

Is Drama a Bard Thing?



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

Mr Gove is set on a political and economic agenda for education that gives little respect to evidence or expert opinion and even less respect to children. I have never experienced such government intransigence and lack of respect for drama specialists and academics.

The recent curriculum 'consultation' review did not contain a single question about Drama. I suppose Mr Gove can claim that relatively few people responded on Drama ...and omit the fact that no-one was ever asked. Just days after the curriculum consultation closed, newspapers reported Mr Gove's support of the new annual 'Shakespeare Week' (starting March 2014). Presumably he hoped to dupe the public into assuming drama in schools is thriving with his support! The electorate hear there will be Shakespeare Week for children from the age of 5 and a Shakespeare Toolkit in all secondary schools but they aren't really aware that there will be no drama curriculum from KS1 to 3 and that schools can please themselves about whether they bother to offer Drama at all in the future.

A few weeks ago, Mr Gove received powerful and important letters from highly respected Professors of Drama and Theatre from around the world and

from the World Alliance for Arts Education (World Associations for Art, Music, Dance and Drama). They were all expressing their concern and dismay at hearing what was happening to Drama in schools in England at this time. Associate Professor Peter O'Connor, Professor Larry O'Farrell, Professor John O'Toole and Professor Rita Irwin all wrote strong letters to Mr Gove but it seems he has conveniently ignored them. These significant letters received just standard replies from the DfE. This is not just deeply disrespectful; it is deeply worrying.

I have written several letters on behalf of ND to various ministers, including Mr Gove, David Laws, Elizabeth Truss and Nick Gibb, and received various evasive and well timed replies. In her reply to my last letter, Elizabeth Truss, MP, says she *'continues to question whether the best way to promote high quality drama in our schools is to make it compulsory and taught according to a curriculum set in Whitehall'*.

My letter was about the teaching of drama not about its promotion. Why is it best for the English and Maths curriculum to be dictated by Whitehall but not a drama curriculum? No explanation is offered. I am writing again to ask for an explanation but I don't expect to receive one, of course.

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I gave Norman Lamb (my MP) copies of the letters from the drama academics and sent them to David Laws, MP, and Elizabeth Truss, MP. I knew Mr Gove already had them. Ms. Truss wrote,

'I have read the letters from the international drama associations'.

Really? The letters were not from international drama associations. She goes on to say that she agrees with *'much of what they say about the benefits of drama'* but does not specify what exactly. She also states that schools

'will remain free to introduce or continue with drama at any level they choose'.

Is this freedom or the government sidestepping responsibility? Is her letter really saying,

'Schools can please themselves about drama. We don't care either way.'

Patrice Baldwin
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