

SCHOOLS MISSING OUT ON THE POWER OF THEATRE

A new survey has found that a substantial number of school students have had no exposure to theatre.

The research, conducted by C3Education, found that 30% of primary schools and 10% of secondary had organised no theatre trips, in or out of school, in the past two years.

The survey, *Theatre attendance: In and out of school*, was given to 360 schools, a majority of which are based in London. The research is the first of its kind to discover how much schools in England are engaging with theatre.

The main reasons schools listed for not engaging with theatre were: teachers having limited access to theatre information, cost, and not being part of the National Curriculum.

Co-ordinator for the Cultural Learning Alliance, Lizzie Crump, said: 'Schools play a vital role in ensuring that children have equality of access to arts and culture and need to be supported to continue this role.'

These figures also have an effect on the future of the theatre industry. Without access to theatre at an early age, students are less likely to engage with it in the future.

Sydney Thornbury, co-ordinator of *Theatre attendance: In and out of school*, agreed there are, 'a significant

minority of young people who are completely missing out on engaging with theatre through their schools.'

However, not all of the figures from the research were discouraging; 89% of secondary schools surveyed attend a theatre production at least once a year. An encouraging 84% of primary and 88% of secondary teachers were in agreement that schools have a responsibility to develop and nurture the cultural aspects of young people's lives.

Sam West, board member for the National Campaign for the Arts, responded to the findings of the survey: 'At a time when it is easier and easier for us to live life in our own little boxes, live theatre is one of the few remaining communal things we do. It's very easy for young people to get out of the habit of going to the theatre, or never to get into it. They miss out on the imaginative escape, the linguistic explosion, the cultural discovery and the chance of being part of a society with people they don't know. If parents haven't been, why would they take their kids? In that situation, we look to teachers to inspire and enthuse. Visiting a theatre is a social contract. Children must be part of that. They must feel at home there or we won't have an audience in the future.'

THEATRE WORLD UPDATE

- Former BBC Director Greg Dyke has said government plans for local television stations will benefit theatre companies, as advertising will be cheaper. Dyke said: 'All sorts of partnerships will be created from local TV, I am sure of it.'
- Converted St Matthew's Church in Brixton will now be home to The Brixton Empire. This will be the first professional theatre to open in the area for over 10 years. The venue will host the UK premiere of *When the Chicken's Came Home to Roost*, directed by Daljinder Singh. The Brixton Empire opens 5 October.
- A new 50-seat fringe theatre has opened in New Cross. The London Theatre will feature Chekhov and Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* in its upcoming season.

Curriculum focus

with Patrice Baldwin



The Curriculum in Wonderland!

'I have an excellent idea, let's change the subject.'

The March Hare (Alice in Wonderland)

I wrote to my MP recently to explain National Drama's concern about the future place of drama in the curriculum and the impact of cuts on the availability of drama specialist teachers and courses. He forwarded my letter to Mr Gove and I received a reply from Nick Gibb. It was a politically ideological reply and I found myself weighing up and considering the possible implications of every word. Tumble with me now down the rabbit hole, be warned ... there may be no way back!

Mr Gibb wrote that, 'art, design and music are being examined as part of the National Curriculum Review'. No mention of dance? However, slightly encouragingly, Mr Gibb went on to say, 'All pupils should be taught a broad and balanced curriculum which includes the arts and drama.' I would have hoped that might have read 'the arts, (including drama)' but maybe the Government have forgotten drama is an art form.

I shrank inwardly when I read, 'there is a distinction to be drawn between the centrally prescribed National Curriculum and the whole school curriculum.' Experienced teachers know the real difference that the arts have made to many disaffected pupils. They responded to the Ebac league tables by putting highly successful GCSE arts lessons into after school slots and giving the school day over rapidly to the Ebac subjects.

“ In this game of chess, drama is being cornered ”

Mr Gibb went on to say, 'our intention is that the National Curriculum will be slimmed down so it is focused on setting out essential knowledge in key subjects that all pupils should learn during their time at school, and does not absorb the overwhelming majority of teaching time in schools.' This intention is unlikely to be the reality in a system that has high stakes assessments. Maybe a national audit needs to take place now on how drama in schools has already been adversely affected.

Mr Gibb continues 'refocusing the National Curriculum does not mean stopping subjects from being taught in schools.' Glug! Have another swig. It may help you see things differently. Maybe this means we don't need teachers to teach drama. So who will do the drama teaching?

We are entering a game of curriculum chess in wonderland. Drama teachers are the pawns who are fast disappearing. But don't worry I can see a knight in shining armour. Mr Gibb's letter says, 'Darren Henley has been asked to carry out a review to recommend ways in which every child experiences a cultural education. The review will report later this year.' In this game of chess I think drama is being cornered. By January 2012 it might be check mate.

'It would be so nice if something would make sense for a change.' (Alice)



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