore alternative possibilities and realities in a world sorely in need of new understandings and creative leadership. Primarily focussing on the teacher's professional learning to develop their confidence and capacity to use drama-rich pedagogy with quality literature, the program was also an intervention for learners, providing opportunities to develop their imaginations, engagement and agency in the learning process and English and literacy outcomes.

This summative report briefly describes the antecedents and a description of the program before providing a snapshot of its different iterations. It draws on the research that underpins the program and includes the voices and reflections of many School Drama key players including participants (teachers, learners, teaching artists, principals, and other stakeholders) to provide an understanding of the program's strengths, challenges and opportunities over the last 15 years.

We argue that creative school leadership alongside the provision of opportunities to activate imaginations through embodied learning, and arts-rich strategies and experiences has enabled time for teachers, learners and teaching artists to delve deeply beyond the surface of texts and taken for granted-ness of today's dominant school hegemonies to ask, 'what if.'

Introduction: Why a drama-rich program with quality literature?

As Vygotsky (1930/2004) noted, “Drama, more than any other form of creation, is closely and directly linked to play, which is the root of all creativity in children” (p. 71). At its core, Drama is about “standing in the shoes” of another and imagining and communicating the world through different perspectives. Embodying someone else involves an act of the imagination that is central to a learner’s ability to empathise and understand others. Actively taking on roles in a range of contexts, and situations, across different times and places, fosters our development of personal, cultural and social understandings as we imagine, empathise, embody and communicate through deep experiential learning.

Children who are aware of their emotions and manage them, cope with uncertainty and recover from experiences of adversity will be successful learners. To improve experiences and outcomes for children we need to influence the adults around them – shifting judgemental, negative and limiting interpretations (perhaps built by difficulties in ‘managing’ the child) to views and behaviours that are caring, supportive and optimistic. (Scottish Children’s Parliament, School should be a joyful place, 2017, p. 16)

Aprill, Burnaford, and Weiss (2001) assert that “an arts-rich curriculum can help transform a school into a dynamic learning community in which educators and learners are more likely to think critically, express themselves creatively, and respect diverse opinions” (p. 2). Yet an arts-rich curriculum is still not the norm in Australian schools and recent reports suggest the arts education in schools is in decline (Thomson, 2024; Saunders, 2024). Research strongly supports the relationship between enactment and embodiment through classroom drama and improved skills in reading, writing and text understanding (for example, Winner, Goldstein and Vincent-Lancrin, 2013; Deasy, 2002; McMaster, 1998). As O’Connor (2008) suggests, Drama gives us “a sense of what it is to be other than ourselves in a world where otherness and difference is too often something to be feared and punished” (p. 29).

Drama can be used not only metaphorically to turn the pages of the story but to bend space and time to create a third facing page (Ewing, Miller & Saxton, 2008) on which we, through enactment, can draw and write our own versions of the story. Through such interactions, dialogues, confrontations, risk-taking and unplanned discoveries we engage with new ideas. This is a deeper form of literacy incorporating quality literature. In defining quality literature, Australian author Libby Gleeson (2012) writes that:

A quality text must have integrity. It must have characters that are fully realised. It must have language that fully expresses what the writer wants to say. The story must satisfy the reader but also make demands of the reader. The very best stories have something to say that go beyond a surface meaning to something deeper, a symbolic meaning that speaks of the human condition. (p. 6)

About the School Drama program

The School Drama program was a fifteen year partnership between Sydney Theatre Company (STC) and The University of Sydney (USyd) designed to enrich and enhance the teaching of English and literacy in classrooms by employing drama-based strategies with quality literature. The program had a dual focus: the professional learning of primary teachers to ensure they had the confidence and expertise to embed drama-rich processes and strategies with authentic literary texts in their pedagogy, and an intervention for learners that nurtured their imaginations and confidence while enhancing their English and literacy development (Ewing, 2002, 2006, 2009).

This report includes a description of the program itself alongside the research undertaken throughout its history, interspersed with reflections from key players and participants. We demonstrate the powerful impact that arts-rich pedagogies can make, not only in the English and literacy classroom, but more broadly in our lives, in nurturing our imaginations and creativities, and in fostering confidence and engagement in lifelong learning.

The Antecedents to School Drama

The methodology of the School Drama program is based on Ewing's co-mentoring approach (2002, 2006) using drama-rich strategies as critical quality pedagogy with quality literature to nurture learners' imaginations, confidence and deep language and literacy development. First piloted with interested teachers at Harbord Public School in the early 1990s, Ewing further developed the model over many years with teachers at Curl Curl North Public School beginning in 1995. Later she also worked with teachers at Crown Street Public and Glebe Public Schools to refine the model.

Education was a central part of Sydney Theatre Company's mission from its inception in 1978. For example, the Education and Communities Department's mission was:

To provide young people in NSW with possibilities to play, imagine and learn through the provision of theatre and theatre-based education programs of the highest standard. (Sydney Theatre Company, Community and Education, 2015)

Our Education programs provide enriching and unique opportunities for students, teachers and lifelong learners to engage with theatre. (Sydney Theatre Company, 2024)

When STC Artistic Directors Andrew Upton and Cate Blanchett AO (Co-Artistic Directors, Sydney Theatre Company, 2008-2013, Andrew then solo until 2015) wanted education to be an important legacy of their time at STC:

Both of us had formative and liberating experiences of drama at school. So it was, when we began our time as The Artistic Directors of The Sydney Theatre Company, we were determined to develop and re-imagine the educational programmes the company had in place for school students to get that all-important early exposure to the form.

When we met Robyn Ewing we knew we had found a mentor and a partner for building this pillar of our tenure. Modelling, role-playing, creating life-paralleling scenarios and playing through the consequences of them are all dynamic crossover points between classroom-learning and theatre-making. When you magnify that simple understanding, the classroom enthusiastically re-invents itself as a big theatre, where life and the curriculum can be explored.

Blanchett and Upton also hoped that the teachers' excitement with and enthusiasm for being associated with a working theatre and their new-found expertise in their use of drama would in turn enhance the creative and literacy processes of their students. In addition, they wanted actors to work as teaching artists, and for this avenue to provide additional employment for artists and help sustain their careers in theatre.

Blanchett also described how having her own children contributed to realising:

how different children are and the way they don't always learn in a conventional way. And it's often a left-of-field approach that will open up the important questions that are going to develop that child's personality and their love of learning. (Blanchett in Johnson, 2011).



School Drama Launch, 2009, Plunkett St Primary School. Photo credit: Grant Sparkes-Carroll

Some discussions were also furthered by ideas about the imperative of the Arts in learning in the Towards A Creative Australia stream (co-chaired by Cate Blanchett, Professor Julianne Schultz AM and Commonwealth Minister for the Arts, The Hon Peter Garrett MP) at the then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's 2020 Summit in 2008.

The beginning of School Drama

On a sunny afternoon at a table by the harbour, colleagues and I gathered about a large research project happening across several theatre companies and universities, about how young people engaged with theatre (TheatreSpace, 2007-2011). I was paired with Professor Robyn Ewing as STC's research partner for STC's case study. In that moment our two minds and fierce hearts came together in our shared belief that quality stories for children matter as much as fresh air. That it is through stories that children make sense of their complex inner worlds and how they navigate the outside world as they grow up. After the research project concluded, Robyn and I stayed in touch. She was (and is) my mentor, my inspiration, my friend.

I'd been a primary teacher as well as a creative producer of many, many theatre productions. I noticed in Australia we were entering a

economic factors were also impacting investment in cultural engagement for children more broadly.

STC was able to respond in a unique way. I'd observed extraordinary directors in rehearsal rooms and was struck by how similar the dynamics of a vibrant, productive rehearsal room were to a vibrant, energised classroom. I shared this observation with Robyn and distinctly remember the conversation where she first generously shared with me her creative practice in schools. Robyn was open to the idea of sharing her incredible experience and creative practice with STC artists, and her methodologies were gifted to STC, not invoiced.

So how do you create something new in a theatre company? Be strategic, be determined, be opportunistic. STC was developing the Actors Company, and as part of the artists' full-time employment, the premise was the artists could be immersed across all aspects of the company. I proposed to Rob Brookman the idea of training some of the actors' company with an interest in creative learning experiences and he agreed with this possibility. It was also a time when philanthropy was looking to engage new supporters around children and young people. So, with a promise to Rob I wouldn't spend more than \$5,000, our idea was hatched with the working title 'School Drama'. We agreed it was a pilot to keep things low risk and low impact on the rest of the company's operations. The word pilot was soooo useful in initially keeping us going, we hilariously said it was a pilot for years - and we never did come up with a better name.

School Drama was piloted in 5 inner-city Sydney schools (Glebe, Plunkett St, Lewisham, Newtown North and Crown St Public Schools) the following year (2009). After School Drama's first year Cate, Andrew and Patrick held STCs reins, and I acknowledge their unwavering support, openness, and passion for School Drama in its infancy. As STCs senior leadership, they sheltered our fragile candle and allowed a fire to catch. And around that fire thousands of children have had their imaginations, their curiosity for learning, and self-belief warmed. After having two small boys, my time at STC ended and Dr John Saunders went on to play a profound role in embedding and scaling School Drama with integrity, authenticity and deep commitment to its founding values.

Helen Hristofski (STC Education Manager, 2007-2012)

School Drama Classic

At the core of the program was a co-mentoring relationship between the teacher and the experienced actor/teaching artist. Instead of using the traditional conception of a mentoring relationship with the mentor as the expert knower providing guidance for the novice, the program reframed the mentoring process as one of co-mentoring that positioned the participants in a non-hierarchical or reciprocal relationship (Le Cornu, 2005; Ewing, 2006). Each acknowledged and respected the other's knowledge and expertise. Together the pair co-planned, co-mentored and co-taught the seven-week program. Teaching Artists modelled the use of drama-rich processes as a powerful way to delve deeply into quality literary texts with a focus on a particular English or literacy area (confidence in oracy; inferential comprehension; imaginative writing; rich vocabulary development). The School Drama partnership was thus a significant departure from conventional artist-in-residence programs.

All participant teachers (and, where possible, a member of their school's leadership team) were initially immersed in a professional learning workshop that introduced the aims of the program, a summary of relevant research and enabled the teachers and school leaders to experience some of the drama-based strategies for themselves. At the beginning of the classroom program the artist and teacher met twice to discuss the focus for the seven-week time frame and plan. The teacher identified the relevant English/literacy focus using outcomes derived from current state syllabus documents and an analysis of the learners' needs and classroom context. With the teaching artist, they also chose the literary text(s) that would be explored. The four areas chosen most frequently during the pilot years became the focus areas:

- Confidence in oracy;
- Inferential comprehension;
- Narrative (later Imaginative) writing; and
- Descriptive language (later vocabulary development).

The teaching artist planned a program with an agreed literary text incorporating relevant drama strategies. The teacher and artists then team taught seven 60–90-minute sessions over seven weeks. Saunders (2015) coined the term 'episodic pre-text' to describe how only a small excerpt from the book was shared each week as a trigger or catalyst for exploring the spaces and places to play in the text. Importantly, students did not reenact what had just been read, but rather explored the critical moments, gaps and silences, and key decisions characters

encountered throughout the texts. Teachers and Teaching Artists engaged in debriefing conversations at the end of each session. In many cases over the 7 weeks the teacher grew in confidence using the drama strategies and took more leadership in delivering them. It was suggested that benchmarking of the students' capacities in the identified English/literacy area was undertaken before and after the program to assess student starting points and progress over the program. Some teachers chose to benchmark case study learners, other benchmarked the whole class. Over time the benchmarking became optional. In addition, teachers completed a questionnaire before and at the conclusion of the program.

The program was most effective when the teacher consolidated their learning through working with another class using the drama devices initially modelled with their own class. The students consolidated their learning through the completion of follow up activities between sessions.

The pilot program was undertaken over four years to refine the process and was completely subsidised. The first iteration in 2009 was piloted in nine classes across five inner city Sydney public primary schools. Its success in those schools led to the extension of the program to 16 schools across all education sectors in 2010. Four of the pilot study schools remained in the project for a significant number of years and Plunkett Street was involved for the whole 15 years.

A meta-analysis in 2012 (Gibson & Smith, 2012) concluded that the co-mentoring was a most effective professional learning approach with teachers describing it as: 'the best professional learning of a 30-year career.'

Over time the program was piloted in Broken Hill and delivered in: Adelaide (2013-4) in partnership with the State Theatre Company of South Australia, in Perth and Karratha partnering with Backing Gecko Theatre (2015-22); in Darwin through a partnership with Brown's Mart Theatre; in Albury-Wodonga through a collaboration with Murray Arts and HotHouse Theatre; in Wilcannia and Katherine; in the Australian Capital Territory through a partnership with Canberra Theatre Centre; and in Auckland through a partnership with Applied Theatre Company and The University of Auckland (2018-9). The COVID-19 pandemic prevented non-essential staff from delivering workshops in schools in many states and territories across Australia and New Zealand and this led to the end of several partnerships with regional and interstate delivery.

Reflections about School Drama from key stakeholders

Cate Blanchett AO and Andrew Upton - Artistic Co-Directors, 2008-2013

School Drama as designed, researched and developed by The Education Team at STC was a wonderful, on-going manifestation of that exciting and illuminating central provocation that “life and curriculum can be explored through theatre”. The great flowering of confidence and engagement we personally witnessed through our partner schools from the early stages of the initiative to its ongoing rollout and growth during our time at STC was always a steady inspiration for us.

Now, when we both stop to consider just how deeply embedded in our culture and our psyches the core tenets of the theatrical experience are, we are startled. Role-playing and wrestling hard-earned knowledge from engaging with life’s drama is fundamental to any person’s successful passage through their time and society. Refining the skills that that process demands and affording young students the explicit opportunity to do just that gives them all an invaluable tool for their future. Hopefully too, the fond memories of their early encounter with the company and the form will throw open the doors for them when they are older, no doubt wiser and making their own way in the world.

Patrick McIntyre - Executive Director, Sydney Theatre Company, 2010-2021

As Executive Director of Sydney Theatre Company for twelve of those 15 years, I can attest to the rigour, efficacy and originality of the program, and am proud of my part in supporting its development and nationwide reach.

While the original model involved specially trained teaching artists working alongside classroom teachers over a period of weeks, in response to demand, over time the program was successfully adapted into short-form teacher professional development opportunities, hub-based delivery, and also for adult education including with adult refugees and others for whom English was not their first language. In each case, the partnership between teaching artists, school teachers and community workers in delivering the program enriched and extended the skills of all, in addition to improving learning outcomes of students.

From the outset, School Drama was deliberately intended to have a network effect on literacy outcomes. Through a wide range of partnerships with other theatre companies, universities, schools and education departments, the program was delivered in every single state and territory in Australia except Tasmania, as well as in Albury/Wodonga and Auckland, New Zealand. Over fifteen years, an estimated 39,000 teachers and students participated in the program, sometimes on more than one occasion. This means thousands of teachers and students became more confident and responsive teachers of literacy, and will take new skills with them into other schools across the course of their careers.

Importantly, research programs were conducted by The University of Sydney alongside the program, establishing a rare body of knowledge that is a testament to the importance of creativity, play and active engagement in engaging and inspiring students, leading to improved results against literacy curriculum benchmarks. As has been demonstrated with other arts-rich education programs, secondary benefits such as enhanced confidence and self esteem, positive social interactions, and increased interaction by habitually less-engaged learners were also observed.

Dr John Nicholas Saunders - Director of Education & Community Partnerships, 2013-2020

I first learnt about the program in 2011, when I was a school teacher in Queensland. Robyn Ewing had just published an enormously persuasive monograph for the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), and the School Drama program was being showcased on the ABC's 7:30 Report. I emailed Robyn (having never met her before) congratulating her on the story and monograph. Our paths crossed several times before I was fortunate enough to win a role as Education Manager, and later Director of Education and Community Partnerships at STC (2013 – 2020), with a strong initial focus on 'scaling up' the School Drama program. Through our work, Robyn became a colleague, mentor and friend, and supervised my masters and doctoral research, both exploring different aspects of the School Drama program. What struck me was the way Robyn had designed School Drama, as a co-mentoring collaboration, was exactly the way she worked with all colleagues. There was never a hierarchy (even though she was the professor!). We were all equal and we were all invited and encouraged to bring our strengths and experience to continually refine and improve the program. Robyn and I, like Sydney University and STC, worked together in a true and authentic

partnership. Neither could 'do' School Drama without the other, and a very powerful and productive partnership continued for many years, beyond the life of the program. I was also fortunate to work as a teaching artist each term throughout my time at STC. This was enormously beneficial, as I became deeply intertwined with the program, and it helped me support our teaching artists. The teaching artists were also great collaborators and generously shared their experiences and learnings with the rest of us. I learnt so much from working with them and seeing them in action. Together we all co-mentored each other and many of us are friends and colleagues long after finishing working on the program. I was particularly lucky to work alongside Alyson Evans as we piloted School Drama in a juvenile justice centre in Western Sydney. This was a transformative experience for me as a person, teacher, and teaching artist.

Looking back, I'm incredibly proud of all that we achieved. To reach over 39,000 teachers and students through the different iterations of the program is staggering. I attribute the success of the program to the people, particularly Robyn. Helen Hristofski and Toni Murphy did an enormous amount of work in the pilot years, Zoe Hogan, Rachel Small, and Kaylee Hazell worked with me to build the program to have national reach. I don't think any of it would have happened without Cate Blanchett and Andrew Upton, Rob Brookman, and Patrick McIntyre's vision and commitment, and their ability to excite donors about the program. They saw this program as an investment in the future. The Board at STC loved the program, and many of them supported the program through philanthropy.



Left to right: Andrew Upton, Patrick McIntyre, Robyn Ewing and John Nicholas Saunders at the launch of the School Drama book in 2016.

Photo Credit: John Nicholas Saunders

Rob Brookman - General Manager Sydney Theatre Company, 1999-2010

When Professor Robyn Ewing brought the idea of an artist-led literacy program for primary schools to Co-Artistic Directors of Sydney Theatre Andrew Upton and Cate Blanchett in 2008, it was a classic case of a seed falling on fertile ground. Cate and Andrew enthusiastically embraced the idea and STC's Education Manager Helen Hristofski and subsequently John Nicholas Saunders ran with it. After a highly successful pilot program in 2009 which provided proof-of-concept, the program expanded year-on-year within Sydney and, before too long, the unique process of pairing teaching theatre artists with teachers in the classroom had been adopted in a number of cities across Australia and even into New Zealand. Robyn's conviction was that such a program, which embedded the learnings from artists-in-residence into ongoing teaching practice, would not only improve academic outcomes but also contribute to the holistic development of students into literate and engaged people capable of harnessing creativity to address the issues of the world we live in. The academic outcomes have been proven. And the six-year-olds that encountered this program in 2009 are now 22. I love to think that, as they take their place in the grown-up world, the impact of School Drama from their early childhood will live with them and help make them excellent citizens navigating this complex planet – so full of both frightening and wondrous possibility.

Professor Peter O'Connor and Dr Briar O'Connor, ATCo Directors, Aotearoa New Zealand

In 2018, Applied Theatre Company Ltd (ATCo) signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Sydney Theatre Company to deliver School Drama across Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ). This fortuitously coincided with NZ's Ministry of Education providing funding for schools to apply for, called Creatives in Schools (CiS). ATCo's School Drama-trained facilitators each registered as 'creatives' and as a result, two separate contracts were granted, enabling ATCo to work with two separate schools: a Catholic primary school (years 1-8) in a low socio-economic area, and the Mangere Refugees Centre. At the Refugees Centre, basic schooling is provided to newly-arrived refugees, who stay for six weeks before being assisted to living in the community.

In writing a reflection on our time delivering School Drama in NZ, we were drawn to the following comments offered by teachers:

The sessions would be by far the best PD I have undertaken. The hands-on experience put everything in context and showed the potential for each convention used. The engagement levels of both student and teacher were very high with both anticipating the following weeks session.

Quite a natural way to encourage children to engage with unfamiliar texts while exploring the arts in context.

Informative, interesting and delightful to see the children's enjoyment Schools Drama has encouraged my students to delve into their imaginative selves in a safe and non-threatening way. Everyone contributes and all responses are positively received. Apart from a great deal of enjoyment experienced by all, the exposure to a variety of literacy conventions has seen an improvement in my students "love of language and confidence in writing. Thank you.

These comments so vividly recall for us our own excitement at having the opportunity to work alongside John and Robyn, when they came to Auckland to train our small group of teaching artists. Their own modelling in classrooms was some of the best professional development we had ever had as well. Our team at ATCo already had many years' experience of working in schools, but School Drama pushed our practice in so many positive ways. As part of that training we still vividly recall watching Robyn teach a class of five year olds in Auckland. She held them spell bound as they spent nearly an hour looking closely at only 2 or 3 pages of text. It reminded us of watching our colleagues and dear friends Juliana Saxton and Carole Miller teach. It was slow, deliberate teaching with an embodied sense of what makes good drama and good learning. It was drama teaching as art form.

The highly structured model of professional development where our teaching artists taught and learnt alongside teachers and students was exciting for us all. We got so much better at the professional conversations at the heart of the mentoring programme, and we loved sharing our successes with each other as a small team. Watching students' literacy skills develop and their writing blossom, all amidst a fun and energising programme was so deeply rewarding.

Peter used the School Drama model when he was asked by the Sir John Kirwan Foundation to create a professional development programme for mental health education in New Zealand primary schools using high quality children's literature as a basis for dramatic and other arts based processes to explore the text and beyond. The co-mentoring process it uses owes much to the inspiration provided by our experience of School Drama. The programme, Mitey, is now in 300 schools across New Zealand.

The work at the Mangere Refugees Centre was enhanced when one of our Teaching Artists, Caitlin Kennedy, travelled to Sydney to work with Zoe Hogan in a course Zoe had designed regarding working with marginalised people, including refugees. This allowed Caitlin to tailor the work we did in the Centre.

Despite various lock-downs and limitations, Caitlin and Stacey were able to work with several groups of newly-arrived refugees over the three years the funding was available. This was an unexpected bonus, giving teachers the opportunity to reflect upon their experiences between visits, knowing the team would be returning when possible.

We know that the work we did energised whole schools, giving teachers and students a remarkable taster of the possibility of working through drama. We know too of teachers and schools still pursuing drama as pedagogy and art form, enriching children's' learning everyday.



*Students participating in arts-rich activities during the School Drama program.
Photo credit: Grant Sparkes-Carroll*

School Drama Hub

Many teachers wanted to continue their professional learning after they finished School Drama Classic (the seven week model). We developed School Drama Hub, a series of five twilight sessions (over a semester), where we would immerse the teachers in new drama and literature workshops and experiences. The teachers would take the ideas and strategies, adapt them for their specific context and then explore them in their classrooms. When they returned to the hub a few weeks later, they would share their experiences and reflect on their learning. Then we would start the cycle again. Often, after the semester finished, the group would stay in touch to continue to share ideas and resources and support each other. First offered in Sydney, School Drama Hub was also successful in Brisbane in partnership with Brisbane Catholic Education, and in Melbourne with Drama Victoria, Deakin University and the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, over a number of years. Some of the communities of learning that developed in those hubs continue online. 15-20% of teachers who have completed the program chose to undertake further professional development in their own time by enrolling in subsequent School Drama Hub professional learning twilight seminars.

Other adaptations of the program

Over time, the program was adapted for use in Secondary English as Additional Language/Dialect (EAL/D) classrooms, juvenile justice centres, with adults from a refugee or migrant background, with teenagers living with disabilities, and in preschools. Keynotes at a range of different conferences were invited and workshops were presented at peak professional association conferences (for example, Australian Literacy Educators Association (ALEA); Primary English Teaching Association Australia (PETAA); Drama Australia, Drama NSW, Drama Victoria, Drama Queensland, and Drama New Zealand to name a few). We presented lectures and workshops to groups of pre-service teachers (at Sydney University, Western Sydney University, Charles Sturt University and University of New South Wales) and to whole staff professional development days in schools. Later, short courses were also developed and accredited by the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA). Ewing and Saunders presented research and practice at international conferences around the world, including in the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Canada, United States of America, Singapore, and New Zealand.

Connected

Zoe Hogan and Victoria Campbell developed the Connected program, which used the drama-rich pedagogy with ancient myths and legends and was designed for adult refugees and adults with migrant backgrounds learning English. More recently Hogan and Campbell adapted Connected for community language teachers.

Juvenile Justice Centres

Alyson Evans, an experienced teaching artist, with John Nicholas Saunders and Zoe Hogan, established a branch of School Drama, working firstly with young men (ages 12 to 16) in juvenile justice centres in Western Sydney. The program's success saw the initiative grow and work with young woman in juvenile justice centres too.

School Drama Virtual

During the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns, the Teaching Artists under the leadership of Zoe Hogan developed School Drama Virtual as an online resource for schools and parents.

Dr Zoe Hogan - Teaching Artist, Education Manager, Director, Community Engagement and Partnerships, 2015-2023

Being part of School Drama at Sydney Theatre Company was a real turning point in my professional life, and opened my eyes to the transformative potential of arts-rich education programs.

I joined the School Drama team in 2015 as a Teaching Artist and administrator. One of my most lasting memories is the genuine sense of camaraderie, fun, and professional learning every year when we would gather as a cohort for Teaching Artist training week. What I learned from my fellow teaching artists in those weeks, alongside Robyn, John, and Victoria, constitute the best professional development I have ever had. It left me with a lasting respect for the role of the Teaching Artist, and understanding of how through programs like School Drama, we can open spaces for students to imagine, question, and explore new worlds.

In my nine years on the program, I worked alongside many classroom teachers in many contexts, from primary schools to Intensive English Centres and juvenile justice centres. Looking back, I learned so much from many of these teachers and their passion for enriching the lives

of their students, particularly in under resourced schools. For example, I have had the privilege of seeing teachers delight their students by stepping into role as a witch, a town mayor and even as Prime Minister Anthony Albanese surveying the students' Incredible Freedom Machines (inspired by the book by Kirli Saunders).

School Drama also provided the foundation from which my colleague Victoria Campbell and I (alongside other Teaching Artists) were able to pilot and develop what became the Connected program, working with adults from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

On a personal note, many of my School Drama colleagues are now dear friends and mentors. The ongoing impacts of the program are difficult to encapsulate. I feel honoured to have played a part in the School Drama program at Sydney Theatre Company.

Dr Victoria Campbell - Teaching Artist, Lecturer, Mentor, 2010-2024

The power of School Drama lies in its ability to rekindle a sense of wonder, creativity and imagination in learning. My enduring memory of being a teaching artist on the School Drama program is the profound and transformative impact it has on teachers and students alike. Students are released from their desks and are encouraged to use their own imaginative, creative and authentic processes for learning. I repeatedly observed how teachers' expectations about their students shifted. It was inspiring to witness how teachers also had an opportunity to reconnect with their own creative selves, resulting in a revitalisation of their teaching practice. In my experience, School Drama is a powerful catalyst for transforming the classroom experience. The legacy of School Drama lies with the many teachers who have participated in the program over the years, who hopefully will continue to design dynamic classroom experiences where imagination and creativity become touchstones for deep learning.

Kaylee Hazell - Teaching Artist, Creative Learning Program Manager, Sydney Theatre Company, 2015-2024

My journey as a teaching artist on School Drama began in 2015 after hearing about the program while working in the STC box office. During the professional learning week I attended I met a group of highly skilled and passionate teaching artists and academics that reawakened my love of education through the arts. I had never linked my teaching artistry with academic research before, and I was

immediately infused with a new confidence about the power of drama in the lives of young people!

One of the strengths of School Drama that deeply resonates with me is the accessibility of the program for all students regardless of their academic levels. Countless times classroom teachers expressed surprise and delight when particular students were, for the first time, ready to engage orally and actively with the class and then translate that confidence into written words. Teaching School Drama with Youth Off the Streets, Key College in Redfern over 5 years impacted me profoundly. (Key College provides educational opportunities that support young people who are disengaged from mainstream education and/or struggling to maintain stable accommodation). Joanna Nicholson from Key College said “For students who have experienced complex trauma, a space where permission is given to dress up, be silly, experiment with different personas and work as a team is invaluable. One student who would not speak or participate in the early workshops, ended the program writing a scene about a traumatic incident in her life. Young people who experience trauma also need a space where they can tell their stories and be heard. We are so grateful for the Sydney Theatre Company’s School Drama program.” Working on this program has deepened my teaching artist practice with so many layers of meaning and purpose. I will forever hold onto these learnings and continue to draw on them throughout my career.



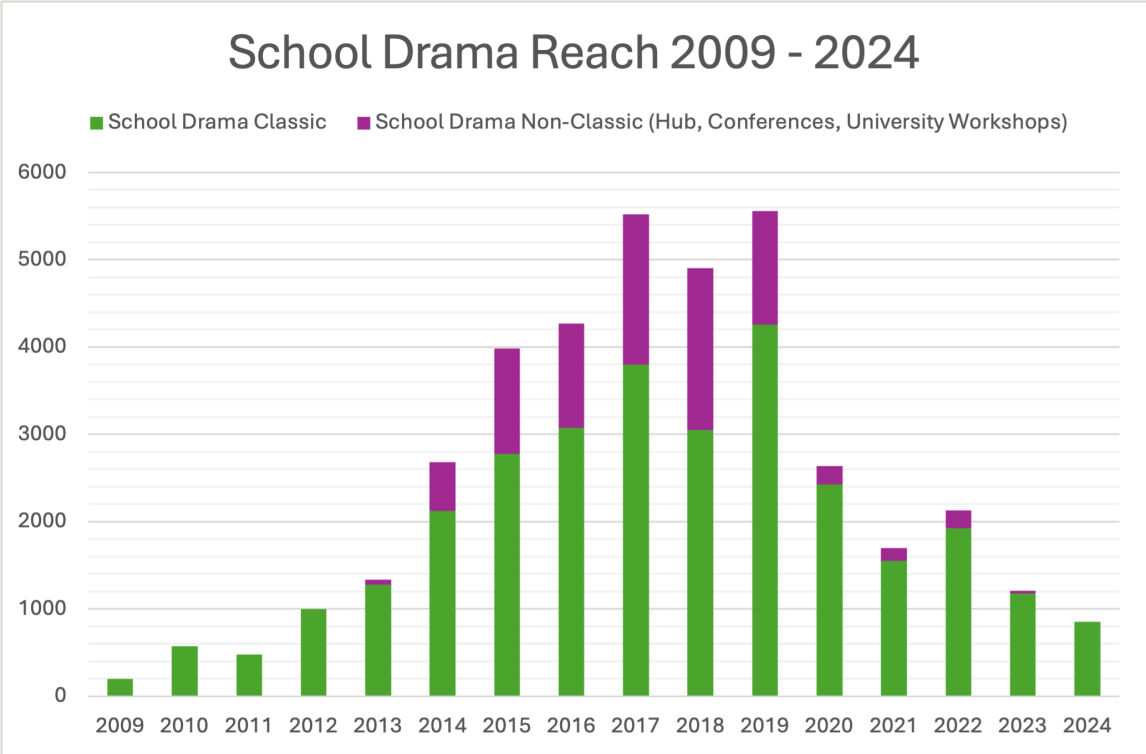
*Teaching Artist Training Week, 2015.
Photo credit: Grant Sparkes-Carroll*

Resources and Reach

In response to teachers asking for more resources after they had completed the in-class program, Ewing and Saunders (2016) wrote: *The School Drama Book: Drama, Literature and Literacy in the Creative Classroom* (Currency Press) and *The School Drama Companion* a multi-touch book showcasing 24 drama strategies and devices with Apple. Zoe Hogan and Victoria Campbell (2022) co-authored *Connecting through Drama* also published by Currency Press.

School Drama Reach

From 2009 to 2024, School Drama Classic had reached 30,530 teachers and students, and 8,488 teacher educators through School Drama Hub, School Drama workshops and papers at conferences at universities with pre-service teachers, reaching a total of 39,018 participants over the fifteen years of the program.

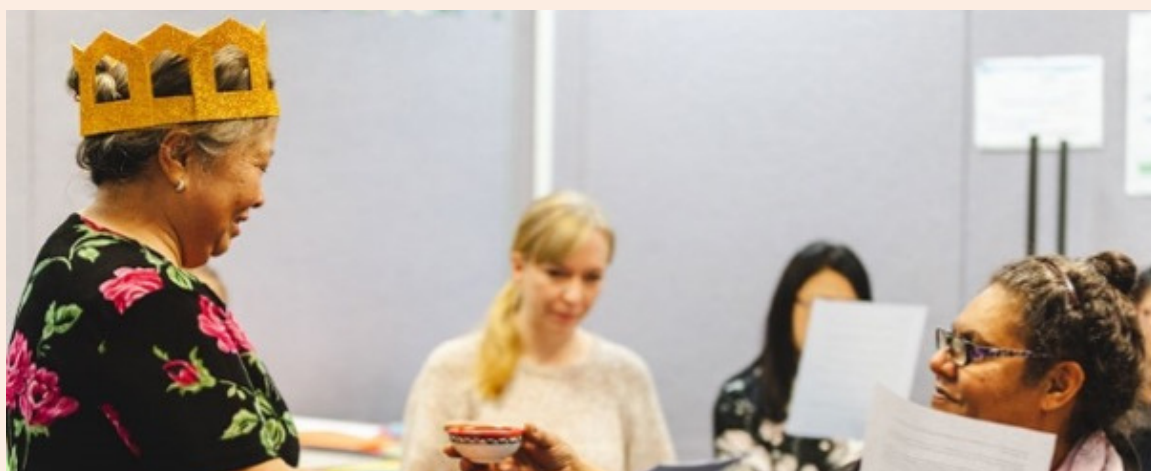


From 2009 to 2013, participation in School Drama was fully subsidised through philanthropic support. In 2014, schools made a modest contribution. From 2015 to 2024, schools made more substantial contributions to the program, however all schools also received a subsidy through philanthropic support. From 2022-2024, one third of participating schools were subsidised by the City of Sydney. It is worth noting that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many education jurisdictions did not allow teaching artists on campus in 2020 and 2021 and research was not allowed in Department of Education schools during 2022-2023.

The pandemic coincided with STC's \$60 million Wharf Renewal Project, fully renovating the Walsh Bay site. Prior to the pandemic, STC's revenue was largely supported by ticket sales to productions, worth about 70% of total revenue. During the pandemic, revenue fell significantly, and the company directed more philanthropic support away from School Drama to support mainstage productions. In addition, in 2023/2024, NSW Department of Education teachers were granted a salary increase, however the Department's budget was not increased, leaving schools with reduced budgets for professional learning. This, coupled with increased fees for School Drama contributed significantly to the decline in participation rates in the final years.

A number of principals and teachers have articulated the need for the School Drama program even more given the new NSW K-6 English syllabus (to be implemented from 2024) does not prioritise the centrality of quality literature in nurturing learner creativity and imagination, particularly in the the early years of schooling. One teacher asserted:

I cannot imagine not using process drama as pedagogy in my classroom but sadly with this new 'explicit' syllabus it is more difficult. I manage to do it, but I worry for the newer teachers, the less experienced, who cannot make such adaptations easily. I blame the syllabus for the demise of the program and its outreach - I hear it every day here from the younger staff who are struggling to cover the explicit program content. [The program] opened doors of understanding for our EAL/D and less able students that previously they had not been able to grasp. For the others it deepened their interpretations and developed critical and creative thinking on themes, concepts, character, story development and so on.



Zoe Hogan observes a Connected session with MTC Australia in Blacktown, 2019. Photo credit: Hon Boey

The Pilot Phase Findings

Evaluating the Pilot School Drama 2009-2012

As part of the partnership between STC and The University of Sydney's then Faculty of Education and Social Work (FESW), annual evaluations of the four years of the pilot program were undertaken by University of Sydney researchers. Along with these annual evaluations (Campbell, Ewing & Gibson, 2010; Gibson 2011, 2012, 2013) a meta-analysis of the first four years was completed by Gibson and Smith, The School Drama Project Meta-Evaluation 2009–2012. It analysed information gathered from participants, including: teacher pre- and post-program surveys, reflective teacher and teaching artist post-engagement interviews, debriefing with teaching artists at the conclusion of teach term's program; student pre- and post-program benchmark results and work samples, and some student evaluations and focus group interviews.

Associate Professor Robyn Gibson:

I was fortunate enough to work as the chief evaluator for the School Drama program from its inception in 2009 through to 2012. This involvement extended to a meta-evaluation of the program in 2013 with Associate Professor David Smith & another in 2018 with Dr Jenny Beachum.

Overwhelmingly both participating teachers and their students reported a range of positive academic and social outcomes as a result of this innovative program. Teachers, working in a co-mentoring partnership with a teaching-artist, identified a newfound confidence in using process drama across the curriculum. Evidence indicated that students' literacy outcomes had improved as did their confidence, creative thinking and risk-taking through their involvement. There is little doubt that the School Drama program offered a myriad of educational opportunities unique to the program.

Associate Professor David Smith:

I had the privilege to be one of the original evaluators for the School Drama program. I both analysed the results of survey data and also contributed one of the case-study evaluations focusing on sustainability.

From all of the data that we gathered and analysed during the evaluations the School Drama program has been an unqualified outstanding success for the students, teachers, and teaching artists

artists who have participated. Further, the impact on the participant teachers has also been shared with other teachers in their schools: the effect of the School Drama program snow-balls throughout participant schools.

There is also no doubt from the analysis of evaluation results that there are four outstanding features of the program that are constantly referred to by participants:

1. The first, and probably most important, is the mutuality of the partnership between teaching-artist and classroom teacher in which the knowledge each brings to the partnership is respected and joined to result in powerful learning and understanding by both teacher and teaching-artist. This finding is expected, given that the principles underpinning the partnership model were established and confirmed previously over 17 years of working with teachers in schools and using evidence from the latest educational research.
2. All of the learning experiences/activities and texts/resources are negotiated by teacher and teaching-artist together taking account of students' backgrounds, abilities and literacy learning needs and the confidence and learning needs of the teacher.
3. The opportunity is provided for participating teachers to not only undertake professional learning with the teaching-artist in their classroom, but also for immersive collaborative professional learning free from classroom and school responsibilities before the in-class program.
4. Finally, the comparative benchmarking of student outcomes from the beginning to the end of the intervention is a very clear, unambiguous demonstration of the progress of the students to the teacher, other teachers, principals and parents.



Teaching Artist Professional Learning. Photo credit: Grant Sparkes-Carroll

A Portfolio of School Drama Research

The evidence of the School Drama program's efficacy can be seen in classrooms around the country. Over fifteen years, the program has changed the way many participating teachers approach teaching English and literacy. It has boosted learners' confidence, imagination and English and literacy outcomes. But beyond ongoing anecdotal evidence from teachers and students, the program has been underpinned by a wealth of research, undertaken by researchers from The University of Sydney's School of Education and Social Work, the CREATE Centre and Research Higher Degree students. Below, we have compiled some of the studies, book chapters, articles and resources beginning with the most recent. They provide an in-depth look at the program's impact and sustainability, and clear evidence for not only the immediate effect of School Drama in the classroom, but its ongoing impact on the way creative drama-rich processes can transform teaching and learning across the curriculum.



Teaching Artist Courtney Stewart working with students on the School Drama program. Photo credit: Hon Boey

Hogan, Z (2024) Weaving unweaving, reweaving: personal, social and creative experiences of process drama with Community Languages teachers, *Unpublished PhD*, Sydney: University of Sydney
<https://hdl.handle.net/2123/32865>

Community/Heritage Language (CL) learning contexts have not been well researched. This study uses arts-based inquiry and ethnography to illuminate the experiences and learning of a group of CL teachers in Western Sydney, Australia as they participated in a process drama program that explored the Greek myth of Penelope. The thesis also considers the role of teaching artistry in shaping these experiences and is an extended and critical reflection on the researcher's Teaching Artist practice. At each stage of the study, collaborative and dialogic ways of meaning-making were privileged. A preference for multi-vocal approaches is also reflected in the ethnodrama script that forms an integral part

of this thesis. Penelope's iconic weaving, unweaving, and reweaving became a central metaphor for the research as an iterative process of learning, unlearning, revisiting, and reconceiving for both the participants and the researcher. This central metaphor also resonated with the diffractive approach to data analysis, which involved threading theory through the data, and data through the theory to highlight new insights and learnings. This research contributes to the literature concerning how adults from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds engage with participatory arts. It explores how engagement, care, and the collective shaping of third space are at the heart of experiences of adults engaging in applied theatre. This study adds to a growing discourse in applied theatre that moves away from positivist jargon and grandiose claims in favour of research methods informed by social justice and the centring of the intrinsic value of arts-rich experiences. As a critical and ethnographic thesis, it is also a provocation to more deeply consider and acknowledge the complexity of Teaching Artistry.

Saunders, J. N., & Ewing, R. A. (2022). It Lifts Up Your Imagination: Drama-rich pedagogy, literature and literacy: the School Drama programme. In M. McAvoy, & P. O'Connor (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Drama in Education* (pp. 443-449).

<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003000914-47>

This chapter documents the practice of, evolution of and research about the School Drama programme, a teacher professional learning programme developed in Australia by Sydney Theatre Company and The University of Sydney. It provides a rich exemplar of why drama-rich processes and quality literary texts enable children and young people to become deeply literate. This chapter explores how the provision of opportunities, time and strategies to activate learners' imaginations, embody their feelings and enact new experiences encourages primary students to work together to delve deeply beyond the surface and taken-for-granted-ness of a text to learn about themselves and others in the context of the complexities of today's world. We show that drama has the potential to encourage children to develop the confidence to ask 'what if' and that drama-rich pedagogies can and should be used to interrogate quality literary texts; enable multiple ways of knowing, doing, being and becoming; and explore alternative possibilities and realities in a world sorely in need of new understandings.

McAtamney, O. (2021). School Drama: Using drama for oracy in an EAL/D classroom. *NJ*, 45(2), 113–127.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14452294.2021.2011045>

This article examines the pedagogical potential of drama-rich processes to develop and improve oracy skills for students learning English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D). Research was conducted through a multi-level, qualitative case study of Sydney Theatre Company and University of Sydney's School Drama program. School Drama is a co-mentoring teacher professional learning program that promotes a dual focus of developing teachers' capacity to use drama pedagogy with literature, and improving literacy outcomes and engagement for students. The research context was an intermediate Intensive English class at a western Sydney secondary school, involving students from refugee backgrounds. Data gathering included observations, focus groups, teacher interviews, and artefact analysis. While this instance of the program presented behavioural and structural limitations, benchmarking assessment depicted a marked to moderate improvement in oracy skills. Vocabulary, imagination and creativity and confidence emerged as the most salient ways oracy was developed and improved.

Collis, Z. (2021). *Using drama-rich pedagogies to increase students' engagement with learning in juvenile justice centres: A case study*. Unpublished Honours Thesis, Sydney: The University of Sydney.

This study draws on and bridges two significant fields of research: the benefits of drama in adult prisons, and the effects of drama-rich pedagogies in improving students' literacy and oracy for deeper learning. The study investigated whether drama-rich pedagogies can increase student engagement with learning within a juvenile justice centre context; and what drama-rich pedagogies can offer students who are being educated in these institutions.

A qualitative case study of the Sydney Theatre Company's 'School Drama' program was undertaken to explore whether teaching artists, working within the program using drama-rich pedagogies and strategies, observed enhanced student engagement in learning over the length of the program.

Findings suggested that using warm-up activities, age-appropriate visual texts and drama processes and strategies increased students' ability to connect with educational content and enhanced their desire to participate. The flexibility of drama was seen as beneficial for educating students in this environment, with a focus on fostering empathy and forging collaboration and communication skills. The teaching artists reported that using drama-rich pedagogy enabled students

to find personal meaning within the content and articulate their knowledges and ideas more confidently. These findings suggest drama-rich pedagogies have the potential to enable individuals whose learning is at risk to access educational possibilities and overcome educational barriers to foster more engagement and excitement around learning. While the scope of this study is limited, it contributes to a growing portfolio of research about the 'School Drama' program and its positive influence on student learning in different contexts.

Beaumont, N. E. (2022). "It makes you feel a little bit freer": Committing to creativity: A hermeneutic phenomenological study of a primary teacher's use of drama with additional language learners. *Teachers and Curriculum*, 22(2), 35-47.

<https://doi.org/10.15663/tandc.v22i2.405>

Creative pedagogies contribute significantly to children's cognitive, social and linguistic development. This article discusses the drama-based creative literacy practice of an early primary teacher in a high diversity school in Sydney, Australia. Literacy pedagogy blended with drama and role play was shown to aid oracy whilst also adding valuable semiotic support for language learners. Video recordings of this teacher's lessons formed the basis of a hermeneutic phenomenological study into the affordances of drama in additional language contexts. Findings revealed positive contributions to learner comprehension and engagement. They also indicated that the pressure of an over-crowded curriculum necessitates personal commitment to creative arts pedagogy on the part of the teacher. Despite policy rhetoric promoting creativity as a key capability, creativity itself is seen to be stymied in an educational context heavily prioritising standardisation and assessment. Without systemic support, it is left to motivated, individual teachers to prioritise creative learning experiences in schools.

Beaumont, N. E. (2022). Poetry and Motion: Rhythm, Rhyme and Embodiment as Oral Literacy Pedagogy for Young Additional Language Learners. *Education Sciences*, 12(12), 905.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci12120905>

Literacy pedagogy that integrates oracy, poetry and embodiment can foster children's language development in multiple ways: (1) oracy is foundational to children's emergent literacy as writing extends from oral language, (2) poetry uses rhythm and rhyme to support letter-recognition and the learning of phonemes and morphemes, (3) embodiment and roleplay provide semiotic support and opportunities for expressive and receptive communication.

This article shares findings from a phenomenological case study investigating how literacy pedagogy that integrated oracy, poetry and embodiment impacted three additional language students aged 6. A series of weekly literacy classes in a school in Sydney's multicultural western region were observed and recorded on video. This instrument was able to capture 'micro-moments' of learning between peers, depicting how physicalisation and the use of rhythm and rhyme effectively engaged students whose first language was not used in the classroom. Using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to data analysis, case study findings revealed that embodied explorations of poetry immersed participants socially and imaginatively whilst pushing them beyond their additional language comfort zone. The pedagogy was also shown to increase comprehension and support the acquisition of new vocabulary.

Beaumont, N. E. (2020). Drama as inclusive literacy in high diversity schools. *NJ*, 44(2), 120–131.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14452294.2021.1897250>

Drama is becoming increasingly valued in the context of additional language learning. Representing knowledge in multiple modes has been shown to support diverse students. The use of drama can enhance meaning and comprehension for language learners as it enlists the voice and body as additional semiotic tools. Sociocultural theory provides a framework for understanding this dynamic, as does the work of Kress and Jewitt in multimodal communication. This article reports on a hermeneutic phenomenological study centring of three English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) students during weekly Year 1 literacy classes where drama was used. The setting was a high diversity primary school in Western Sydney. In keeping with the research method, participants' lived experiences were sought, and narrative interpretations were used to represent the collected data. The findings indicated that drama provided both multimodal comprehension support and increased sociocognitive motivation for the participants during these sessions.

Beaumont, N. (2020). *Multimodal language and learning: Drama as EAL/D pedagogy in the early primary classroom*. Unpublished MEd Thesis, Sydney: The University of Sydney.

<https://hdl.handle.net/2123/22696>

Multimodality is becoming increasingly valued in the fields of second language learning and social equity. This investigation builds upon a growing body of research demonstrating that drama-rich strategies and techniques are a classroom innovation that can improve student engagement and learning

outcomes. The experiences of three English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) Year 1 students and their classroom teacher are explored. The study interprets their engagement in socio-dramatic roleplay as a form of oral and written literacy instruction. Analysis centres around the body language and classroom conversations of participants, as well as the pedagogic strategies implemented. Drama encourages vocal expressiveness and creative language use. It also allows young students to use their innate physicality to create and access multimodal meaning.

Karaolis, O. (2020). *Everybody in! Drama as a Pedagogy for Inclusion*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Sydney: The University of Sydney.
<https://hdl.handle.net/2123/24316>

This inquiry explores the potential of drama as inclusive pedagogy with young children/ Included in the study are three preschools that enrol children with additional needs in their program. Together with the researcher, the children and staff engaged a range of drama strategies, including puppetry and found they significantly increased the participation and contribution of all children in their learning experiences, creating a more inclusive learning environment. The process of this study is depicted in portraits, allowing the audience to discover the world of the children, how their day-to-day experience was changed by the creative approaches and the potential of drama and puppetry as a valuable tool for professional development in the early childhood sector.

Saunders, J.N.R. (2019). *Dramatic Interventions: A multi-site case study analysis of student outcomes in the School Drama Program*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Sydney: The University of Sydney.
<https://ses.library.usyd.edu.au/handle/2123/21249>

This dissertation reports on research that has examined the process and outcomes of the School Drama professional learning program. The dual aims of the program are to provide primary classroom teachers with the knowledge, understanding, skills and confidence to use drama-based pedagogy with quality children's literature and to improve student literacy in a designated focus area such as confidence in oracy, creative/imaginative writing, descriptive language or inferential comprehension. This research aimed to investigate the impact of the program on students. An analysis of all data collected in 2017 from a range of participating schools, teachers and students provides a top-level overview of the program's outcomes. A fine-grained analysis of three case study classrooms in diverse school contexts follows. A range of data was collected from students, the class teacher and the teaching artist/researcher including: student pre- and post-

program literacy benchmarking tasks; student pre- and post-program surveys; student focus groups; teacher interviews; and teaching artist/researcher observations and journals. The findings suggest positive shifts in student English and literacy outcomes in the selected focus area (inferential comprehension), particularly in less able male students. Perhaps even more importantly, there is strong evidence that quality drama-based pedagogy enhances student confidence, collaboration, imagination, engagement and connection to character.

Taylor, K. (2019). *Empowering Students with Language Difficulties Through Process Drama* [Paper presentation]. Australian Association for the Teaching of English/Australian Literacy Educators Association Conference, Hobart, July.

This research paper explores the impact process drama has on the expressive language skills for students with a Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) using Action research as the chosen methodology. The research project facilitates a partnership between Peel Language Development School and Barking Gecko Theatre Company to provide an opportunity for students at Peel LDS to participate in the School Drama program. The ability to communicate can often be taken for granted. This project aimed to empower students with language impairments by giving them a voice through the Arts using drama pedagogy with literary texts. The data demonstrated through benchmarking that students' oral language and comprehension skills improved markedly. Findings from this research illustrate and exemplify how drama can foster literacy learning for students with language difficulties.

Ewing, R.A., & Saunders, J.N. (2019). *The School Drama Partnership: Beyond an artist-in-residence program*. In M. Finneran & M. Anderson (Eds.), *Education and Theatres: Beyond the Four Walls* (pp. 139-153). Springer.

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-22223-9_10

This chapter first focuses on the relationship developed between a leading Australian theatre company, Sydney Theatre Company (STC) and The University of Sydney's Faculty of Education and Social Work (FESW) in order to use one artform, drama, as a lens to interrogate another, contemporary literary texts for children in order to enhance literacy learning in its deepest sense. Subsequent acts pay particular attention to the role of the teaching artists in the program and their work with participating primary teachers. The outcomes of the project, from their perspectives and the development of what we have described as a collaborative zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978; Ewing, 2015; Moll and Whitmore, 1993) are then discussed. The final act explores some of the outcomes and implications for the ongoing sustainability of the program.

Ewing, R. (2019). *Drama-rich pedagogy and becoming deeply literate*. Drama Australia Monograph No 12. Brisbane: Drama Australia.

In this monograph Robyn Ewing considers the highly significant body of more than three decades of research, scholarship and practice that unequivocally support the transformative potential of embedding arts-rich or quality arts processes and experiences across the curriculum. Ongoing research that specifically focuses on the potential that drama rich pedagogies in particular can play in becoming deeply and critically literate in the 21st century are explored including the School Drama program, a co-mentoring teacher professional learning program developed by Sydney Theatre Company in partnership with The University of Sydney.

Campbell, V., & Hogan, Z. (2019). Pandora and the Tiger's Whisker: stories as a pretext in two adult language learning contexts. *NJ*, 43(1), 39–50.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14452294.2019.1585931>

This article discusses the way two traditional tales were adapted and modified for use as pretexts in the Connected: Adult Language Learning through Drama program (CALLD) with migrant populations, including refugees and asylum seekers, in two sites during 2017 & 2018 in Sydney, Australia. The focus of this article is to explore the way ancient stories such as folktales and myths function in these settings, and how through action and reflection the authors, as teaching artists on the program, adapted these tales to better engage the participants in the process drama that followed.

Ewing, R. (2019). Embedding arts-rich English and literacy pedagogies in the classroom. *Literacy Learning: The Middle Years*; v.27 n.1 p.7-17; February 2019, 27(1), 7–17.
<https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/aeipt.222610>

Arts-rich English and literacy pedagogies are critical for our social and emotional wellbeing as well as our academic success and readiness for creative lifelong learning. Increasingly, however, the demand for simple 'one size fits all' approaches to English and literacy pedagogy and improved test performance threaten the expertise and professional judgement of many teachers and teacher educators. What do arts-rich literacy experiences and practices look like in the classroom? This paper explores current research and a contemporary example that demonstrates how teachers' and children's creativities, imaginations, self-confidence and identities can be nurtured through embedding quality arts processes and experiences in the English and literacy classroom.

Ewing, R.A. & Saunders, J.N. (2018). Towards 'grown-up-ness in the world' through the Arts as critical, quality pedagogy. In C. Naughton, G. Biesta and D. Cole (Eds), *Art, Artists and Pedagogy: Philosophy and The Arts in Education* (pp. 96-106). New York, NY: Routledge.

<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315143880-10>

Many western education systems are currently in crisis, providing an increasingly technical approach to classroom learning and assessment. This chapter focuses on how engagement in two artforms, literature and drama, can enable teachers, children and young people to learn in transformative ways. While acknowledging that 'grown-up-ness' is a slightly misleading term, Biesta argues that this concept is at the very heart of envisaging a mature way of being-in-the-world. The Arts remain an under-used component of early childhood and primary curricula despite unequivocal evidence that quality arts experiences and processes are important for human social and emotional wellbeing. The concept of 'grown-up-ness' aligns with empathy and compassion for others but such attributes are not easily measured by testing regimes. Despite the growing body of research documenting the potential of the Arts to transform the learning process, ongoing cuts in pre-service and in-service arts education in Australia has resulted in many teachers expressing a lack of confidence in the Arts.

McAtamney, O. (2018). *School Drama: A case study of using drama for oracy in the secondary EAL/D classroom*. Unpublished Honours Dissertation, Sydney: The University of Sydney.

This case study investigated the pedagogical potential of educational or process drama to develop and improve oracy skills for students learning English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D). Research was conducted through a multi-level, qualitative case study of Sydney Theatre Company and University of Sydney's School Drama program. School Drama is a co-mentoring teacher professional learning program that promotes a dual focus of developing teachers' capacity to use drama pedagogy with literature, and improving literacy outcomes and engagement for students. The research context was a Level Three Intensive English class at Fairfield High School. Data gathering included observations, student focus group, teacher interviews, and artefact analysis. While this particular instance of the program presented behavioural and structural limitations, benchmarking assessment depicted a marked to moderate improvement in oracy skills across the cohort. Vocabulary, imagination and creativity and confidence emerged as the most salient ways oracy was developed and improved. While the scope of the study is limited, this case study contributes to a growing portfolio of research about the School Drama program and provides a strong basis for further investigation into using drama to develop oracy skills in EAL/D settings.

Hankus, N. (2016). *It made me feel like I lost something: Engaging students in learning history through process drama*. Unpublished Honours Dissertation, Sydney: The University of Sydney.

Ewing, R. (2015). Dramatic play and process drama: Towards a collective zone of proximal development to enhance language and literacy learning. In S. Davis, H. Grainger Clemson, B. Ferholt, S.M. Jansson, & A. Marjanovic-Shane (Eds.), *Dramatic interactions in education, Vygotskian and sociocultural approaches to drama, education and research* (pp. 135-152). London, England: Bloomsbury.
<https://doi.org/10.5040/9781472593429.ch-007>

The making of meaning was central to Vygotsky's theory of thought and language development. Importantly he gave close attention to the relationship between affect and intellect (Mahn and Steiner, 2002: 369; Vygotsky, 1986). This chapter asserts that both early dramatic play and the embedding of educational or process drama strategies across the early childhood and primary curriculum can facilitate work in a collective Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and link directly to children's language and literacy learning. Furthermore, it is also argued that classroom professional learning models, like the School Drama programme (Ewing et al., 2011, 2014), have the potential to encourage collective ZPD opportunities that can extend educators' and children's understandings alike and facilitate their deeper learning. Language and literacy learning is the particular area focused on for this discussion, but the principles can and should be applied across the early childhood and school curriculum.

Saunders, J.N.R. (2015). *School Drama: A Case Study of Student Academic and Non-Academic Outcomes*. Unpublished MEd (Research) Thesis, Sydney: The University of Sydney.

This qualitative research study aims to focus on the student outcomes of the School Drama program, both academic (literacy and English) and non-academic (motivation, engagement and empathy). This case study investigated a single Year 6 class and their teacher. Multiple data collection methods were employed including artefacts (for pre-program and post-program student benchmarking as well as sample student work), focus groups with students, reflective interviews with the Class Teacher, and observations from the Teaching Artist/Researcher. The findings suggest that students involved in the School Drama program generally showed marked improvements when comparing their results on the pre-program and post-program benchmarking tests. These tasks, with identical criteria, required students to illustrate their inferential comprehension and descriptive language skills. The data also suggests a range of non- academic

improvements to students through the intervention, such as increased motivation and engagement in learning, and shifts in empathy.

Ewing, R., Gibson, R., Campbell, V., Saunders, J., Hristofski, H. (2015). School drama: towards state of the art in drama professional learning. In M. Anderson & C. Roche (Eds.), *The State of the Art: Teaching Drama in the 21st Century* (pp. 25-48). Sydney: Sydney University Press.

This chapter examines the rationale for the establishment of the School Drama program and some of its outcomes from the perspective of the major stakeholders: teachers, learners and teaching artists.

Smith, D. (2014). *School Drama program sustainability case study*. Sydney: The University of Sydney.

The case study school had been involved in the School Drama program (SDP) since 2012. On the basis of the interviews, viewed and documentary information gathered for this case study, there was strong evidence of the school's plans and intentions to continue to sustain the aims, purposes, principles, concepts and strategies of the SDP particularly by those teachers who had been participants in the SDP. Further, this evidence suggested the intention through the draft curriculum documents for both units in English and other KLAs (Science, History and Creative Arts) to extend the ideas and strategies of the SDP to other teachers in the school. However, the strongest evidence for the extension of the SDP stemmed from the data gathered by interview, viewing and student work samples from a classroom teacher who had never been a participant in the SDP but whose classroom practice demonstrated her deep understanding of, commitment to and implementation of the principles, concepts and strategies of the SDP.

Gibson, R., & Smith, D. (2013). *Meta-evaluation of School Drama 2009 to 2012*. Sydney: The University of Sydney.

This meta-evaluation marked the end of the pilot phase of the program (2009 to 2012) and contained significant findings and recommendations. See highlights in Appendix 3

Sze, E. (2013). *Sustainable professional development: A case study on quality Arts partnerships in the primary classroom*. (Unpublished honours dissertation). Sydney: The University of Sydney.

Robertson, A. (2010). *The School Drama experience: A case study of learning in and through the art of drama*. (Unpublished honours dissertation). Sydney: The University of Sydney, Australia.

Using a case-study approach, this research examined the impact of the School Drama program upon the professional learning of one teacher involved, and the development of descriptive writing by his class of Stage 2 students.

This study utilised a qualitative research approach, with data collection occurring through interviews, student focus group discussion, observations and analysis of physical artefacts. The findings suggest there are a number of factors influencing the adoption of drama as pedagogy by the teacher, and therefore involvement in drama by students. Overall, active participation in learning, a co-mentoring partnership and a supportive school environment aided professional learning. However, the teacher's lack of personal confidence to engage in drama obstructed adoption of dramatic practices to some extent. For students, participation in drama was beneficial as it allowed them to work in role, extend their vocabulary and increase their confidence- leading to improved descriptive writing. The outcomes of the case study provided some implications for future research and the School Drama program.

Related Reading and Resources

Ewing, R. (2011). *The arts and Australian education: Realising potential*.

AER 58, Melbourne: ACER

<http://research.acer.edu.au/aer/11/>

In this publication, Robyn Ewing outlines and reviews the research that demonstrates the potential of the Arts to reshape the way learning and the curriculum is conceived and organised in schools and contains a section on the early pilot phase of the School Drama program.

School Drama Resources

[The School Drama program video](#)

This video explains School Drama, a professional development program for primary teachers developed and offered by Sydney Theatre Company in partnership with The University of Sydney. The program demonstrated the power of using drama pedagogy with quality literature for improving English and literacy in young learners.

School Drama Virtual

School Drama Virtual are imaginative, fun, interactive and free videos for primary students, based on the School Drama program in partnership with The University of Sydney. Each video delves into the world of some of Australia's favourite children's books, with drama activities to engage imaginations, improve literacy and get everyone up out of their seats.

Amy & Louis

Explore the much-loved children's book [Amy and Louis](#), where imagination turns boxes into skyscrapers, clouds morph into dinosaurs – and true friendship can span even oceans.

Over three short videos, STC Teaching Artists Kate Worsley and Tara Morice will take you into the world of Amy and Louis. Learn alongside Kate and Tara as they read the book, model exciting drama activities and bring these unforgettable characters to life.

Designed for Stage 1 learners, this series is accompanied by a resource for teachers, illustrating curriculum links, and showcasing follow-up activities for each video.

[Watch the series.](#)

[Where Happiness Hides](https://www.sydneytheatre.com.au/education/school-drama-archive/school-drama-virtual/where-happiness-hides) - <https://www.sydneytheatre.com.au/education/school-drama-archive/school-drama-virtual/where-happiness-hides>

Join STC Teaching Artist Branden Christine for a fun, interactive look at how drama helps young people build resilience and wellbeing. Together, you'll read [Where Happiness Hides](#), the beloved tale of hope, joy and silver linings.

[Where The Forest Meets The Sea](#) -

<https://www.sydneytheatre.com.au/education/school-drama-archive/school-drama-virtual/where-the-forest-meets-the-sea>

Journey with STC Teaching Artists Tegan Arazny and Kaylee Hazell as they explore the story of [Where the Forest Meets the Sea](#) by Jeannie Baker. Across three episodes, read and play along with Tegan, Kaylee and the boy as they travel through a beautiful tropical rainforest

Ewing, R. and Saunders, J.N. (2016) [The School Drama Book: Drama, Literature and Literacy in the Creative Classroom](#). Currency Press.

Robyn Ewing and John Saunders provide the rationale and research that underpins the School Drama program and 21 units of work that can be adapted and implemented in the classroom.

Ewing, R. and Saunders, J.N. (2016) [The School Drama Companion: A Collection of Devices](#)

<https://books.apple.com/au/book/the-school-drama-companion/id1178779266>

An interactive practical resource to assist teachers in exploring how Drama can be used to improve literacy in the primary and middle years of schooling. The book contains helpful descriptions and videos outlining 24 key Drama devices to engage and unlock the creativity of your students. Available from Apple Books.

Campbell, V. & Hogan, Z. (2022) [Connecting through Drama. Drama and literacy for learning English as an Additional Language](#). Sydney: Currency Press.

<https://www.currency.com.au/books/education/connecting-through-drama/>

Connected was a Sydney Theatre Company program for adults learning an additional language. It focuses on the power of drama and storytelling to improve literacy, confidence and social connection.

A Summary of the evidence from the School Drama research

A summary of the key findings evident from the School Drama research are listed below:

1) Very strong evidence from teacher pre- and post-surveys and interviews of powerful teacher professional learning that has resulted in significant shifts in teachers' reported knowledge and understanding of drama-rich strategies and quality literary texts:

I remember having Cate Blanchett come to the classroom and my connection to USyd when I was at Plunkett Street was an absolute lifeline. Teaching can be such an isolating game and tragically about instruction and not education and exploration any more. I can see the beautiful role that School Drama has in broadening the world of the teacher. A little like travel. And of course the children travel so far through story and play. Just a quick reflection.

Josh Barnes, Classroom Teacher, Plunkett Street Public School

Being part of the School Drama program was the most inspirational professional development I experienced in my teaching career. Having a teaching artist (Victoria and John) work in my classroom took my love of literature to a new level. I saw students' engagement, confidence, imagination and empathy emerge and flourish over the weeks. I saw the value and necessity of students participating in drama activities that enabled them to write with greater ease and purpose. I was so convinced that I continued to 'do' School Drama long after the program finished and inspired many other teachers to 'have a go'. I am so grateful to have been able to participate in this excellent program.

Jenny Rodgers, Classroom Teacher, Arden Anglican School

2) Improved teacher confidence in using drama-rich pedagogy both during their engagement with the teaching artist and, in most cases, continuing on conclusion of the program. For example, Smith's (2014) case study demonstrated the sustainability of the innovation in a school where those teachers who had undertaken the program mentored other teachers.

Saunders (2019) wrote: *In both studies, I was struck by the way using the drama processes with literature positively impacted the teachers' artistry and pedagogy and the learners' confidence, collaboration, imagination, engagement and connection to character.*

**Sue McIntosh, Assistant Principal and Classroom Teacher,
Asquith Public School**

First engaging with the Sydney Theatre Company (STC) School Drama program in 2015, I can only state that the positive outcomes for students at our school have been nothing short of immense over the past 9 years ... and continue to be so. From the 4 humble early practitioners – in the main still at our school waving the banner for this pedagogy – we developed a continuing program of Teacher Professional Learning in our very own English through Drama (EtD) program.

This practical application of process drama as pedagogy combined with quality literature, has enriched student learning with deeper understandings AND made that learning more accessible for the EALD and reluctant, less-able students.

The School Drama program developed our teachers in their own classrooms and opened insights into credible, research-based pedagogy which enhanced student thinking, directly influencing their comprehension, interpretation and application of knowledge. Students are enabled to become critical and creative thinkers, delighting in their learning and develop deep, lasting understandings.

Research papers continue to confirm that Australia is undergoing the most significant disruption in the world of work since the industrial revolution, and how we respond has huge implications for the next generation - young changemakers - the innovators, the makers, the dreamers, the thinkers, the doers and the creators.

We, at Asquith PS, through this remarkable program, have prepared our students for building their toolkit with “enterprise” skills for their 21st century world.

**Kelly Taylor, classroom teacher, special education, now lecturer,
Notre Dame University**

As an educator working in special education with children with a Developmental Language Disorder (DLD), I had always been passionate about pedagogies that emphasised a holistic approach to education. I was intent on exploring teaching strategies that empowered them as learners and provided them with meaningful educational experiences. I was interested in the emerging findings of various research projects focused on the School Drama program and

the benefits for children and was keen to explore the impact of such program in the context in which I was working. In 2017 with Robyn Ewing as my academic partner, I undertook an action research project funded by the Australian Literacy Educators' Association. We engaged with Barking Gecko Theatre Company to implement the School Drama program at Peel Language Development School in Western Australia throughout the year.

Resoundingly, the School Drama program had a significant impact on the children and educators I worked with. Many of the children made gains in their oracy skills, but clear within the data were great gains in their comprehension skills. Process drama pedagogies provided my students with opportunities to learn in a multisensory manner and in addition gave them the opportunity to express and communicate in multiple ways. Other aspects of children's experiences were equally insightful. Children described their experiences as fun and enjoyable, and participating educators noticed increased levels of student engagement in classroom experiences when they embedded process drama strategies. Notably, educators described how they felt these experiences contributed to the gains they saw in some children's confidence and social and emotional understanding. Participating in the School Drama program has had a lasting impact on my knowledge as educator and researcher and I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to share the program with my school community.

Another classroom teacher wrote after undertaking School Drama classic over two years:

It is interesting for me to report back this second time as I have had a completely different experience to that of last year. At the end of last year's seven weeks, I went away raving about how good it was and how much the students enjoyed it ... This year, however, I feel that my maturity as an implementer of drama has really improved. I now clearly understand that drama is not just about acting and playing games but about accessing characters' feelings and emotions through exploration ... I now view drama as an irreplaceable part of not only my literacy teaching but as my whole curriculum approach to teaching. (Classroom Teacher, 2011)

3) Unequivocal evidence from teachers and teaching artists confirming the efficacy, effectiveness and impact of the co-mentoring model:

Who'd have thought that drama could actually be so engaging to teach? It has been an inspirational journey for me. Although my learning curve has been a steep one, I can see a whole range of ways that drama can be incorporated into the curriculum.

Classroom Teacher, 2013

School Drama is a much more collaborative environment for everyone involved compared to other programs I've been involved in. It is not about the Teaching Artist showing the students and teacher how they can do something that they could mimic. It is about discovering things together and for the Teaching Artist to offer ways of making those discoveries.

Teaching Artist, 2017

For me it was like mentoring in drama teaching... [the teaching artist] broke it down in a way that made me realise I could do it. It was empowering. It was fantastic.

Classroom Teacher, n.d.

I was extremely grateful to be given the opportunity to participate in this project. Professional from the first teachers' workshop to the last class lesson I was engaged and enthusiastic which left me motivated to plan more innovation, inclusive lessons.

Classroom Teacher, 2013

Schools frequently chose to sign up for School Drama over a number of years with 56% of schools participating in the program for at least two years and 11% for five years or more ensuring that most of their staff have been involved. Plunkett St stayed with the program since it began, and several other schools for a decade, with different teachers participating each year to build a community of learners.

Principals had a range of reasons for inviting School Drama into the school. For example:

In 2008-2009, Robyn invited me to be part of the planning meetings for a new pilot program that the Sydney Theatre Company was thinking of launching — 'School Drama' — with Cate Blanchett, Andrew Upton, herself, and other educators. I was completely blown

away. The idea that schools across NSW would have the opportunity to work with real theatre artists to enhance literacy through Drama was groundbreaking, especially at a time when the Creative Arts were being increasingly sidelined in the curriculum.

When the 'School Drama' program officially launched in 2009, it flourished. The program breathed new life into classrooms, building the capacity of teachers and reigniting a love for literacy among both students and educators. The impact of this program was incredible. It has been a privilege to see two schools where I've been Principal—Beauty Point PS and Seven Hills West PS—take part in this journey. I am also proud that the teachers at Beauty Point PS were able to contribute to 'School Drama' co-coordinator John Saunders' groundbreaking PhD research on the program. Over the past 15 years, 12 of my teachers have been involved in the 'School Drama' program, and every single one of them have loved it.

Shanti Clements, principal

I would like to think of it as an opportunity to inspire the staff. As a result I hope that there is an increased opportunity for us all to discuss what it is that really engages kids. For the kids I hope there is an opportunity for them to reflect on this experience and continue to develop ownership of this process, so that it is something we can continue to build on within the school community... Drama can provide a unique opportunity for the students to see their teachers in a different way...not just the learning as such, but the relationships it can build.

Principal

And examples of their observations after the program include:

'SD changed how teachers program and plan literacy.'

'Drama is now valued and used regularly in the school'.

The opportunity to learn by doing is positive for kids. High quality text selection is also important – it has really enabled more reading because we have created a rich literacy environment – there are books everywhere The School Drama skill set is applicable to all literacy aspects across the KLAs.

Principal, 2015

There have been important changes to the programming and/or teaching and learning practices of teachers in relation to drama and its use to improve student writing as a result of participating in the program.

Teaching artists reported that the program was valuable from their perspective because it deepened their understanding of the educative process and building their own artistry skills in a different context. A number undertook education degrees.

Being involved in School Drama was a pivotal experience for me - it gave me the confidence and skills to teach and has opened up the way I work and support myself now. Robyn, your generosity and insight were such a beautiful thing to share with us and your gentle and steady support were extraordinary. The value and impact of our work on young lives and imaginations was a truly beautiful thing to be part of and brought such integrity to the company's contribution to our community and culture. It felt like a real and right way to make a genuine difference in young lives through the creativity and insight we have developed through theatre and creative practice. The number of teaching artists who took their new insights into further study is testament to the meaning and hope it gave us.

Georgia Adamson, Teaching Artist

Reflecting on my time at School Drama I am struck by how vividly I remember every school and every teacher. Although seven weeks is not long in the scheme of a school year, the programmes brought such joy and were so rewarding that they all live large in my memory. Being invited into school communities far and wide across Sydney was a complete privilege. There were inevitable nerves that came with being the "stranger in the staff room" at a new school, but these would quickly be dispelled by the warmth of fellow teachers and it was fascinating to be part of such a range of learning cultures. These experiences fostered my deep admiration for the primary teachers I worked with. Each with different strengths and approaches to education, but all deeply committed to their students. A key part of these professional bonds was the creativity, laughter and connection that characterised each School Drama workshop. Students would literally jump for joy when they knew School Drama was about to begin. As teachers, we got to enjoy their madcap ideas, or touching characterisations, or deep noticing of the extraordinary picture books we worked with. School Drama provided the time and space for more

imaginative ways to teach and learn, and gave so many students an avenue like no other to creatively express themselves. It was a fundamental experience in my professional life and one I am so grateful to have been a part of.

Dr Natasha Beaumont, Teaching Artist, Lecturer, The University of Sydney

Being a Teaching Artist in the School Drama program was an absolute lifeline for me as a regional artist and teacher. I am so grateful to have been part of the program, it informs my practice every day. I feel fortunate to be able to show teachers the benefits of drama and witness the positive impacts that it has on students, teachers and the broader creative community.

Rachel McNamara, Teaching Artist, Albury/Wodonga

From the moment I became involved as a Teaching Artist with School Drama, I knew it was a very special program that would have a long-lasting impact on teachers and students. In fact, even now, years later I still have teachers who took part in the program, tell me they are still using some of the strategies from School Drama. From the early stages of training as a School Drama Teaching Artist, right through to delivery in classrooms, it was a pleasure to witness how drama pedagogy and practice could weave so seamlessly with literacy curriculum and bring stories to life for children. Returning each week to continue the journey with the students was such a joy, especially when it was evident how much deeper their engagement in the story had become whilst simultaneously seeing how their self-confidence and self-expression was growing too. This is the magic of the program and the power of drama as part of the learning journey. Seeing a teachers confidence blossom around their engagement with using drama pedagogy was also very incredibly satisfying. Drama was no longer something to be feared for lack of knowledge or skill, but rather another tool to be celebrated and utilised in the classroom once they had the opportunity to see the work being demonstrated in real time – and especially when they witnessed firsthand the impact on some of their students social and emotional growth as well. Even in the most challenging of school environments, I don't think I ever walked away from the delivery of the program without witnessing profound impact on both students and teachers.

Carla Nirella, Teaching Artist, Barking Gecko Theatre Company, Western Australia

I had the joy of being a teaching artist for the School Drama program from 2014, beginning in Sydney for two years, then facilitating it regionally in Albury-Wodonga, Wagga Wagga, Wilcannia, Katherine and Darwin, where we partnered with local companies such as Murray Arts and Hothouse Theatre in Wodonga and Brown's Mart and Katherine Regional Arts in the NT.

With a background in applied theatre, I could instantly see how this would apply outside of mainstream settings, and so over the years, I ran School Drama within juvenile justice centres, at Katherine High, central schools and special education schools for children with disabilities. I got to witness the incredible benefits of the program's practical application to teach literacy within settings where the traditional teaching of literacy was not accessible for students. The embodiment of the program translates way beyond words and through language and physical barriers. I also saw the effects not just in young people's lives from an education perspective, but socially too.

I want to share with you a little story from Shepherds Park School, which is located within Riverina Juvenile Justice Centre in Wagga Wagga. It was during my third facilitation of the program there in December 2018, with incarcerated students aged between 16 and 18, but with a literacy level of stage 1. We engaged with 2 of my personal favourite books, Fox by Margeret Wild and The Island by Armin Greder.

With such quality texts and such an engaging program of activities, the class of young men engaged from the get-go. With the model being episodic, meaning each day we would just read a few pages of the book, students often felt frustrated and wanted to read more, with one suggesting we put the book in solitude so no one could sneak a peek. Some students admitted searching the library for the book, but luckily it wasn't there.

There was one particular 18 year old student who fully engaged throughout the week, was the first to raise his hand and acted as a role model to others. On completion of the program, I was surprised to learn that he was actually one of the most disengaged students at school, often refusing to leave his cell to attend. And this is something we often saw during School Drama. Often those students who engage most are those who don't sit well while sitting behind the desk. All

teaching artists here will have their own story, but it's such a norm that teachers see a new side to students. When discussing this with the teacher, she explained that that student would never have read text like this before, and it was likely his first time delving into the world and life of a character. As he is learning to read, this young 18 year old was currently working with kindergarten-aged books. So it's no surprise that for this week he turned up every day and was invested in the stories, as, through School Drama, he got to enter the minds of these characters, make decisions as them, and explore the world around him through the safety of a text.

Alyson Evans, Teaching Artist, Sydney, Albury/Wodonga, Wilcannia, Katherine, and Darwin

I've loved working on the School Drama program for so many reasons. First of all, it combines two of my passions - drama and literacy! It has been hugely rewarding to apply the skills I have developed as an actor and story-teller in an educational setting, seeing the way these skills can engage students, and give classroom teachers new approaches and ideas!

It has also been satisfying to see the way the program endures beyond the term we spend in the classroom with the teacher. I've always found it difficult to measure the impact a one-off workshop has on the participants, but in the School Drama program we are able to forge strong connections with the classroom teachers we are paired with. Being in the classroom alongside them across a term allows for ongoing reflection and for creativity to flourish.

Kate Worsley, Teaching Artist, Sydney

The people of School Drama have been the heart of the work. United by storytelling and drama, collaboration between the dedicated STC Education team, teaching artists, school principals, classroom teachers and students has made each and every day spent in School Drama classrooms exciting and inspiring. It's been such a joy to work with early stage through to experienced teachers as they make creative connections to the School Drama work, and I'll always be grateful for the opportunities to share, learn and explore new ideas with the incredible STC teaching artist team.

Bronwyn Batchelor, Teaching Artist, Sydney

*I wasn't very good at school; I was the class clown.
When I left, I felt I'd learnt very little.
I stumbled into an acting class one day and was hooked!
All of a sudden, the way I saw the world made sense.
Community, collaboration and self-expression.
I became feverish for knowledge; I wanted to connect!*

I was angry at my schoolteachers for not noticing my way of learning.

*After many years as a jobbing actor, I began to want more!
More Community. More Collaboration. More Connection!*

*I'm lucky enough to work at The Sydney Theatre Company where I
found this wonderful program called School Drama.
From the brief it seemed to offer all those things.
I was desperate to be involved. Still am.*

*I thought it would be important for me, and it was.
But I found out very quickly it was even more important to them!...
Those teachers that I was so angry at.
I soon realised; they just didn't know.
They didn't know about the inclusive power of this beautiful program
that leaves no one behind and give agency to all involved.*

*And now we can share with them all this special program.
What a beautiful thing to add to your pedagogy!*

Estevan Martin, Teaching Artist, Sydney

Having trained as an actor, a playwright, a screen writer and a teacher, my teaching into a drama program that recognises and nurtures individual creativity using a highly developed code of practice, was, for seven years, an absolute pleasure, a confirmation that cultural insights belong to everyone. To me, School Drama invites students of all ages to participate in their own growth as communicators, as story-tellers, as contributors, and, we, as teaching artists, guide this development through play, through curiosity, through wonder, through possibility. We encourage self-expression through a focus on listening, confidence and trust. And through the interplay between relationship, story and possibility, we affirm the emerging imagination and share the experience of empathy and identity.

Of course, all this isn't obvious in the drama classroom. It just bubbles away under the improvisations, the hot seating, the diary entries of characters we are coming to know. And characterisation isn't necessarily the final goal either. In this noisy place everything is about the journey, the willingness to participate, whatever that means for the individual.

Dr Linden Wilkinson, Teaching Artist, Sydney

Honestly, when I started I was both nervous and excited to work with STC, or even be affiliated with STC. The name alone has such prowess and respect in the arts community. Especially as an up-and-coming multidisciplinary artist. I always felt the need to share my culture and my skills. This program has not only embraced my culture but also learnt from our way of storytelling and discovered how engaging, beneficial and accessible that way of learning is. Not many industry or companies are looking at storytelling as a skill to be taught, at least in westernised institutions. I had an absolute blast! My dance technique, acting skills, and teaching have all improved and grown. The engagement of students inspiring them to look after country and one another through deep connections via the arts is so revitalising for me as an artist. This experience has humbled and grounded me and I am forever thankful.

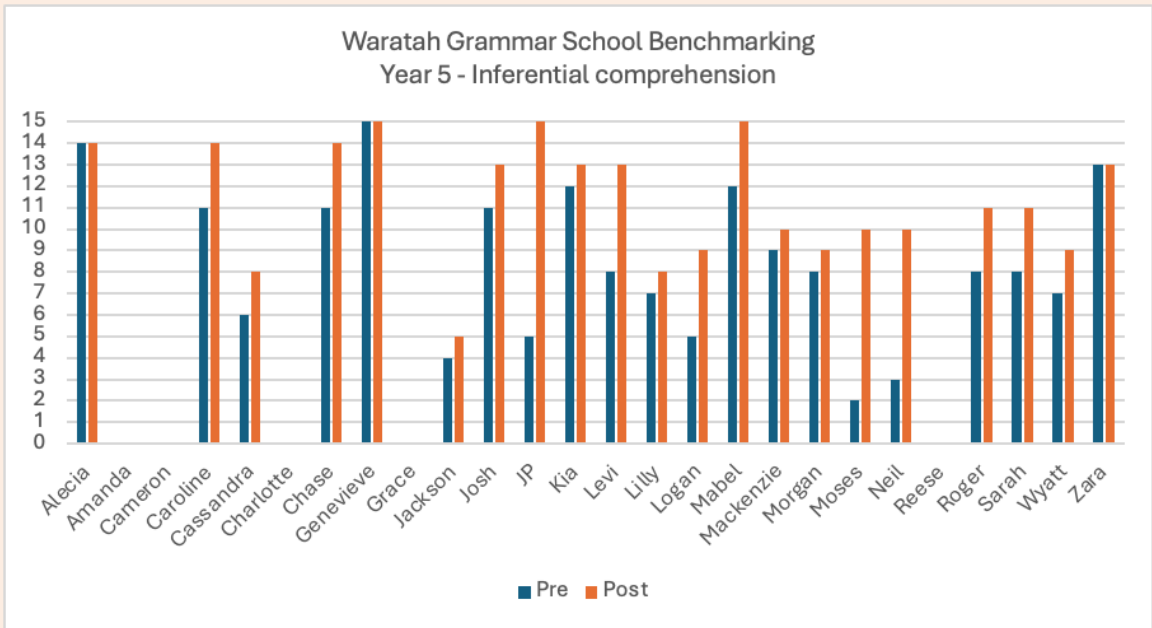
Neville Boney Williams, Multidisciplinary Teaching Artist, Dancer

4) There is strong evidence of enhanced student learning in relation to the teacher-identified outcomes from the benchmarking and student work samples. Saunders' (2015) case study with a year 6 class, and his (2019) case study of three other classes from years 4 to 6, he found that this improvement was most marked for students who were less proficient in literacy and had found learning more challenging.

Saunders (2019) concluded that: Perhaps as a result of building these capacities, the findings also demonstrated positive shifts (about two levels) in student English and literacy outcomes in the selected focus area (inferential comprehension), particularly in less able male students. In the PhD, of the 68 students across three schools, 91% of students improved their literacy score, with 9% maintaining their already high level. Male-identifying students generally started at a lower point on the literacy scale, and demonstrated the most significant shift overall. Below are some findings from his research.

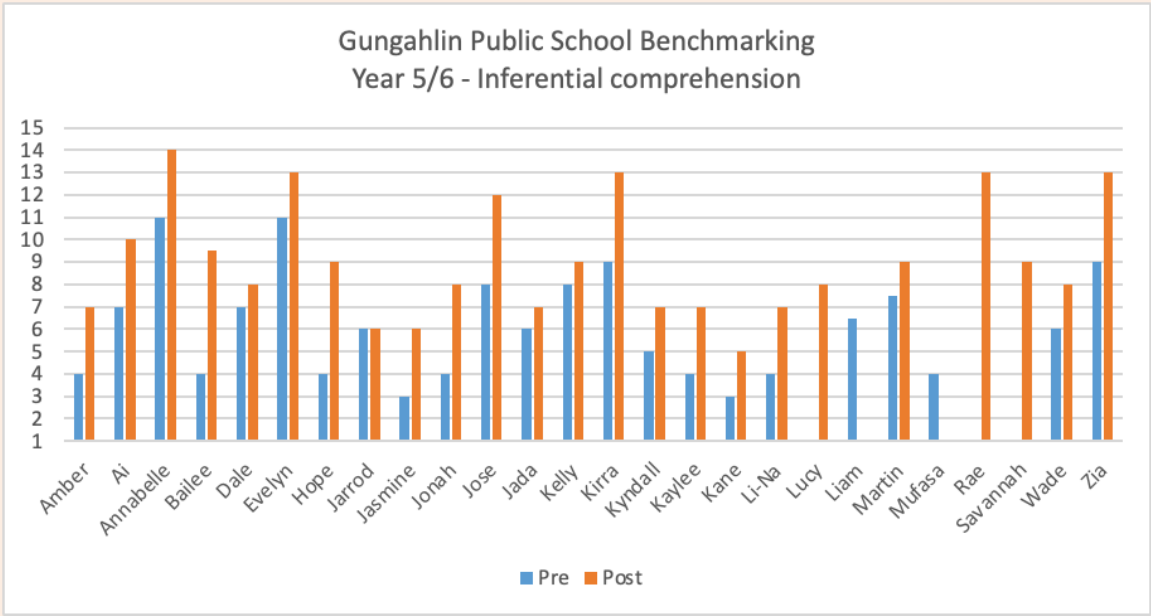
Waratah Grammar School (Case Study 1)

Figure 14 Waratah Grammar School Benchmarking (Case Study 1)



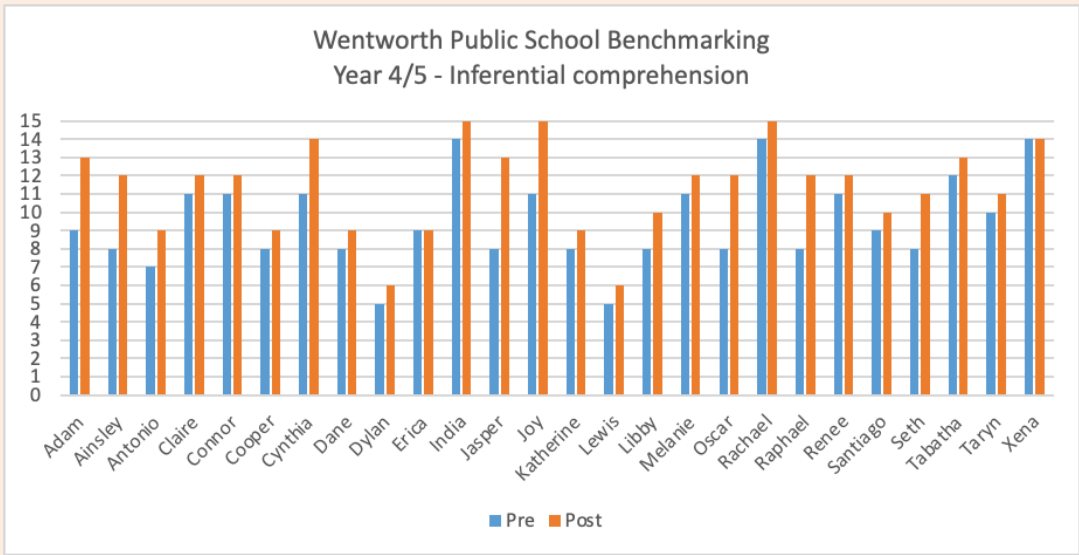
Twenty-one students were benchmarked from Waratah Grammar School Year 5 class in the area of inferential comprehension (this is explored in detail in the following chapter). An average pre-program score was 8.5 (C grade) and average post-program score was 11.3 (B grade) with an average shift of 2.8 marks. Three students (Alicia, Genevieve and Zara) did not move from the pre- to post-program tasks, receiving grades of A, A+ and A-; however, all remaining 18 students improved in their literacy. JP moved 10 marks, the most significant shift in the entire 2017 cohort.

Gungahlin Public School (Case Study 2)
 Figure 15 Gungahlin Public School Benchmarking (Case Study 2)



Twenty-one students were benchmarked in the Year 5/6 class at Gungahlin Public School in the area of inferential comprehension. An average pre-program score was 6.2 (D+ grade) and an average post-program score was 8.9 (C/C+ grade) with an average shift of 2.7 marks. Four students (Li-Na, Mufasa, Rae and Savannah) did not complete either the pre- or post-program benchmarking.

Wentworth Public School (Case Study 3)
Figure 16 Wentworth Public School Benchmarking (Case Study 3)



Twenty-six students were benchmarked in the Year 4/5 class at Wentworth Public School focusing on inferential comprehension (which is explored in detail as Case Study 3 in Chapter 8). An average pre-program score was 9.2 (C+ grade) and average post-program score was 11.3 (B grade) with an average shift of 1.8 marks.

Importantly, Saunders also found similar results across all schools participating in the program during 2017, and that the improvements were consistent across the four literacy focus areas.

The following is a breakdown of literacy focus areas of the 12 classes who participated in benchmarking in 2017:

Table 1 Breakdown of literacy foci identified in 2017 benchmarking.

Breakdown of literacy foci identified in 2017 benchmarking	
Literacy Foci	Number of classes and percentage of classes
Confidence in oracy	1 of 12 classes / 8%
Creative/imaginative writing	3 of 12 classes / 25%
Descriptive language	1 of 12 classes / 8%
Inferential comprehension	6 of 12 classes / 50%
Unknown/not identified	1 of 12 classes / 8%

The following is a breakdown of stages (year level groupings) of the classes who participated in student benchmarking in 2017:

Table 2 Breakdown of 2017 benchmarking into Stage and Year Level

Breakdown of 2017 benchmarking into Stage and Year Level	
Stage/ Year Level	Number of classes participating in 2017 benchmarking and percentage
Early Stage 1 & Stage 1 / Kindergarten, Years 1 & 2	2 of 12 classes / 16%
Stage 2 / Years 3 & 4	5 of 12 classes / 41%
Stage 3 / Years 5 & 6	5 of 12 classes / 41%

There were positive shifts in the post-benchmarked literacy outcomes across the different stage/year levels participating in the School Drama program.

Table 3 Breakdown of 2017 Benchmarking Stage/Year level Average Shift

Breakdown of 2017 Benchmarking Stage/Year Level Average Shift	
Stage/ Year Level	Average Shift in Marks
Early Stage 1 & Stage 1 / Kindergarten, Years 1 & 2	Average shift of 2.9 marks
Stage 2 / Years 3 & 4	Average shift of 2.62 marks
Stage 3 / Years 5 & 6	Average shift of 2.32 marks

The total average shift of all data is 2.5 marks (just under a full grade of change) and there was no discernable difference between the benchmarking shifts across the three stages (Early Stage 1/Stage 1, Stage 2 and Stage 3).

An examination of the literacy foci chosen explored whether there are similarities or differences in shifts across the 4 English/literacy focus areas.

Table 4 Breakdown of 2017 benchmarking into literacy foci

Breakdown of 2017 benchmarking into literacy foci		
Literacy Foci	No of classes	Average Shift in Marks
Confidence in oracy	1 class	Average shift of 2.3 marks
Creative/imaginative writing	3 classes	Average shift of 2.6 marks
Descriptive language	4 classes	Average shift of 4 marks
Inferential comprehension	6 classes	Average shift of 2.3 marks

It is important not to overstate these findings as the number of teachers who chose to benchmark, particularly in the later years was very low. However, across the K-6 continuum similar positive shifts were evident when comparing the pre- and post-program School Drama intervention benchmarked tasks.

The benefits for students as articulated verbatim in interviews with participant teachers as part of the program's ongoing evaluation include:

- use of higher level of language in dialogue activities
- a deeper understanding of what is happening in the story and have developed more empathy for characters, by putting themselves in their position.

In the pre-drama writing, most students simply retold an existing fairy tale with minimal use of adjectives or adverbial phrases, little or no character descriptions, few of their own ideas and little or no structure. In the post-drama writing, students were able to craft their own ideas; plan their writing (beginning, middle, end); write a structured narrative; include characterisation through descriptions, actions, speech, and attribute thoughts and feelings to their characters; and use less 'mundane' language and more interesting adverbials and adjectives.

5) Increased student confidence in being prepared to actively engage in drama strategies across the primary KLA's. (Gibson & Smith, 2013, p.1) because as teachers noted:

drama allows students to take risks, express themselves orally, use their bodies and emotionally connect to the text. These are all important to deep learning...

They developed new skills and moved outside their comfort zones ... Many students have demonstrated confidence in presenting in front of their classmates ... Shy or students with special needs were given and took on opportunities to succeed in front of peers. This raised their self-esteem and aided in their efforts to take further risks.

The student voice also confirmed the impact of the program. In focus group discussions (Saunders 2019, 2015; Robertson 2011) students demonstrated their understanding of the intervention as well as articulated the value of the drama pedagogy for their learning. As students commented:

When we first met you [John, the teaching artist] and we had to do the writing task, I thought you were going to be really boring because we had to do writing, but then the next week and all these other ones, it's actually been a lot more fun because you haven't made us do writing, we've done all these fun activities. So it was a good way to learn. Yeah, because we didn't have to do any writing or research, we just got to learn it our way. A fun way. Yeah. (And the irony was the class did lots of writing in role ...Saunders, 2019).

And putting yourself in the character's shoes, it like, when you are in character you feel a better prediction of what could happen next ... because you've been through what they have been through ... kind of...(Saunders, 2015).

Importantly, the range of case study data demonstrated a range of non-academic gains for students through the drama intervention, including increased motivation and engagement in learning generally, shifts in empathy and a lot more confidence to express an opinion, to have a go at something that's outside their comfort zone. 91% of students either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: "I feel more engaged in school after participating in drama." Saunders' (2015) case study further explored student development of empathy.

One key theme was student **engagement through embodiment of learning:**

Sandro: Umm it's different. You learn in a different way. Like you actually become the person instead of just learning about that person.

Chase: I think it's more fun because you can move around to do everything. You don't have to just sit there and look down the entire time.

Connection to character was the second major theme in these case studies. 84% of students either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement asking them if they made stronger connections to characters through drama, as opposed to reading a book.

Amanda: ...we do lots of different activities to do with the character and that really helps us step into their shoes.

Evelyn: I think you have stronger connections with the characters in drama than just reading them in class because when you are in drama you can act out the characters and demonstrate and imagine what

they would do in situations and how. You can be in the characters' shoes. When you are in class you just read the book and don't act out the characters.

Cynthia: I think it has become a stronger connection with all the books I read now because all you have to do is put yourself into their shoes and then the connections are really strong.

The third theme identified by the students was about the increase in their **imaginations**:

Kia: Like when I read or draw, my imagination switch flicks on because when I draw I feel like I can draw anything and when you read, you are in the book. You are not just sitting with the book, you are actually in the story. And also with drama your imagination switch goes on and you also feel like you can be anything... become anything... .

Grace: It's like you have an imagination switch, and you can turn it on or off. Like normally if you are doing a persuasive text or something like that or you are persuading someone, your imagination turns off. Like completely off. Um but when you are doing drama you get to think and you get to imagine what other people feel like...

A final comment- the finding from students in interviews/discussions was that the experience of participating in School Drama resulted in them wanting to experience stage theatre - to attend live stage theatre - to become future audience members of stage productions.



Students participating in arts-rich activities during the School Drama program. Photo Credit: Robyn Ewing

Concluding Comments

The School Drama program provided a model for teachers, students and teaching artists to learn simultaneously from each other. While teachers were learning new pedagogical strategies from the teaching artist, they often observed improvements in their students' academic and non-academic outcomes (Gibson & Smith, 2013).

School Drama has been a source of inspiration for many years to me and so many others. This very special program has been loved and emulated for over a decade and the model it has provided to teachers in arts education. What a difference it has made. Countless, in fact thousands of students, received the spark it provided!

Adrianne Jones, Education Manager, Queensland Performing Arts Centre (QPAC)

Building on Vygotsky's (1930/2004) work on drama, language and the imagination, Ewing (2015) argues that dramatic play with literary texts can help learners co-construct knowledge with peers as well as their teacher and teaching artist creating a collective zone of proximal development (Moll & Whitmore, 1993). Children, teachers and teaching artists alike can use the fictional spaces enabled by quality children's literature to build on what they already know as they explore more about themselves and their worlds.

By all criteria the School Drama program has been an absolute success and congratulations to all those who have made it happen. As Patrick McIntyre (2024) concludes:

While this partnership between Sydney Theatre Company and The University of Sydney is coming to an end after fifteen exceptionally fruitful years, it leaves a significant legacy; and the robust School Drama curriculum, book, and research are now established resources that remain available to the education and community sectors.

Any innovative change in Education, in schools, in school systems is extremely difficult and challenging to implement. For the innovation that School Drama was to last for 15 years and engage more than 39,000 teachers and over a million students in Australian and New Zealand schools is truly amazing. It is a testament to the ethical integrity of the program and its partnerships and the undeniable impact it was having on teachers and student learning and engagement, and the tested and validated educational principles and practices on which it was based.

The integration of creative partnerships among artists and educators is so very critical at this time as we learn how to face uncertain futures as humans together. The 'ways of knowing' of artists are just so central to communicating, collaborating and being creative in empathic and just ways, and are very much needed in schools. The invitation to experience drama as a catalyst for developing these capabilities has been vital and enlivening to teachers and children (and families), and working with the calibre of STC artists meant the program did so much to amplify the necessity for learning in, through and about drama. For one of our nation-leading cultural organisations to be committed to this partnership and be a flag for arts education in schools was truly impactful....I want to honour what was felt, loved, achieved, and celebrated in this journey – and honour the leadership and unfathomed generosity bestowed on education communities and arts communities alike in leading research and practice that has and will benefit so many.

Associate Professor Mary Ann Hunter, 2024, University of Tasmania, personal communication.

What an achievement the School Drama program has been. It has had an enormous impact not only on kids in Sydney, but globally. My own literacy research has been influenced by the book you and John worked on. It's a terrific book that will influence the field for years to come. Thanks for this tremendous achievement and incredible contribution both culturally and academically to the children of Sydney and beyond. I hope you can reflect on the enormity of what you've achieved. It is a true cause for celebration.

Professor Peter Duffy, Professor of Theatre Education, University of South Carolina, personal communication.

And for the future:

School Drama is one example of a successful teacher professional learning program that focuses on building teacher confidence to embed arts-rich pedagogies in the English and literacy classroom. Such pedagogies enable students to develop communicative, collaborative, critical and creative literacies that delve beneath surface and literal interpretations of the world. Students' understandings and worldviews are broadened to embrace knowledges about and compassion for the vast diversity of cultures and approaches to living (Neelands, 2010).

The work you have led has been pivotal in helping large arts organisations recognise how to genuinely collaborate on educational initiatives. The innovation and creativity that have emerged from this are truly remarkable. Not to mention the extraordinary impact on teachers and young people.

Associate Professor Peter Cook, University of Southern Queensland

Creative school leadership alongside the provision of opportunities to activate imaginations through embodied learning strategies enables time for learners to delve deeply beyond the surface and taken for granted-ness of today's dominant school hegemonies to ask 'what if.' We need to enable our school leaders, politicians and policymakers to better understand the role The Arts and arts processes can play in enriching imagination and creativities across all curriculum area(s). And we believe this is so needed in the current Australian education context to disrupt the transmissive pedagogy and discourse to ensure we truly develop children's imaginative and creative selves and help them become critical, resilient, compassionate and flexible thinkers. Schools will then build more capacity to become truly joyful learning spaces

While the closure of the program feels like a deep loss—a symbol of the broader devaluation of the Creative Arts in the NSW curriculum. In a world where students are becoming increasingly disconnected through social media, the role of Drama is more important than ever. It teaches them how to connect, communicate, and find their voice in the world. School Drama's legacy will forever be etched in the hearts of countless teachers and students, a lasting legacy that will continue to inspire educators and students for generations to come.

Shanti Clements, Principal

As School Drama moves from STC out into the world in new and unexpected ways, I'd offer to artists and teachers - remember the precious role you play in shaping a child's world view through the stories you explore with them.

Helen Hristotski

May, one day, the richness of this learning be recognised for its full ability to promote and extend student learning.

Sue McIntosh

School Drama has a voice and life of its own.... You have empowered and enriched education in so many ways, and without doubt your legacy will live on strongly, creatively and authentically.

Evelyn Chapman

Acknowledgments and Thank Yous

We acknowledge other important players in the School Drama story including those at Sydney Theatre Company (STC) who co-founded the program and were involved in the supporting the early days of the program: Cate Blanchett AO and Andrew Upton, Helen Hristofski, Rob Brookman and Patrick McIntyre, Danielle Heidbrink. We also wish to acknowledge those who worked at Sydney Theatre Company and contributed to the program during its lifetime: Toni Murphy, Paul O’Byrne, Zoe Hogan; Georgia Adamson; Hannah Brown, Rachel Small, Lisa Mumford, Jacqui Cowell, Kaylee Hazell, Kelly Young, Whitney Richards, Tory Loudon, and Jess Zlotnick, and photographers Grant Sparkes-Carroll and Hon Boey. In addition, we acknowledge our colleagues at The University of Sydney who contributed to the program and the research, Associate Professor Robyn Gibson, Dr Victoria Campbell, Associate Professor David Smith, Dr Jenny Beachum and the CREATE Centre.

The Teaching Artists who have worked on the program over the past 15 years each played an integral part in sharing the magic of School Drama and we are extremely grateful that you shared your joy and passion for learning through drama with thousands of teachers and students across Australia and New Zealand.

Georgia Adamson	Mel Dodge	Caitlin Kennedy
Shruti Agarwal	Stacey Dorthe	Luke Kerridge
Michelle Robin Anderson	Katrina Douglas	Georgia King
David Andri	Travis Dowling	Abbie-Lee Lewis
Tegan Arazny	Alyson Evans	Nick Maclaine
George Banders	Gail Evans	Anna Martin
Josh Barnes	Professor Emerita	Estevan (Steve) Martin
Bronwyn Batchelor	Robyn Ewing AM	Suzannah McDonald
Dr Natasha Beaumont	Rowan Freeman	Rachel McNamara
Jordan Best	Dr Moema Gregorzewski	Merrilee Mills
Sophie Bila	Douglas Hansell	Tara Morice
Margie Breen	Kate Harris	Jo Morris
Robyn Brookes	Kaylee Hazell	Lisa Mumford
Hannah Brown	Anita Hegh	Toni Murphy
Didem Caia	David Hirst	Carla Nirella
Dr Victoria Campbell	Dr Zoe Hogan	Cathy Petocz
Danielle Catran	Katie Hollins	Gwyneth Price
Jessica Chambers	Dr Rachael Jacobs	Jena Prince
Branden Christine	Felix Jozeps	Whitney Richards
Gemma Cleary	Dr Olivia Karaolis	Julia Richardson

Dr John Nicholas Saunders	Alexandria Steffensen	Jennifer White
Janelle Saunders	Courtney Stewart	Dr Linden Wilkinson
Annabel Scholes	Jo Stone	Paul William Mawhinney
Rachel Small	Mark Storen	Neville Williams Boney
Hannah Smith	Vaishanavi Suryaprakash	Ben Wood
Russell Smith	Anthony Taufu	Kate Worsley
	Amber Virtue	Kelly Young

We also acknowledge and thank our delivery partners:

- Evelyn Chapman and Brisbane Catholic Education, for our partnership in Queensland;
- Helen Hristofski, Luke Kerridge, Hannah Smith, Carla Nirella, and Barking Gecko Theatre for our partnership in Western Australia;
- Karen Gardner, Alyce Fisher, Carolyn Doyle, and Murray Arts;
- Tahni Froudin, Travis Dowling, Rachel McNamara and Hothouse Theatre for our partnership in Albury/Wodonga;
- Annabel Scholes, Karla Conway, Peter van Rijswijk and Canberra Theatre Centre for our partnership in the Australian Capital Territory;
- Sean Pardy and Brown's Mart Theatre for our partnership in the Northern Territory;
- Associate Professor Jo Raphael and Deakin University, Fiona Bechtold and Drama Victoria, and Helen Champion and the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority for our Victorian partnership;
- Professor Peter O'Connor and Dr Briar O'Connor and The University of Auckland and Applied Theatre Company for our partnership in Auckland;
- Rob Brookman, Robyn Brookes and State Theatre Company of South Australia and Associate Professor Amy Hamilton from Flinders University for our partnership in South Australia; and
- all the principals, participating teachers and learners who've worked with us across Australia and in New Zealand.

We warmly acknowledge and thank the wonderful philanthropists who made the program possible.

- | | |
|---|---|
| • The Australian Children's Trust | • Ian Darling AO & Min Darling |
| • Michele Brooks & Andrew Michael | • The Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation |
| • The Caledonia Foundation (Ian Darling AO & Min Darling; Dr Mark Nelson & Louise Nelson; Will & Jane Vicars) | • Denton Family Foundation |
| • The City of Sydney | • W & A Johnson Family Foundation |
| • Mark Coulter & Dr Adam Bayes | • Alan Joyce AC & Shane Lloyd |
| • Crown Resorts Foundation | • Anthony & Jacqueline Kerwick |
| • Rowena Danziger AM | • Keith Kerridge |
| | • Simona & Leon Kamenev |

- Minderoo Foundation
- Simon Mordant AO & Catriona Mordant AM
- The Origin Foundation
- Packer Family Foundation
- Mrs Roslyn Packer AC
- Gretel Packer AM
- The Raymond E Purves Foundation
- Rosie Williams and John Grill AO
- STC's Education Donor Circle
- Sydney Theatre Company Foundation
- Colin Tate AM & Matthew Fatches
- The University of Sydney
- Vaux Family Education & Learning Foundation

Thank you to all the principals, teachers and students from the schools who participated in School Drama.

School Drama Schools

- Ainslie School
- Albury Public School
- Ambarvale High School
- Annandale North Public School
- Anula Primary School
- Arden Anglican School - Junior School
- Arncliffe West Infants School
- Artarmon Public School
- Ashbury Public School
- Ashfield Public School
- Asquith Public School
- Auburn North Public School
- Auburn West Public School
- Balgowlah North Public School
- Baulkham Hills North Public School
- Beauty Point Public School
- Beechworth Montessori School
- Beechworth Primary School
- Bellevue Hill Public School
- Belvoir Special School
- Berala Public School
- Bethanga Primary School
- Bondi Beach Public School
- Boronia Park Public School
- Brocklesby Public School
- Broken Hill Public School
- Burke Ward public School
- Canterbury Public School
- Carlton South Public School
- Casula Public School
- Centennial Park School
- Chatswood High School
- Chatswood Public School
- Churchlands Primary School
- Clovelly Public School
- Concord West Public School
- Condell Park Public School
- Connells Point Public School
- Coogee Public School
- Corrimal Public School
- Cranbrook Junior School
- Crown Street Public School
- Croydon Public School
- Curl Curl North Public School
- Darcy Road Public School
- Darlinghurst Public School
- Darlington Public School
- Dorchester Education and Training Unit (Reiby Juvenile Justice)
- Elanora Heights Public School
- Enfield Public School
- Engadine West Public School
- Epping Heights Public School

- Epping West Public School
- Eskdale Primary School
- Essington School Darwin
- Fairfield Intensive English Centre
- Forestville Public School
- Fort Street Public School
- Georges Hall Public School
- Georges River Grammar - Senior
- Giralang School
- Girraween Primary School
- Glebe Public School
- Gordon East Public School
- Granville East Public School
- Green Square School
- Green Valley Public School
- Haberfield Public School
- Hampden Park Public School
- Hobartville Public School
- Holy Saviour School
- Holy Spirit Primary School
- Homebush Public School
- Howard Springs Primary
- Howlong Primary School
- Howlong Public School
- Hunters Hill Public School
- Inaburra School
- Ingleburn Public School
- International Grammar School - Junior School
- Jarjum College Redfern
- Jingili Primary School
- John The Baptist Primary School
- John Warby Public School
- Kariong Public School
- Katherine High School
- Katoomba Public School
- Kent Road Public School
- Kindlehill School
- Kogarah Public School
- La Perouse Public School
- Lane Cove Public School
- Lavington Public School
- Lawson Public School
- Leichhardt Public School
- Lewisham Public School
- Malak Primary School
- Manly Vale Public School
- Marie Bashir Public School
- Marrickville Intensive English Centre
- Matthew Pearce Public School
- Mawarra Public School
- Mitta Mitta Primary School
- Mortlake Public School
- Mosman Church of England Preparatory School
- Mosman Public School
- Narara Public School
- Nemarluk School
- Newport Public School
- Newtown North Public School
- Newtown Public School
- Nicholson Street Public School
- Nightcliff Primary School
- North Sydney Public School
- Northbridge Public School
- Oatley West Public School
- Our Lady of Good Counsel
- Our Lady of Mt Carmel School
- Our Lady of the Nativity Primary
- Our Lady of The Rosary Primary School
- Oxley College
- Paddington Public School
- Panania Public School
- Plunkett Street Public School
- Railway Town Public School
- Redfern Community Centre
- Regents Park Christian
- Robert Townson Public School
- Rozelle Public School

- Rutherglen Primary School
- Rydalmere East Public school
- Sadleir Public School
- Sattler Christian College
- Seven Hills West Public School
- Shepherds Park Education and Training Unit
- Springdale Heights Public School
- St Aloysius College - Junior School
- St Fiacre's Primary School
- St Francis Xavier Primary School
- St Joseph's Primary School
- St Patrick's School
- St Thomas Aquinas Primary School
- Summer Hill Public School
- Table Top Public School
- Talgarro
- Tempe Public School
- The John Berne School
- The John Berne School, Lewisham
- The Scots School
- Trinity College
- Ultimo Public School
- Undercliffe Public School
- Vaucluse Public School
- Victory Lutheran College
- Wanguri Primary School
- Wattawa Heights Public School
- Waverley Primary School
- Waverley Public School
- West Pymble Public School
- Whalan Public School
- Wilcannia Central School
- Winthrop Primary School
- Wodonga Flexible Learning Centre
- Wodonga Primary School
- Wodonga South Primary School
- Woollahra Public School
- Yackandandah Primary School
- Yagoona Public School
- Yerong Creek Public School
- Youth off the Streets (Chapel School, Merrylands)
- Youth off the Streets (Key College, Redfern)
- Yudi Gunyi School

Western Australian schools

- Ashfield Primary School
- Middle Swan Primary School
- East Victoria Park Primary School
- Lockridge Primary School
- Bassendean Primary School
- Gosnells Primary School
- Seaforth Primary School
- North Balga Primary School
- Lockridge Primary School
- Bentley Primary School
- Honeywood Primary School
- Dryandra Primary School
- Carlisle Primary School
- Beckenham Primary School
- High Wycombe Primary School
- Ellenbrook Primary School
- Bramfield Park Primary School
- East Maddington PS
- Balga Primary School
- Forrestfield PS
- Holy Cross College Primary School
- Belmont Primary School
- Queens Park Primary School
- Tambrey Primary School
- Pegs Creek Primary School

Appendix 1
Sydney Theatre Company:
SCHOOL DRAMA CLASSIC IMPACT DOCUMENT

Notable Statistics

- Plunkett Street Public School participated in the program every year, from the inception in 2009 to the conclusion in 2024, totalling 16 years.
- Number of schools that participated in multiple years:
 - Up to 2 years – 28 schools
 - Up to 3 years – 19 schools
 - Up to 4 years – 15 schools
 - Up to 5 years – 7 schools
 - Up to 6 years – 2 schools
 - Up to 7 years – 4 schools
 - Up to 8 years – 3 schools
 - Up to 9 years – 4 schools
 - Up to 11 years – 3 years
 - Up to 13 years – 1 school
 - Up to 14 years – 1 school
 - Up to 16 years – 1 school
- 5 schools participated in the inaugural year of the program: Plunkett Street Public School, Glebe Public School, Newton North Public School, Lewisham Public School, Crown Street Public School.
- The most schools participating in any one year was 53 schools in 2019.
- School participation by years:
 - 2009 – 5 school
 - 2010 – 16 schools
 - 2011 – 19 schools
 - 2012 – 23 schools
 - 2013 – 26 schools
 - 2014 – 36 schools
 - 2015 – 37 schools
 - 2016 – 48 schools
 - 2017 – 52 schools
 - 2018 – 44 schools
 - 2019 – 53 schools
 - 2020 – 33 schools
 - 2021 – 20 schools
 - 2022 – 31 schools
 - 2023 – 19 schools
 - 2024 – 15 schools

Some Notable Quotes (from Teachers in post-workshop surveys)

- “I believe drama is important for students as many teachers do not have the confidence to teach drama along with many students not given the experiences they need to partake confidently. I saw an improvement in many students’ confidence and an increase in both their verbal and non verbal communication skills.” (Teacher, Our Lady of the Rosary Waitara)
- “It was extremely helpful to be led by an expert. I now have a bank of resources to pull from when teaching drama to my students.” (Teacher, Woollahra Public School)
- “It was wonderful to explore different ways of teaching literacy through drama. I am confident that I can adapt these lessons to any text or year level depending on what suits me at the time.” (Teacher, Vaucluse Public School)
- “My students have gained confidence and knowledge in reading and comprehension as well as confidence between each other.” (Teacher, Haberfield Public School)
- “I really enjoyed learning from another teacher how to manage behaviour and social needs within my class through drama.” (Teacher, Davina Kite, Kent Road Public School)
- “Students enjoyed the opportunity to perform through mime and improvisation and as a result the feelings of the characters resonated more strongly with the students.” (Teacher, Kent Road Public School)
- “Having seen the benefit it provided to students I have developed confidence in using drama strategies to improve literacy. The students were active participants in the teaching program as opposed to listening to what the teacher says then going and doing a worksheet. They were engaged and invested which gave me more confidence in teaching it as the term went on.” (Teacher, Kent Road Public School)
- “The program has helped me to develop my skills and confidence in using drama to enhance students learning in many areas of literacy, including speaking, listening, writing and reading.” (Teacher, Ingleburn Public School)
- “Drama activities enhance the learning of literacy. I can see that the practicality aspects of drama help students understand literacy concepts and allow them to full immerse in the learning process.” (Teacher, Elanora Heights Public School)
- “The benefits for my students include increased participation and engagement and meaningful engagement and interpretation of a text. I felt that my support students benefited the most as they were able to engage with a text in so many ways other than just reading and writing. School Drama opens the opportunity for students of all abilities to participate in the same activity at their own pace.” (Teacher, Marie Bashir Public School)

- “With the new curriculum being rolled out across NSW and its emphasis on quality literature, the programme has helped build students’ ability to draw inferences and connect with stories through their own personal experiences.” (Teacher, Our Lady of the Rosary Primary School).
- “Drama strategies help unpack literature, develop inferencing skills and student confidence and are particularly helpful for our high EAL/D student population”. (Teacher, Our Lady of the Rosary Primary School)
- “There was a clear/obvious improvement of all students oral comprehension of both texts that were studied. Their responses became richer and more detailed as the unit progressed.” (Teacher, Balgowlah North Public School)
- “School Drama has helped in achieving English outcomes:
 - Speaking and Listening EN1-6B - Explain personal opinions orally using supporting reasons, simple inferences and reasonable prediction - Demonstrate active listening behaviours and respond appropriately to class discussions;
 - Reading and Viewing EN1-8B - Understand that texts can draw on readers’ or viewers’ knowledge of texts to make meaning and enhance enjoyment -Discuss possible author intent and intended audience of a range of texts;
 - Thinking Imaginatively and Creatively EN1-10C - Predict and discuss ideas drawn from picture books and digital stories -Express a range of feelings in response to a text;
 - Writing and Representing 2 - EN1-7B - Draw on personal experience and feelings as subject matter to compose imaginative and other texts for different purposes.” (Teacher, Seven Hills West Public School).
- “The students’ oral participation increased by the end of the program. At the start of the program many students were very quiet and reluctant to talk. By the end of the program most students could be heard and understood. They took on board advice that improved their communication skills.” (Teacher, St Joseph’s Primary School)
- “I undertook the program in conjunction with a Unit on Visual Literacy in Year 7 and the program really assisted the students with examining the deeper motives behind the representations an author or illustrator chooses and the meaning behind them.” (Teacher, International Grammar School)
- “It allows teachers to have an insight into how literacy is connected to drama. It brings out the best in each student and allows their confidence to grow. I also think it is a valuable way to teach students collaboration and also the importance of self regulation.” (Teacher, Carlton South Public School)

- “School Drama has been instrumental in allowing me to rediscover the power of drama in immersing students in their learning and allowing them to view situations from different perspectives. I have used different games and techniques that were modelled during School Drama since the program and amazed at the vocabulary students use in their writing and the empathy that they show for different characters.” (Teacher Haberfield Public School)
- “The program was extremely beneficial and offered practical hands-on skills that could be applied in the classroom. It is easily the best professional learning I have undertaken in the past eight years.” (Teacher, Haberfield Public School)
- “This program has definitely met my literacy objectives. My focus was on developing the students literal and inferential comprehension. It is evident from the students willingness to participate and how they answered the various comprehension activities, these have been met.” (Teacher, Redfern Jarjum College)

Appendix 2
School Drama – Adelaide Pilot Project, 2013-2014
(in partnership with State Theatre Company of South Australia)

When Rob Brookman left STC for the State Theatre Company, SA and Flinders University he oversaw a successful School Drama Classic pilot in two disadvantaged primary schools in Adelaide, Christie Downs and Alberton (2013-2014). Dr Amy Hamilton from Flinders University evaluated the pilot. Teacher comments resonated with teachers participating in Sydney. For example:

- A fantastic experience. It has given me a whole new approach to engage students in rich texts.
- A deeper involvement in personal reflection and how I can incorporate learning across all areas of teaching.
- Increased self awareness and confidence.
- Combining fun and imagination to improve student engagement.
- The students gained another way of communicating, including the dynamics of communication in a group and the importance of looking beyond yourself.
- It is not just about sitting down and reading a book, understanding happens by knowing what the characters are about and getting their perspective. This was done better with this group than any other year 6/7 class I have taught.
- You don't need to read a book and that is the end of the journey. You can create your own journey...in many ways beyond the print.
- Being able to step into a character's shoes helped them to be able to empathise with characters more and to consider different points of views in issues.
- It was great for me to be mentored. Sometimes I get to mentor other teachers so to be mentored was great, having someone with so much energy and connection.

What would you say to other teachers?

- Just go with it. It is one thing you don't have to stress about. The Arts and how to use them with an English and literacy focus can sometimes be put on the backburner because of time constraints. What you find is that it actually covers a lot of things, it is worth the investment. From here there is so much follow up you can do.
- After the second session I was really embarrassed at how much I had completely undervalued what my students were able to do. They were amazing!

- In a way, I think the students referenced their own life experiences more, talking about being lonely or bored or upset and their friends ditching them for others. doing something wrong or upsetting their families or their family separating. They were also more positive about someone helping this person, or giving stories of hope.
- Students prone to shyness became more confident and more open.

Special Ed benchmarking

- This result was never about incredible changes in literacy, but the ability to relate to others, understand expression and help them communicate more.

Student feedback:

- We learnt all these fun things that we didn't know we could do!
- It made me more comfortable being 'me' around others.'
- It helped my confidence heaps.
- You don't judge a book by it's cover...take care of things that are lost..just keep on trying.

Teaching artist:

- Working with the disability unit, some of the children surprised their teachers by engaging in a way that they hadn't seen before. One child with severe autism recalled all the story of Goldilocks word for word, complete with descriptive and advanced vocabulary. He usually doesn't communicate with anyone directly and is difficult to decipher.

Appendix 3
HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 2013 META EVALUATION
of the SCHOOL DRAMA PROGRAM, 2009-2012
Robyn Gibson and David Smith, University of Sydney

- Meta evaluation synthesised findings from the pilot program evaluations 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 of School Drama program (SDP).
- Evaluations gathered information from participant teacher pre- and post-engagement in SDP surveys, teacher and actor/teaching artist post-engagement interviews, student benchmarked work samples, some student evaluations and observations in several sites.
- 2009: 12 teachers, 250 students in 5 Sydney schools: two teaching artists.
- 2012: 39 teachers, 960 students in 23 schools including three in Broken Hill: 4 actors.
- Overwhelming evidence of the success of the partnership between Sydney Theatre Company and Faculty of Education, University of Sydney in making significant changes to teachers' understanding and skills in using process drama strategies to impact student literacy learning in participant schools.
- Unequivocal evidence from teachers and actors confirming the efficacy, effectiveness and impact of the co-mentoring model between teacher and teaching artist (actor) that is unique to the SDP artist-in-residence approach.
- Very strong evidence from teacher pre- and post surveys and interviews of powerful teacher professional learning that has resulted in significant shifts in teachers' reported knowledge and understanding of process drama strategies, their confidence in using these and to positive changes in classroom practice during their engagement with the teaching artist.
- Increased evidence in benchmarked student work samples from a number of participant teachers of improved student learning in relation to teacher identified literacy outcomes. In addition, particular increase in student confidence in being prepared to actively engage in drama strategies.
- Major unanswered research question: 'To what extent have the changes initiated in schools during their participation in the SDP been extended more widely through those schools and been sustained in teachers' classrooms?'
- Recommended strategy to increase the spread and impact of the ideas and practices of SDP: The development of an on-line facility by STC with information, resources and exemplars of teachers', students' and artists' work.



*School Drama Teaching Artist Professional Learning, 2014.
Photo credit: Grant Sparkes-Carroll*



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SYDNEY