

Why every school should offer Drama

Society asks teachers to help students develop great communication skills, compassion, media awareness and intercultural competence. Many people fear a world solely reigned by digital technology in which real human interactions are rare. A growing number of people already have problems living with respect and appreciation for their own or other people's bodies. Having the opportunity to do drama at school gives our students plenty of opportunities to interact, create, be and act. Here, students can learn to express themselves and get to know others.

Every Drama teacher could tell you the true story of students who used to be shy and hiding behind their hair, but then grew so much confidence within one school year that even their parents were surprised to see how freely they acted on stage. Many students expressed that they gained self-esteem through drama lessons.

Schiller says, "humans are humans *when they are playing*"; Hartmut von Hentig goes as far as saying "we only need two subjects: Drama & Science"! Still, most places in the world don't offer drama lessons to all or any students.

Here are some points why it's crucial to offer Drama lessons to all children.

1. Drama gives you the opportunity to find out what your students are interested in.
While many people have an old-fashioned image of theater lessons consisting of students being divided into main and small parts in a play, learning texts by heart that have been written by playwrights hundreds of years ago and reciting them in a way that bores the audience, the new Drama teaching is much more creative and free. It deconstructs hierarchy and authority, includes room for the students' message and creativity with hundreds of possible styles to choose from and combine. I recommend starting the school year with a lesson that is completely dedicated to finding out what goes on in your students' heads. What is on their minds? What would they like to show the (grown-up) world? What is the message that really needs to be staged?
2. Drama is – by nature – project-based.
Each Drama group has a common goal, a presentation that we dedicate our work to. Therefore, Drama offers the opportunity to allow for all students to contribute the strongest part of their individual personalities. It makes most sense to help students find a job in the production that best suits them and help them work on their strength instead of focusing on their weaknesses. A growth mindset is important: We constantly create, revise, improve and rehearse! And content from all other subjects can be included and delved into.



With new roles and costumes, fantastic worlds with a common goal can become real. And we get the chance to adopt new roles as teachers as well. (Theater Camp, 2007) Photo: Markus Werth

3. Drama is physical but not competitive.

In many school context the human body is either merely a vessel for the brain and cognitive functions dominate the teaching and learning experience, while the body only plays a role in Physical Education, a subject that often – not always – focuses on competition, ambition and results. In contrast to that, Drama shows you how to use your body to express thoughts and collaborate with other people. You learn how to read body language and work with your bodies.

4. Drama fosters ingenuity and creating visions from nothing.

Although some places have access to performing arts funds, many teachers and students have to create costumes and scenery from what they have at hand, be it art supplies or simply naturally occurring materials such as stones, wood or sand or things that would normally be thrown away like packaging and damaged household items. Take the challenge and try to find materials that can be used as props. In a particularly windy and rainy part of New Zealand we created costumes and props mostly from 45 broken umbrellas found at the university campus. It was fun!



With a big budget the students' work gets a lot of recognition and professionalism. (Curtains, 2014) Photo: Tom van Eerten



And with a small budget they learn to reuse and recycle in creative ways. (Peterchens Mondfahrt, 2009) Photo: Mareike Hachemer

5. By default Drama follows the PIES principle:

Positive Interdependence, Individual Accountability, Equal Participation, and Simultaneous Action are innately crucial to the process. Most students feel a strong sense of motivation, if their work is interdependent with the work of others. Writing a scene, researching at home, coming up with ideas are no longer tasks for the sake of being tasks, but will be needed by other students to continue their work on the project. Still, whatever is done doesn't become invisible: Still everyone is individually accountable for what they present and also can be individually praised for their contribution. Even though these contributions might be very different, they are still potentially equal with

regards to their value for the project. Simultaneous action makes the work efficient and offers the possibility for a production that consists of beautiful details in a wide array of fields like costumes, scenery, acting, sound and back office work.

6. Drama doesn't only work with ONE language.

If you're working with students from different cultural backgrounds with different native languages, use Drama as a communal language! Body language is pretty universal (and differences in body languages might be a great source of entertainment and learning). In Drama, language is only one out of many tools that are used to communicate a message: So, use your body, different sounds and visuals to "talk". And use new languages other than the usually prevalent language to add to the composition of sounds and voices in the production. Your foreign language students will be proud to forward their knowledge!

7. Drama helps you develop as a teacher.

By definition, Drama makes you think outside the box! You learn about yourself, others and other realities and you gain the ability to create new worlds. It's a constant source of mutual inspiration! With good training as a professional Drama teacher you'll acquire plenty of techniques of how to develop original scenic material with students, use artistic strategies and help students discover their own creativity and physical expression.



By staying in training as Drama teachers and being on stage, we don't lose touch with our students' feelings when they perform. (Schultheaterfest, 2015) Photo: Olaf Mönch

8. Drama is a great method to offer multi-sensory approaches to cognitive content.

Academic content like dramatic plays from the Age of Enlightenment might be difficult for students to approach. Working on challenging pieces of literature, methods of Drama can make content more accessible. Students choose whether they want to be actors, hosts or writers. Depending on their preferences, students prepare rewritten scenes from the play, introductory speeches and boards with background information for a performance to remember.



Older students use Drama to help them approach intellectual texts, analyse the text material and brainstorm ideas. (Nathan der Weise, 2011) Photo: Mareike Hachemer

9. Drama makes you aware of roles.

In our lives we all play roles. One of the most important abilities for a confident and happy life is to become aware of these roles, to accept or change the role that you are currently playing, to choose who you want to be and to swap roles when it's appropriate. Stepping into different roles in Drama lessons should prepare students to discover the importance of roles in their lives and be empowered to experiment with these roles as well.

10. Drama makes you aware of the making-off and manipulation.

Most things that are have been made. And most things that have been made have been made by humans. In the process of creating, hundreds of decisions are made. Whether we show our personalities on facebook, present a political speech, write an article or choose a decoration for our office: We are making decisions to leave a certain impression. Drama is all about knowing which effects will be created by choosing a certain item of clothes, a particular set of words, an impressive or a humble scenery. The ability gained in this process helps our students choose which impression to leave, but also unmask the factors that manipulate our ways of perceiving others.

In Drama students play and act.

While *playing* is considered the opposite of work and is often not taken seriously, it has been proven to be one of the strongest forms of human learning and a great chance to develop intrinsic motivation for lifelong learning. The word *acting* has two meanings: It refers to pretending as well as to actually doing something.

It is an ideal of our new education to not teach students to only know something, but enable and empower their *action* so that they can be *active* people and – hopefully – change makers for the world around them. Drama teaching offers many opportunities for students to follow their interest and become aware of their abilities.

In Drama, you learn about yourself, others and other realities and you learn how to create new worlds. We need people who create new worlds to create a new and better world. We don't need people who have only been taught to watch, listen and analyze. We need a new generation that also *acts!*

Therefore, I strongly believe that every child should have the right and possibility to do Drama at school!

#drama #dramaed #dramateaching #theatreineducation #theatereducation #artsed #performingarts

Mareike Hachemer has been a Top 50 Finalist in the inaugural Global Teacher Prize 2015, a Lowell Milken Fellow and a member of the community of practice at the Council of Europe's Education Programme. She considers herself lucky to have been trained to be a Drama teacher by the German state of Hesse's qualification programme for Drama teachers at Schultheaterstudio Frankfurt. This programme involves one year of basic training and a two year intensive course with training in theater didactics, methods, analysis, styles, theory, history, theater pedagogy and project management. She has worked with students between 6 and 83 years (but mostly with 10-20 year-olds) at schools in Germany and England, at Johannes Gutenberg Universität Mainz and at the University of Otago in New Zealand. Many of her play productions have been funded and also decorated by the European Union, the German Embassy, Performing Arts and Culture Funds, the Goethe Institut and Goethe Society. Nevertheless, she believes that a great play with students doesn't need a big budget. For about 15 years Mareike Hachemer has worked as an actress, director and organizer of cultural events. She now works as a teacher for German, English and Drama and at the Ministry of Education. Also, she is the founder and Head of Musical Inc. Summer School for Music, Theater and Dance.



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