Enter the space in a different role

Spaces of Performance, Drama Australia National Conference
Perth March 30–April 2, 2011
Robin Pascoe, School of Education, Murdoch University

Abstract

The transition – transformation, perhaps – from drama student to drama teacher involves negotiating a different sense of performance. Drama teachers move from their roles as student actors, directors, dramaturges, scenographers and managers. They take on additional roles as curriculum designers, curriculum constructors and teaching and learning managers. They bring with them their deeply interpersonal capacities, creativity and innovation and re-shape themselves to the immediate task of creating spaces of interaction and learning in the context of drama. They draw together their drama content knowledge and their developing understanding of drama pedagogy.

In that sense drama teaching is stepping into performance in a new space. They are playing in the space “betwixt and between”.

In this paper I explore structuring learning experiences for drama teachers in the processes of becoming, as they step into these new spaces of interaction and learn to make the drama class room their own space. I share the drama education program developed at Murdoch University since it was established in 2002 (when I reported on its beginnings to the last national conference held in Perth).

In sharing “our space” I seek to open the space between participants to share their stories about drama teacher education and to critique and progress future directions for the field.

Introduction

Learning to become a drama teacher is a new role just as much as being cast in a play.

My students who have been recently on School Experience came back into the Drama Workshop bubbling with their stories. They are excited and a little wiser. Aisha talked about how tiring teaching drama was. Tas enthused about how effective teacher-in-role had been for her. All talk about that sense of difference they have now that they are less student and more teacher. They talk of stepping into a new role, into a new space.

Context

The teacher education course developed and implemented in the School of Education, Murdoch University, in 2002 was a green field enterprise. It was a new initiative where there had been no program although there was an existing well-established Theatre/drama program offered in the associated School of Social Science.

The course was designed through consultation with a group of 15 teachers. This proved an interesting process drawing on a diverse range of experience from beginning to veteran drama teachers. Also included in this group were drama teachers who had moved into the field from other learning areas such as English as well as those with drama-specific pre-service training. Most fascinating where the gaps identified in then existing teacher education programs.

The drama teacher education program at Murdoch University was designed within the existing structures. A single unit, Drama and the Curriculum, was designed for both major and minor teaching areas. The differentiation was in the duration of the unit with students taking drama as a minor teaching area completing their studies in Semester 1 and students taking the major completed an additional component in the Winter Semester (between Semesters 1 and 2). Specific School Experience components complement the on campus program. The drama program was offered within both a double degree (Bachelor of Education Secondary and Bachelor of Arts Theatre and Drama) structure and as a Graduate Diploma of Education.
Key features of the drama education program at Murdoch University

Principles

My work with a succession of students has led me to refine an approach to drama teacher education based on two tightly inter-related perspectives about learning and teaching drama: the connections between learning drama and learning to teach drama. While they might seem two sides of the same coin, they are distinctive but connected ways of thinking and acting.

This approach is built on the foundations offered by Shulman (e.g. 1986) that links content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge.

Put simply, there is knowledge of drama and knowledge about teaching drama which goes beyond knowledge of the subject matter to address “the particular form of content knowledge that embodied the aspects of content most germane to its teachability”.

Pedagogical content knowledge also includes an understanding of what makes the learning of specific topics easy or difficult: the conceptions and preconceptions that students of different ages and backgrounds bring with them to the learning of those most frequently taught topics and lessons. ([www.leeshulman.net/domains-pedagogical-content-knowledge.html](http://www.leeshulman.net/domains-pedagogical-content-knowledge.html))

These relationships can be represented diagrammatically.

In the intersections between learning drama and learning to teach drama are the crucial aspects of articulating purpose, values, attitudes, dispositions and ethics. This is the significant focus on praxis where theory as practice and practice theorised are drawn sharply into focus.

A shorthand way of crystallising this relationship between content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge is the phrase: teaching is learning twice (once for yourself and the second time for your students)
overview
With this underpinning, the course constructed for drama education students at Murdoch University explicitly articulates parallel threads that are developed concurrently and explicitly.

how we learn drama.
how we teach so students learn drama.

we clearly identify the art form of drama – its distinctive features

- elements
- skills
- processes
- conventions
- forms
- styles
- history - drama of other times and places and drama of our times and places
- drama values

we identify and understand drama in the curriculum

we can articulate and locate the contexts for drama in schools

- histories of drama in schools
- significant theories and theorists
- differing approaches to teaching and learning drama

we understand and engage with drama curriculum and curriculum in broad terms

- Western Australian Curriculum Framework (1998)
- WACE Drama
- K-10 Arts and Drama syllabus
- Arts National Curriculum (ACARA)
- International Drama Curricula e.g. Ontario
- research in drama education

in working in this way, we are focused on how we learn to teach drama by

- experience - we learn to teach drama by teaching drama
- observing practice
- modelling of others
- belonging to a community of drama educators - a guild

we understand and practice our role as drama teachers

- values, attitudes and dispositions as drama teachers - our ethical responsibilities
- planning for drama - our curriculum engagement
  - shaping teaching and learning experiences – the shape of lesson/sequence/unit/"big picture" planning
  - drama learning strategies (conventions)
- classroom/studio teaching of drama
  - putting planning into action - theory and practice
  - physical exploration of voice and movement and application of elements of drama
  - social health of students
  - co-construction of learning - collaboration
  - questioning
  - interventions in learning processes
  - managing student behaviours
  - modelling learning and drama as art form
  - managing external factors
- assessing drama
- managing drama in schools

our roles as

- teacher
- curriculum leader
- director
- mentor
- role model
- resource manager

drama learning is aesthetic - it is focused through the elements of

- role
- dramatic action and situation
- focus and dramatic tension
- voice
- movement
- symbol and metaphor

it is contextualised in the art form's

- histories
- people
- conventions
- role in culture and society

drama learning is practical, hands on and experiential – we learn by making drama

drama learning is physical

drama learning is ethical, moral and social – people focused

diverse skill-sets for managing

- facilities
- physical and psychological safety
- budgets
- role responsibilities e.g. copyright/performing rights
These serve as anchor points in the development of a teaching schedule in the tight limits of available time (see appendix).

**Unifying metaphors**

This unit has three overarching concepts:

1. To induct students into a community of drama educators - a guild of drama teachers - recognising that we draw on-going support and development from our colleagues
2. To help students build a portfolio of resources to support themselves in the first years of teaching - recognising that we need a repertoire of activities and a collection of resources to move into our drama teaching career
3. To help students articulate values about drama teaching recognising that what we value is ultimately what we teach

**Markers of quality in drama teacher education programs**

In other research, I am investigating the dynamic markers of quality in arts education in schools as a field (unpublished and in process). Not surprisingly, these markers are also relevant to drama teacher education. For example, in that work I have observed that learning the arts in schools develops in each student aesthetic knowledge and understanding which has two complementary and inter-related dimensions: arts practice and responding to the arts. This aesthetic focus is intrinsic to drama teacher education. Further, drama teaching relies on a focus on artistic understanding developing each student’s capacity to generate her or his own artistic expression and to realise it by performing, presenting and sharing it with other people. Linked intrinsically with students’ developing arts practice is their expanding capacity for responding to arts experiences. Responding includes engagement with both other people’s art as well their own. In short, the principles of effective drama teacher education programs cannot be seen as separate or different from arts education in general.

In their work for the Australian National Review of Visual Education, Wright et al (2006) proposed a useful model for arts education. First, there is a focus on student’s meaning making and articulating their own identity through art form specific or multi-modal forms of expression thereby developing agency and personal, cultural and social identity. Second, the construct highlights the value of hands-on practical learning experiences where students are engaged in embodied learning working with materials and ideas simultaneously. Third, the focus is on working in rich, interesting environments and the power of studio-based learning. Fourth, the construct reveals the way that teachers and students are co-constructors of learning based on relationships of trust. They represented their model graphically.
In addition they identified 10 necessary conditions for successful arts education:

1. Sequential, developmental learning programmes;
2. Time allocation for teachers and students that provide extended-time learning opportunities;
3. Student-centred learning;
4. Safe, supportive learning environments that build relationships of trust;
5. Leadership by principals and teachers;
6. Resources, materials, funding, facilities, access;
7. Teacher development - pre-service and in-service education that ensures student learning in Visual Education is effective;
8. Partnerships and community engagement;
9. Valuing by parents, administrators, teachers and community; and,
10. Authentic assessment - for real purposes and audiences.

In subsequent work Wright and Pascoe (2009) developed models from that research which described the arts in schools as a journey of increasing confidence as opportunities lead to participation and engagement that enables expression and the development of expertise.

Effective drama teacher education programs will reflect similar learning journeys.

**Partnerships**

A key aspect of the drama teacher education program is the symbiotic relationship between the drama knowledge, understanding, practices and values developed within the Theatre and Drama program in the School of Social Science (content knowledge) and the specific pedagogical focus of studies in the School of Education.

The renewal and revision in 2010/11 of the theatre and drama program in the School of Social Science, has been a further opportunity to strengthen partnerships and connections. The School of Education is in the process of developing for 2012, a new unit to be titled *Engaging Communities through Drama* as well as extending the time for drama curriculum units.
One further partnership of note is the connection between the teacher education program and the courses articulated by the Western Australian Curriculum Council – the Curriculum Framework (1998), Western Australian Certificate of Education Drama Courses (2007) and the Department of Education K-10 Arts Syllabus (2008). The Murdoch teacher education program is not an island. For example, the student assessment activities are directly related to the assessment tasks undertaken by students in schools. Murdoch teacher education students experience the cognitive and physical demands they will ask of their own students in schools.

Issues in drama teacher education
As a field drama teacher education faces two significant issues: a relative lack of published literature on the field; and, time pressures for the development of competence and confidence in drama teachers in training. While there is a healthy amount of scholarly research on drama education as a field in Australia (for example, NJ, the Drama Australia Journal) there is relatively less attention given to drama teacher education in Australian published literature (with some exceptions such as (Wright & Gerber, 2004)1. In developing the drama education program at Murdoch University, there was a range of materials on aspects of drama education but a lack of a suitable drama education-specific text. Discussions with colleagues in other Australian universities led me to the UK publication, Learning to Teach Drama 11-18 (Kempe & Nicholson, 2007) but the particular contexts of teacher education in that setting limited its usefulness. It has also been some years since the publications by Errington (e.g. 1992; 1993). The publication of Education in the Arts, Teaching and Learning in the Contemporary Curriculum (Brown, O’Toole, Macintyre, & Sallis, 2009) provides some attention to drama teacher education through an arts lens; similarly, Delivering Authentic Arts Education (Dinham 2010) is encouraging. However, there is still a distinct gap for drama education in its own right. This lack of drama teacher education material was paradoxically limiting and liberating. On the one hand, there was no imposed given cannon or text (though this may help explain an atheoretical approach to drama teacher practice identified by Sorenson (unpublished). On the other hand there was a sense of pioneering the field.

I suggest that there is a gap in the literature that needs attention and a need for a contemporary text for Australian drama teacher education students – for both primary and secondary programs. Further this gap indicates a need for more attention to drama teacher education in Australian drama journals.

The second issue pertinent to this discussion focuses on the pressures of time and resourcing that impact on teacher education courses in Australia. In designing this drama education program, the constraints of time led to coining the phrase enough to get started as a working principle. There was a pragmatic recognition that there would be choices made about what was included and that there would be gaps. In designing the program, there was a deliberate decision to signal where there were gaps.

It has been clear throughout the first years of the program in operation that more time than currently provided is necessary. The announcement of the national system for the accreditation of pre-service teacher education programs (AITSL, 2011) and the proposed increase in time for pedagogical content studies for both major and minor teaching areas is a welcome innovation.

Conclusion
Many of the concepts hazily or intuitively identified in my 2002 conference paper about the then newly-minted drama teacher education program at Murdoch University, have been refined and consolidated through the subsequent years and the experience of working with different cohorts of students. Each student has contributed in some way to the current version of the program which continues to re-shape itself with each new telling. What was begun with hope in 2002 has matured, continued to develop and extend as practice has clarified and sharpened focus.

I acknowledge the contributions of the initial consultative group along with each class of students to this journey.

1 I look forward to the publication of work by Christna Grey considering practicum experience in drama.
Bibliography


## Appendix

Overview of the tightly packed drama teacher education schedule.

### Week 1 - 16 Feb

**Saturday, 22 January 2011**

#### Lecture 1: "What is drama? How do we learn it?"
- The Company of Boys in King of Scotland's Play (1563)
- Medieval Times
- Drama in Australian Schools
- Drama in Australia
- Introducing the Drama Maze
- Drama and Theatre Key Texts and Concepts
- 2nd Edition pancake R & H Pantin, 2002, Bapppage (not included in unit)
- ‘*The Elements of Drama*’ John Cottle and Brad Newman, 1991, Heinemann
- ‘*Dramatic Action Source Unknown*’
- ‘*An Acting Teacher’s journey*’ What does it mean to be a good teacher?/M. B. Teaching Theatre, Educational Theatre Association
- Working up in drama teaching
- Beginning in drama: Improvising our own dramas

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**Wednesday, 19 January 2011**

#### Lecture 3: "What is drama? How do we learn it?"
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**Monday, 17 January 2011**

#### Lecture 4: "What is drama? How do we learn it?"
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**Monday, 17 January 2011**

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Semester 1

Week – 15 beginning 23 May

Semester 1

Week – 14 beginning 16 May

Week – 13 beginning 9 May

Rehearsal

Saturday 30 April - All Day

No lecture

No Workshop:

Rehearsal

Sunday May 1

12.00 - 6.30

Semester 1

Week – 16 beginning 30 May

Semester 1

Week – 15 beginning 23 May

Week – 14 beginning 16 May

Week – 13 beginning 9 May

Rehearsal

Spring Saturday 30 April - All Day

No lecture

Rehearsal

Sunday May 1

12.00 - 6.30

Seminar 1

Week – 17 beginning 6 June

No lecture

No Workshop:

Rehearsal

Saturday 4 June

12.00 - 6.30

Semester 1

Week – 16 beginning 30 May

Semester 1

Week – 15 beginning 23 May

Week – 14 beginning 16 May

Week – 13 beginning 9 May

Rehearsal

Spring Saturday 30 April - All Day

No lecture

Rehearsal

Sunday May 1

12.00 - 6.30

Seminar 1

Week – 17 beginning 6 June

No lecture

No Workshop:

Rehearsal

Saturday 4 June

12.00 - 6.30
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Note: It may be that the Thursday 23 June workshop is run on Wednesday 22 June 1.00-4.00; to be negotiated.

See Note for June 22.