

A letter, a playwright, a handbook and a Bible



Patrice Baldwin is Chair of National Drama, President of the International Drama Theatre and Education Association (IDEA) and an Executive Council member of the World Alliance for Arts Education (WAAE).

The DfE recently wrote a letter to some theatres who were concerned at the disappearance of drama from the draft primary curriculum. The DfE wrote:

Ministers do not consider drama itself to be core knowledge, as it is more a question of pedagogy and therefore outside the remit of the national curriculum review.

This is politically expedient nonsense, as Drama is already in the current national curriculum, (if only as an aspect of speaking and listening within English). Drama therefore should legally be part of the review consultation. To pretend Drama is not in the national curriculum can be seen as a way of avoiding having to consult on it.

Drama is a subject. It may be used as pedagogy in schools but teachers still need subject knowledge to use Drama well. The patronising letter goes on to say:

As you know, where drama features in the primary English programme of study it is in relation to pupils studying great works of great dramatists, including Shakespeare.

Shakespeare is not what primary children mainly need in drama. They should be creating drama not just 'studying' dramatists. Maybe politicians relate to Shakespeare's plays as they are filled with political intrigue, treachery, ambition, power,

trickery and betrayal.

The same letter claims that schools are being given more freedom to:

...teach subjects and topics like drama... as part of a broad and balanced curriculum.

Many of us apparently have a degree in a topic! What nonsense! Apparently,

...the new national curriculum focuses on the core knowledge that pupils should acquire to succeed in education, and in life.

Children need to be literate and numerate and gain knowledge but no 'subject' better prepares children for life than Drama. It helps develop our humanity. Sir Richard Eyre, CBE, was recently quoted in the NUT's response to the DfE about the KS4 qualifications reform,:

By diminishing the opportunity to study the arts – by excluding them from the core subjects of the curriculum - we condemn future generations to a life a little less than human and, in time, the already large gap between those for whom the arts are a part of life and those who feel excluded from them will widen to an unbridgeable divide. What's next? Cultural apartheid.

There seems to be a complete lack of understanding or interest on the part of Mr Gove, as to what Drama in schools actually is and can achieve. He seems to see a prime purpose of drama teachers (if they exist) as mainly

creaming off the talented students and pointing them in the direction of the professional theatres. This was the gist of his response when I personally asked him what he saw as the role of drama teachers in the future.

Inspectors do look for evidence of social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. This partly involves checking whether children have an appreciation of theatre. So, children will be expected to appreciate theatre but not necessarily create or participate in making theatre. Children can study great playwrights and watch theatre without experiencing drama or participating in Drama at all.

Inspectors are also being asked to consider how well schools help pupils to prepare for life in 'modern democratic Britain'. I am startled at the irony of this statement when one considers what the government is doing with education. Is it democratic? Is it modern?

The unhealthy global competition to achieve ever higher PISA scores misses the true purpose and value of education. We should be educating children to become good, rounded, adaptable citizens in the volatile and fast moving 21st century. Drama can play a major role when education focuses on holistically developing people instead of just driving them towards ever higher measurable outcomes in a few subjects.

A final quote from the Bible seems to hold a message for Mr Gove:

For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? (Mark 8:36)

Patrice Baldwin
Chair of National Drama