

# **The School Drama Book**

*We dedicate this book to every child, teacher and artist who  
we have had the honour of working with on School Drama.  
Thank you for your inspiration, creativity and imagination.  
We hope you find this book helpful.  
RE & JNS*

# The School Drama Book

Drama, Literature and Literacy in the Creative Classroom

Robyn Ewing and John Nicholas Saunders



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# FOREWORD

by Cate Blanchett *and* Andrew Upton

At the beginning of our time at Sydney Theatre Company (STC), we were desperate to find a way to bring theatre alive for young audiences. An early workshop discussion with teachers and teaching lecturers (including Professor Robyn Ewing) led to a rough draft that became known as the *School Drama*<sup>TM</sup> program. Further consultation and development with Robyn Ewing and the input of our new Executive Director, Patrick McIntyre, led to the very targeted approach of *School Drama*. There seemed to be productions of curriculum plays abounding and it seemed to us that STC could let audiences into its own work at any time. But actually reaching into schools and stimulating the dramatic impulse was missing. Children love dressing up and playing roles, in fact, it's clearly a part of their deep socialisation process. Tying this to their literacy and numeracy is a way of broadening their access points to education and simultaneously opening them up to the illuminating pleasure of drama.

Much work was done by the University of Sydney, headed up by Robyn Ewing and our Teaching Artists, over the four pilot years and three subsequent years of the program, and much of that work can be found in this book. We always hoped that this program would become a national phenomenon, and perhaps this book can facilitate something akin to that.

*Cate and Andrew were Co-Artistic Directors of STC from 2008 to 2013.*

*Andrew was solo Artistic Director of STC from 2013 to 2015.*

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, we must acknowledge the incredible individuals and Foundations who have generously supported *School Drama* from its small beginnings in 2009 to the enormous program it is today. Our thanks to: Ian and Min Darling, Catriona and Simon Mordant AM, Minderoo Foundation, Origin Foundation, David and Claire Paradice, The Australia Children's Trust in collaboration with Ian Thorpe's Fountain for Youth, The Caledonia Foundation, The Johnson Family Foundation, The Raymond E Purves Foundation, Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation and the 2016 STC Auction Donor Circle. Without you, the dream of improving the literacy of young Australians would never have become a reality. Thank you.

We acknowledge the team of dedicated and inspired Teaching Artists who have worked on *School Drama* over the years (from 2009 to 2016): Georgia Adamson and Victoria Campbell, our two original Teaching Artists, David Andri, George Banders, Josh Barnes, Bronwyn Batchelor, Hannah Brown, Danielle Catran, Jessica Chambers, Travis Dowling, Alyson Evans, Rowan Freeman, Douglas Hansell, Kaylee Hazell, David Hirst, Zoe Hogan, Felix Jozeps, Luke Kerridge, Anna Martin, Paul William Mawhinney, Suzannah McDonald, Rachel McNamara, Lisa Mumford, Carla Nirella, Gwyneth Price, Jena Prince, Rachel Small, Russell Smith, Courtney Stewart, Jo Stone and Ben Wood. Many of your wonderful ideas have been used in this book. Thank you.



We also thank our project partner, the University of Sydney, Faculty of Education and Social Work, particularly Associate Professor Robyn Gibson and Associate Professor David Smith for their work on the program evaluations and longitudinal research.

The strength of the partnership between Sydney Theatre Company and the University of Sydney has provided a wonderful foundation from which the program has grown.

We also thank everyone at Sydney Theatre Company, particularly those who have worked on *School Drama*: Cate Blanchett, Andrew Upton and Helen Hristofski, who started the program with Robyn Ewing; Toni Murphy, Georgia Adamson, Naomi Edwards, Rachel Small and Zoe Hogan who have coordinated the program with John Nicholas Saunders; Patrick McIntyre and Paul O'Byrne, who saw the potential of the program and have been incredible advocates for its growth. Thank you.

Our thanks to all of our partners who have enabled the growth of the program: State Theatre Company of South Australia and Flinders University, particularly Robyn Brookes and Amy Hamilton; Murray Arts and HotHouse Theatre, particularly Karen Gardner, Tahni Froudish and Travis Dowling; Drama Victoria, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority and Deakin University, particularly Lyndy Clarke, Eli Erez, Emily Atkins, Helen Champion and Jo Raphael.

Creative collaboration is at the heart of *School Drama*, both in the classroom and behind the scenes. This book is a reflection of the generosity of spirit of hundreds of teachers, students, Teaching Artists and philanthropists. We hope it inspires you to bring the same creative collaboration into your classroom.

# INTRODUCTION:

## *The School Drama* story

In April 2008 the newly appointed Australian Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, held a summit in Canberra to establish a direction for Australia's future. The 2020 Summit brought together leaders from a range of sectors to address key policy areas. One of the ten strands was 'Creative Australia'. The working group was co-chaired by Cate Blanchett who was Co-Artistic Director at Sydney Theatre Company (STC); Professor Julianne Schultz from Griffith University; and Peter Garrett, who at the time of the summit was the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts.

Prior to the 2020 Summit, Helen Hristofski (STC's Education Manager 2006-12) and Professor Robyn Ewing AM (University of Sydney) had discussed a potential collaboration between STC and the University of Sydney. At the same time Co-Artistic Directors of STC, Cate Blanchett and Andrew Upton were discussing the potential role of artists in primary schools.

Ewing participated in the Creative Australia strand at the 2020 Summit. It was at this summit that Blanchett and Ewing further discussed the potential collaboration. Following the summit, Blanchett, Upton, Ewing and Hristofski continued to meet and took their idea to a group of primary school teachers. It was through these ongoing discussions during 2008 that the idea for a co-mentoring, artist-in-residence, teacher professional learning program was established. The program would become *School Drama*<sup>TM</sup> and was piloted in five disadvantaged schools across Sydney the

following year. The methodology of the program is based on Ewing's co-mentoring model developed with teachers from Curl Curl North Public School over 17 years. Since its inception in 2009, the *School Drama* program has continued to be refined. In 2013, John Nicholas Saunders was appointed Education Manager at STC to oversee the growth of the program. In 2015 the program reached over 1,200 teachers, 109 of whom were part of the *School Drama Classic* (traditional seven week, artist-in-residence) model. *School Drama* is now a cornerstone of STC's Education program.

As part of the partnership between STC and the University of Sydney's Faculty of Education and Social Work (FESW), STC commissioned annual evaluations of the program by independent researchers at the University of Sydney, Gibson and Smith. Along with annual evaluations (Campbell, Ewing and Gibson 2010; Gibson 2011, 2012, 2013) a meta-analysis was completed (Gibson and Smith 2013) and several case studies have been undertaken by Saunders (2015), Robertson (2010), Sze (2013), and Smith (2014) with several more in progress. The program has been thoroughly researched and is regarded as best practice by the field.

*School Drama* has received significant attention both in Australia and internationally. We were often asked by teachers who had participated in the *School Drama* program and also by teachers who were interested in Drama and literacy in education to document the practice and methodology alongside the research and theory around both the program and the field more generally.

This book is our way of documenting the *School Drama* program both as a resource for teachers who have participated in the program and also for teachers who cannot participate, but are interested in using drama as critical, quality pedagogy in their own classrooms.

## Setting the Scene

The Arts remain under-valued and under-used components of primary curricula despite unequivocal evidence that they enhance student wellbeing and, in turn, improve learning outcomes across other disciplines and subject areas (for example Gibson and Ewing 2011; Ewing 2010a; Burton and O'Toole 2009; Catterall 2009; Bamford 2006; Deasy 2002; Fiske 1999). More specifically, there is strong research evidence that demonstrates the effectiveness of drama as critical, quality pedagogy (for example Saunders 2015; Baldwin and John 2012; Ewing 2006; Ewing and

Simons 2004; Miller and Saxton 2004; Baldwin and Fleming 2003). Drama can engage children in the learning process and help them to develop their already rich imaginations and creative potential: capacities so important for living in a world that changes at a rapid pace.

In addition, many primary teachers do not feel well equipped to embed the Arts into what has become an overcrowded curriculum. Many western education systems, including Australia's, are increasingly turning to a narrowed curriculum, triggered by high stakes testing and a technical focus on literacy and numeracy. As a result, teachers often feel they must concentrate on the 'basics'. Initial teacher education and professional learning in the Arts have been progressively reduced and resourcing the Arts in schools is variable (see for example Pascoe et al. 2005 and Davis 2008). Many teachers also lack confidence in their own drama abilities; perhaps as a by-product of a performance emphasis in their own education (Angus et al. 2007).

Although often unrecognised as such, literature is still the art form that most Australians are familiar with (Australia Council for the Arts 2010). Children's literature, however, has not always featured prominently in every primary classroom in recent years. British research (for example, Cremin et al. 2008) suggests that some primary teachers lack the confidence to choose quality literary texts for close study in their classrooms. Although appreciating the importance of these texts, they will often return to those books read in their youth. Of 1200 primary professionals in the 2008 study by Cremin et al., the majority leaned on a narrow repertoire of authors, poets and picture book artists. The declining number of school librarians in many Australian states due to funding cuts has exacerbated this trend. The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA 2015) places a renewed emphasis on imaginative and creative literature. In defining quality texts, Australian author Libby Gleeson asserts that:

A quality text must have integrity. It must have characters that are fully realised. It must have language that fully expresses what the writer wants to say. The story must satisfy the reader but also make demands of the reader. The very best stories have something to say that goes beyond a surface meaning to something deeper, a symbolic meaning that speaks of the human condition. (Gleeson, 2012, p. 6)

In 2009 a partnership between STC and the Faculty of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney, was created in response to these concerns. This was the birth of the program *School Drama*.

## What is Drama?

Drama is a discipline in the Arts in its own right. Drama as a discipline refers to Drama as a subject taught in schools; it is taught in every state and territory in Australia as part of the Australian Curriculum: The Arts and focuses on students creating drama, performing drama and responding to or analysing drama. The subject of Drama explores the Elements of Drama (see Chapter 3, pp. 41–44) and in the secondary school curriculum it usually involves the study of dramatic forms and styles and their related dramatic conventions. Drama as pedagogy refers to teaching *through* drama, rather than *about* drama. This book focuses on helping primary teachers to use Drama as pedagogy but, of course, we explore Drama as a discipline at the same time. Helen Nicholson describes Drama by saying that ‘At the core of our subject lies the familiar Deweyan notion that students learn best by doing. However, what is particular about drama is that experiential learning is not just a pedagogic tool, it is intrinsic to the art form itself’ (2000, p. 8). John Norman goes further, to say that

Drama in Education is an enactive learning process which derives from our unique ability to imagine, emphasise and project. It is a collaborative medium, accessible to all, the purpose of which is to explore past, present and future experiences, our own and others’, in an attempt to make sense of the world in which we live. The distinctive features of this process are:

1. The creation of an ‘as if’ context and fiction
2. The taking of roles
3. The motive power of feeling engagement within the fiction or metaphor  
and
4. The primacy of experiencing the ‘here and now’ of the drama.

(Norman, 1999, p. 9)

Drama helps students to imagine worlds outside their own. It can also help students to imagine the worlds of the texts they are working with. Through taking on role and exploring relationships, situations and events, students begin to empathise with the characters in the text. They may even project elements of themselves into the characters.

## Drama as pedagogy: process *or* educational drama

Drama as pedagogy uses drama strategies or devices adapted from those used in the theatre as teaching and learning strategies. The focus is on enabling the *process* of imagining a fictional situation and on taking on different roles. Pioneered by drama educators Dorothy Heathcote and Gavin Bolton (1995), John O’Toole (1992), Cecily O’Neill (1995) and Neelands and Goode (1990), its essence is enactment, walking in others’ shoes (Ewing and Simons 2004) and enabling participants to explore multiple meanings for themselves through dramatic processes. These explorations may, but do not necessarily, culminate in a performance (Bowell and Heap 2013).

Students and teachers work together in and out of role to suspend disbelief (a term first coined by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1817) and create an imagined world. In the case of using process drama strategies to enhance English and literacy, the work often involves the use of a quality literary text or an image as a starting point or pre-text (O’Neill 1995). O’Neill introduced the term ‘pre-text’ which she described as ‘the means by which the drama world is set in motion’ (ibid., p. xv). A pre-text is used to activate the dramatic world ‘by a word, a gesture, a location, a story, an idea, an object, or an image as well as by a character or a play script’ (ibid., p. 19). In relation to this book, pre-text is the literary text that is explored by the students over a seven week process. *School Drama* uses what Saunders (2015) has termed an ‘episodic’ pre-text model. In this model the literary text is not read to the participants in full during the orientation of the Drama, but rather is broken into episodes or sections which are explored sequentially over a series of learning experiences. David Booth (2005) termed using a story’s issues, themes, essence or ‘spirit’, characters or mood as ‘story drama’. In *School Drama* we may start with themes, share excerpts from the literary text, an image or even the title. This is explained in more detail below; and later, in Chapter 3, we discuss the main Elements of Drama as well as the drama devices used in *School Drama* in detail.

The use of process drama (O’Neill 1995) or educational drama (Heathcote 1984; Bolton and Heathcote 1995) has long been recognised as critical, quality pedagogy (Baldwin and John 2012; Ewing 2010a; Ewing 2009; Booth 2005; Baldwin 2012; Ewing and Simons 2004; Miller and Saxton 2004; Baldwin and Fleming 2003; O’Toole and Dunn 2002), particularly in enhancing teaching and learning in literacy (Saunders 2015; O’Toole and Dunn 2015; Ewing 2013b; Gibson and Ewing 2011;

Ewing 2010b; Booth 2005; Miller and Saxton 2004; Ewing and Simons 2004; Baldwin and Fleming 2003).

Process or educational drama is particularly powerful as students can work in an area of overlap between their own world and the world of the pre-text, narrative or fiction. This overlap or ‘in-betweenness’ was first described by Plato as ‘Metaxis’ and popularised by Augusto Boal in drama education literature. Process drama enables participants to exist in the overlap of their own, real world and the imagined, fictional world of the drama or story at the same time. It is in this space that meaningful, deeply engaging, experiential learning can occur, where real and imagined can co-exist, igniting the emotions and imagination. Participants can re-imagine and re-evaluate ideas, concepts, attitudes and perceptions. This notion of Metaxis provides learners with opportunities to make connections, which is a key literacy strategy in comprehension (McLaughlin and Allen 2009). As Ellin Olivier Keene and Susan Zimmermann (1997) discuss, learners can make connections between text to self, text to text or text to world. Because Metaxis incorporates both the real and imagined worlds, the learning that occurs in this space can have a powerful impact on children’s learning.

## What is *School Drama*?

*School Drama* is an artist-in-residence professional learning program for primary school teachers, which focuses on the power of using drama as pedagogy with quality literature to improve English and literacy in young learners.

Developed by STC over a four-year pilot program (2009–12), building on a co-mentoring model developed by Ewing (2002) and in partnership with the University of Sydney, *School Drama* is designed to increase teachers’ confidence and capacity in using quality arts processes and experiences as pedagogy. This in turn improves English and literacy outcomes in primary students. Ongoing research and evaluation of *School Drama* have shown a range of professional learning outcomes for teachers at any stage of their careers as well as numerous benefits for their students.

Overall the teachers who have been involved in *School Drama* report that the implementation of drama devices in their classroom English program enhances students’ deep understanding of literary texts, improves their oracy, inferential comprehension, writing and their confidence more generally. Participant teachers

also report that the in-classroom professional learning that occurs during *School Drama* develops their confidence to use drama strategies as effective tools for learning and teaching, not only in English and literacy but, in addition, more generally across the curriculum. Despite the apparently short seven week time frame, teachers also state that their students' literacy outcomes are enhanced. A more detailed analysis of the research is located in Chapter 2 (pp. 27–40).

The evaluation findings (Gibson 2011, 2012, 2013) and meta-analysis also demonstrate that these partnerships between teachers and teaching artists are mutually beneficial (Gibson and Smith 2013). The teachers value having experienced theatre professionals bring their unique 'skill set' into the classroom. The actor or teaching artist value learning how to use their skills in specific primary classroom contexts.

## How *does School Drama* work?

STC partners each participating teacher with a teaching artist over a school term and together they explore how drama devices can be integrated into any area of English and literacy identified by the teacher as needing attention. These may include narrative writing and structure, comprehension and inference, descriptive language and confidence in oracy. The program begins with introductory professional learning workshops for those teachers who will be involved so they can experience the process first hand. This is followed by a series of planning sessions with the teaching artist, focused on tailoring a team-teaching program to meet the class's individual literacy learning goals and the teacher's professional learning aspirations. The teaching artist then comes to the school for seven weekly sessions and team-teaches the program, modelling the drama strategies and empowering the teacher to carry this pedagogy into their professional practice.

The program consists of:

- Six hours of professional learning workshops – All participating teachers must attend these. They provide a taste of the drama strategies that will be taught in the classroom as well as an overview of the program structure, the literary benchmarking processes, and the expectations of the teacher and the school. In recognition of the critical role the school leadership plays in school reform, principals are also encouraged to attend this workshop.



- Planning meetings – In these meetings the teaching artist and class teacher discuss their professional learning goals, identify the English literacy outcomes that the teacher wishes to focus on, together with one or more quality literary texts that will form the basis of the drama work in class. After the first planning meeting, the teaching artist prepares a draft series of learning experiences, designed to target the specific learning outcome identified by the teacher as a starting point for discussion and collaboration with the teacher at the second meeting. These will leave room for the teacher and teaching artist to collaborate on further planning strategies as the program progresses.
- Pre-program benchmarking – At least one teacher from each school is asked to benchmark the students’ skills in the selected English/literacy outcomes at the beginning and the end of the *School Drama* program. The suggested benchmarking tasks that have been designed are located at: [www.sydneytheatre.com.au/schooldrama](http://www.sydneytheatre.com.au/schooldrama).
- In-class workshops – The teaching artist comes to the school for seven weekly sessions and team-teaches the learning experiences with the class teacher. The collaborative nature of the relationship between the class teacher and teaching artist is key to the success of the program. The role of the class teacher increases progressively over the seven sessions as they try out strategies and ideas for themselves and contribute to the planning of further learning experiences in the final weeks. The in-class workshops are 60 minutes for Kindergarten or Foundation and 90 minutes for years 1–6. It is also desirable for the class teacher to model the strategies for other teachers and/or consolidate their understanding of the strategies during the following week. These teachers can then seek further advice on refining these strategies if necessary.
- Follow-up activities – The seven session program will include follow-up activities that the class teacher is encouraged to complete with students between the scheduled sessions. A critical part of the *School Drama* process, these activities reinforce the learning generated in the in-class workshop and its relationship to the students’ English and literacy work, allowing teachers to further consolidate the new strategies for themselves and also to facilitate authentic links with other art forms.
- Weekly reflections – Following each workshop the teaching artist and

class teacher have a short debrief and reflect on the workshop. This conversation focuses on the students' academic and non-academic progress as well as the teacher's professional learning journey.

- Post-program benchmarking – Students' skills in the selected English or literacy outcomes are benchmarked once again by the class teacher at the end of the program. The teacher selects samples from 6 to 8 students from a range of academic abilities and performs an analysis of the students' progress in the identified English literacy outcome. Copies of the work and analysis of the benchmarking are forwarded to STC as part of the ongoing evaluation of the program.
- Research – The benchmarking data is collated by the University of Sydney's evaluation team led by Robyn Gibson and contributes to the *School Drama* evaluation and ongoing research project (see Chapter 2, pp. 27–40).

## Professional learning: a co-mentoring approach

*School Drama* seeks to develop primary teachers' professional knowledge of and expertise in the use of process drama. Teachers work in a co-mentoring relationship with actors, or teaching artists. This is one of the defining features of *School Drama*, distinguishing it from some other artist-in-residence programs. There is a strong emphasis on teacher ownership and professional responsibility. Instead of using the traditional concept of the mentor as the expert knower, the mentoring process is re-conceptualised as one of co-learning, positioning the participants in a non-hierarchical or reciprocal relationship (Le Cornu 2005; Bona et al. 1995). The teachers learn about the use of drama in enhancing literacy and English, while the teaching artists learn about adapting their professional theatre skills to a particular literacy focus in classroom contexts.

One of the teaching artists articulates this clearly:

It's really that building of the relationship between the teacher and the teaching artist that's so crucial. I realise now how important that is because I've had the experience where it didn't happen and now I know it's crucial for the program and that it works very well.

The intention of the program is that the teachers will then continue to use their new-found expertise in drama with quality texts with their own students and it is hoped with other classes at their school.

I thought it was exciting to work with someone with extensive theatrical background, who is working in the industry, they have more insight than a classroom teacher ... yes I did develop some skills ...

For me it was like mentoring in drama teaching ... [the teaching artist] broke it down in a way that made me realise I could do it. It was empowering. It was fantastic. I have been using some of those activities ... I would love to have more.

The most successful outcomes occur when teachers can demonstrate the drama strategies to other classes at the school or trial the activities in between the teaching artist's visits (Ewing et al. 2011, p. 3).

[The actor] would come on a Tuesday and she would teach my class and I would watch her and I would take notes. I pretty much scripted everything she did. Then on Thursday, the teacher next door ... would teach my class for science and I would take her class. It was really interesting because I got totally different results. Great results. In other words, I was doing side-by-side lessons but I was doing it with another class.

## How to use this book

You do not need to read this book in a linear way from cover to cover. The book has been written as a resource and you should feel free to sample relevant sections or chapters or the drama units themselves as appropriate for your particular need or interest.

This book is a response to teachers who have participated in *School Drama* — and many teachers who have not had access to it — asking us to document the program and include more resources so that the methodology can be shared more broadly.

Every time we do drama work, it is a little different and the drama units in Part II that have been included here are only one way to approach each text. We would encourage you not to use the workshops verbatim, but rather use them as a starting point and adapt them to create your own version to meet the particular needs of your class and school context.



PART I: THE HOW AND WHY  
OF *SCHOOL DRAMA*

# CHAPTER 1

## MAKING MEANING *and* DEVELOPING LITERACY *through the artforms of* LITERATURE AND DRAMA

No philosophy, no analysis, no aphorism, be it ever so profound, can compare in intensity and richness of meaning with a narrated story.

Hannah Arendt in McGowan 1988, p. 138

The need to be literate is a given in today's world. The definition of literacy has changed dramatically over time: at one time you were considered literate if you were able to sign your name; at another, only if you could read Latin or, at still another, if you could read the Bible. In 1998 the United Nations determined that two per cent of the world's population were illiterate because they were not able to read a single, simple sentence. Today we need to be able to sift through, understand and intelligently analyse information shared through books and printed materials, emails, social media, websites, mobile phones, blogs, photographs, paintings, billboards and podcasts (to name just a few). On the other hand, some researchers in the United States of America are suggesting that many adults are losing the desire (and then

the ability) to be literate and that the steepest declines are in reading for ‘literary experience’ (National Education Association 2013). If we accept that literacy is about making meaning then all art forms are different forms of literacy (Livermore 2003). In this chapter we are exploring our use of drama to deepen understanding of literary texts – in effect using one artform to extend, investigate and develop another.

This chapter first discusses the influence of Vygotsky’s socio-cultural approach to how children learn with particular focus on literacy and drama. We then define literacy and critical literacy and explore the central role children’s literature can and should play in learning to be literate. The concept of literacy (or, more accurately, literacies) must be re-imagined through the Arts. We then examine more particularly the significance of using the art form of drama with quality literary texts to enhance students’ literacy and English outcomes. We also suggest a range of criteria for selecting quality literature to use with drama as a precursor to the Drama and Literature units that follow in Part II.

We believe drama and literature go hand in hand in developing critical literacy. In this chapter we concentrate on the concept of using drama as critical, quality pedagogy (Ewing 2010b, 2006) with contemporary children’s literature to enhance children’s literacy development. The essence of educational or process drama is embodiment and enactment. By physically getting involved in a story we can turn its pages metaphorically, bend space and time and create our own version of the world. We can suspend what’s happening in our real world to explore other possibilities. In doing so we can learn more about both ourselves and others. Drama strategies can develop deep interaction and understanding through dialogue, questioning, provocations, exploration of dilemmas, confrontations and risk-taking. Drama engages children in deep explorations of text and image and activates their imaginations to develop new understandings and perspectives about their worlds. As Atticus famously says to Scout in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, ‘You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view ... until you climb into his skin and walk around in it’ (Lee, 1960, p. 36).

Finally, we explore how drama used with richly interpretive or imaginative literature can encourage the ongoing development of students’ imaginations and creativity in English and literacy classrooms. While we focus on early childhood and primary classrooms, these principles are just as relevant for middle and secondary contexts. The next section of this chapter documents the research evidence alongside concrete examples of how drama can enhance learning in English and literacy.

## *The influence of Vygotskian concepts on literacy and drama*

Many educators have been influenced by Lev Vygotsky's social constructivist theory (Vygotsky 1978). Our research and practice in the *School Drama* program are underpinned by four important Vygotskian concepts: the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (1978); guided participation (1978); dual affect (1933/1966); and *perezhivanie* (1935/1994). Each of these concepts is briefly outlined below.

### Zone of Proximal Development and Guided Participation

Vygotsky (1978) argued that student learning is often mediated by a more expert peer, teacher or parent and that it is through this interaction that the learner develops more quickly than if left to learn individually. He called this the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and defined it as the 'distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving through adult guidance or in collaboration with a more capable peer' (Vygotsky 1978, p. 86). Through the *School Drama* program, students learn from the teacher, teaching artist, the author of the pre-text and their peers. Barbara Rogoff describes this as guided participation explaining that: 'children's cognitive development is an apprenticeship in social activity with companions who support and stretch children's understanding of and skill in using the tools of the culture' (Rogoff 1990, p. vii). Vygotsky's concept of guided participation resonates with the facilitated process drama experiences for students. The facilitators (in our case the teaching artist with the class teacher) guide the students through the Drama, allowing opportunities for embodied action in role. Ewing (2015) builds on Luis C. Moll and Kathryne F. Whitmore's (1993) work to discuss the concept of a 'collective Zone of Proximal Development' in the *School Drama* program. Ewing argues that a collective ZPD occurs for students, teaching artists and teachers involved in the *School Drama* program (pp. 144-148). She asserts that 'Dramatic play and process drama can encourage adults and children to work in a collective ZPD and enhance children's language and literacy development, as well as their collaborative skills and their understandings of other' (ibid., p. 148). We can even go further to include the pre-text (in our case quality children's literature) as the fourth teacher in the program's collective ZPD.

## Dual Affect

Dual affect (Vygotsky 1933/1966) is connected to Plato's concept of metaxis (the in-between or middle ground) and is significant in process drama work, particularly in relation to role. John O'Toole and Julie Dunn (2002, p. 166) define dual affect by explaining:

A child (or any other actor) involved as a character in dramatic play or performance will be simultaneously 'inside' the role (identifying and empathising with the character and their situation) and 'outside' (enjoying or analysing the sensation).

Metaxis and dual affect provide ways of analysing the state of being 'in role' as another, and being conscious of the real world at the same time. Through process drama work and *School Drama*, students work in role, and this opens up the opportunity to experience a state of metaxis or dual affect. This experience enables students to explore and connect with characters, particularly through making emotional connections.

## *Perezhivanie*

The fourth Vygotskian concept relevant to this research is *perezhivanie*, a Russian term (which cannot be directly translated into English) but means 'lived emotional experiences' (John-Steiner 2015, p. xix). These lived emotional experiences or *perezhivanie* can be accessed through a lived and/or imagined experience. Vygotsky (2004) called this the cycle of imagination, which 'explores the relationship between 'imagination' and 'reality'. The cycle is a two-fold, mutual interdependence between imagination and experience' (Bundy, Piazzoli and Dunn 2015, p. 157). In *School Drama*, by engaging in quality literary texts and exploring these stories through process drama, the students can experience lived and/or imagined emotional experiences that in turn, can assist in developing literacy. As Julie Dunn and Madonna Stinson state: 'recent research into the functioning of the brain would seem to offer support for learning experiences that engage children's emotions as well as their intellect' (2012, p. 4) Hence, these lived and/or imagined emotional experiences that are formed through process drama play a crucial role in the development of literacy, particularly inferential comprehension.



## Defining literacy *and* critical literacy

Literacy is not a single global skill that once mastered will be there for life. There are many kinds of literacies (visual literacy, mathematical literacy, scientific literacy, social literacy and so on) and there will be many more. Perhaps because of the importance of literacy, people often conflate reading and writing abilities with intelligence and parents and caregivers become anxious if their children do not learn to read when they first go to school. This anxiety can be palpable and sometimes inadvertently communicated to the children in question. If we truly care about all Australian children becoming literate we must stop perpetuating a narrow debate about what literacy is and no longer use outdated definitions. It is not an unfortunate coincidence that our gaols are filled with those who are not functionally literate. Tony Vinson and Margot Rawsthorne's *Dropping off the Edge* report (2015) underlines this. 'Literacy' means more than simply being able to read and write. The ACARA, however, defines literacy as encompassing more than traditional notions of reading and writing:

[It is] the knowledge and skills students need to access, understand, analyse and evaluate information, make meaning, express thoughts and emotions, present ideas and opinions, interact with others and participate in activities at school and in their lives beyond school. (ACARA 2015)

UNESCO's (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) definition also includes similar words (understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute) and stresses the importance of context (UNESCO 2006, p. 13).

Learning to be literate, then, goes beyond the initial sounding out and recognition of words or decoding a text. It is a complex process of constructing meaning(s) from a text – understanding, analysis and interpretation are part of the process.

It is also important to note that what is often termed 'critical literacy' goes further. It encompasses being able to go beyond what Colin Lankshear (1994) termed surface impressions, traditional myths, mere opinions and clichés to develop an understanding of a particular social context. He regarded the ability to uncover the deep meaning(s) of an image or text (or video clip) and then to think about that meaning in relation to one's own situation and context and, if needed, to challenge the assumptions of the author as part of this process. Becoming critically literate is certainly a strong factor in determining children's life chances in the twenty-first century.

## Teaching literacy

Controversies about the most effective ways to help children's literacy development have raged for the last century and are often polarised; some favour the use of a linear skills-first approach, others one that emphasises the importance of meaning-making. While we cannot explore the whole debate here, the most convincing research is emerging from neuroscientific studies of the brain. For example, Steven Strauss et al. (2009) strongly support the meaning-construction view of reading and how important prediction and confirmation are in the reading process. Other research demonstrates that the best way for children to excel in reading comprehension tasks is to read a wide range of books for pleasure (Krashen 2004; Sullivan and Brown 2013). Children who live in low socio-economic areas are unlikely to have as many opportunities to read in this way when compared with their more affluent peers because of difficulties in accessing a wide range of quality texts at home and sometimes at school. We believe that comprehension and meaning-making are connected to the concept of dramatic meaning (see Chapter 3, diagram p. 42).

Experienced readers usually sample just enough visual information to feel satisfied that they have grasped the meaning so far of whatever text they are reading. They bring past experiences and knowledge of language to a specific text and use prediction and questioning strategies to test and re-test that they have understood the author's purpose in this particular context. Over-emphasis on the letter-sound relationship can be very confusing for children learning to read. In fact phonics and phonemic awareness are more important in learning to spell and to write rather than in learning to read (Ewing and Maher 2014).

Research has shown that employing a repertoire of strategies and approaches shaped to meet the learning needs and strategies of individual children is the most effective approach to the teaching of reading. For example, the project *In Teachers' Hands* (Louden et al. 2005) investigated the link between children's growth in English literacy in the early years of schooling and their teachers' classroom teaching strategies. This study assessed some 2000 children from each Australian state and territory at the beginning and end of their first or second year at school. The practices used by the teachers whose children had made most progress were explored. The most effective teachers used a wide repertoire of strategies tailored to meet the needs of the children. They implemented these key teaching practices with greater consistency, skill and subtlety.