



**WORKING CONDITIONS FOR
TEACHING AND LEARNING
IN DRAMA**



DRAMA AUSTRALIA



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**Position Paper on Working Conditions and Environmental,
Health and Safety Guidelines for Teaching and Learning in Drama
in Australian schools**

(Released April 2009)

Preamble

This document has been prepared by Drama Australia primarily for its members. While reasonable checks have been made to ensure its accuracy, no responsibility can be accepted for errors and omissions however caused. No responsibility for any loss occasioned to any group or individual acting or refraining from action as a result of material in this document is accepted by Drama Australia.

It is envisaged that periodically this document may be reviewed and possibly revised however at the time of its publication (2009) it had undergone an extensive consultative process. Drama Australia welcomes feedback on its guidelines documents. Any feedback can be sent to the Director of Projects, Drama Australia.

This document supersedes the document produced by Drama Australia entitled, *Position Paper on Working Conditions for Teaching and Learning in Drama (2001)*, Interested parties may wish to obtain a copy of the 2001 document to gain an historical perspective on how the latter document has been revised compared to the original.

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The writer

Richard Sallis has a background in both the performing arts and education. He is a Board member and a former president of Drama Australia. He is on the Executive of Drama Tasmania and a Life Member of Drama Victoria. As the then, Director of Projects of Drama Australia, he coordinated the writing of the original *Position Paper on Working Conditions for Teaching and Learning in Drama (2001)*. He lectures in drama/theatre education at the University of Melbourne where he is completing a PhD, encapsulating his research interests of drama, gender and educational ethnography. As well as journal and magazine articles on drama/theatre education his publications include the 'Acting Smart' VCE textbooks for Drama and Theatre Studies.

Background

Drama Australia is the peak national body for drama education in Australia. The drama education associations in each state and territory are members of Drama Australia. In the late 1990s Drama Australia conducted a major national survey to determine the working conditions of drama¹ educators across the states and territories. While it was found that drama is taught in Australian schools in a wide variety of contexts, there were some principles that commonly underpinned its pedagogical working conditions. This resulted in a document which was published by Drama Australia in 2001 entitled, *Position Paper on Working Conditions for Teaching and Learning in Drama*. The paper was intended to be both a support for enhanced working conditions for drama teachers in pre-schools, primary schools and secondary schools and a guide to teachers on issues of health and safety in their drama teaching.

In 2007 at the suggestion of Drama Tasmania, Drama Australia decided it was timely to consider updating the original (2001) document. An extensive surveying of state and territory members about the existing document revealed that it had proved most useful to drama teachers since its publication. However many members who were surveyed believed that it was now time to refresh and re-work the document, especially in light of an increased awareness of environmental, health and safety² issues in regards to the teaching and learning of drama.

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Rationale

Drama is an art form, one of the nationally recognised Arts curriculum subjects, a method of teaching and way of learning. Drama Australia urges the Australian community to publicly acknowledge the work and commitment of drama students and staff, thereby affirming the role and value of drama in schools. Drama Australia encourages educational communities to support high quality drama education for all students regardless of their racial/cultural background, gender, sexuality, disability or special needs.

Good working conditions and sound environmental health and safety practices for students and teachers of drama raise the quality and status of learning in the subject area. Such conditions and practices signal to parents, students, teachers and other members of the community that the study of drama is a valued aspect of the curriculum.

This position paper is intended as a guide to assist the teaching and learning of drama in primary and secondary schools. However the information may also be useful for other teaching and learning environments, including TAFE/technical colleges and centres of higher/post-compulsory education. Users should be mindful that a healthy, safe and effective working environment is not merely about adhering to rules and regulations; awareness, positive action and appropriate attitudes help to foster better teaching and learning conditions.

¹ Wherever there is a reference to the study of 'drama' in this paper, the term should be read as referring to the study of both drama and theatre in schools.

² Also referred to as 'occupational, health and safety' or 'occupational, health, safety and welfare' in some contexts.

Guiding principles

Drama Australia advocates that

- drama is taught and learnt as an arts form discipline
- drama is used to complement and enhance work across the curriculum
- co-curricular activities in schools include drama
- students are provided with opportunities to experience live performance as participants and audience.

Drama Australia advocates that

- explicit and comprehensive statements about drama in the curriculum be made and implemented for all young Australians
- all young people have access to a drama education
- students with special needs are given full access to drama in schools and that the Drama classroom environment meets their needs (Drama Australia, 2005)
- there is an acceptance and celebration of, the diversity of all those who teach and learn within drama programs in Australian schools (Drama Australia, 2005)
- the working conditions for the teaching and learning of drama be explicitly recognised by schools, other educational systems/sectors and wider communities
- drama is taught with an appropriate level of duty of care in a healthy, secure and safe environment.

Drama in Early Childhood Learning

Drama Australia advocates that

- opportunities to engage in drama are provided in early childhood classes including structured dramatic play, where students socialise, through the taking on of roles, working within relevant dramatic action
- early childhood educators are trained in, and/or have a background in, or knowledge of drama processes

Drama in Primary Schools

Drama Australia advocates that

- students in primary schools are given access to drama programs throughout their schooling
- drama in primary schools is taught as an arts-form discipline
- drama is taught by classroom teachers who have been trained in, and/or have a background in, or knowledge of, classroom-drama processes and programs
- drama is an integral part of cross-curriculum learning and co-curricular programs
- drama teaching and learning programs be developed and maintained according to current drama education philosophy and practice
- where schools are resourced to provide a specialist drama teacher(s) and/or an artist(s)-in-residence, other teachers in the school are encouraged to work collaboratively alongside these teaching artists as part of an integrated school-based program. This co-operative/collaborative learning approach will enhance teacher expertise and foster rich learning opportunities for students.

Drama in Secondary Schools

Drama Australia advocates that

- students in secondary schools are given opportunities to engage in drama programs throughout their schooling
- drama in secondary schools is taught as an arts-form discipline by teachers who have pre-service training in drama education
- in each state and territory there is an explicitly stated curriculum for drama teaching and learning, which is informed by current drama education philosophy and practice
- staffing levels for drama in secondary schools recognise the nature and demands of drama in the curriculum, including those referred to in this document
- schools, provide access to artist(s)-in-residence and additional specialist teacher(s) where appropriate to support the work of the drama staff
- drama subjects in the post-compulsory/tertiary entrance years are accorded appropriate status, resources and skilled teachers necessary for students to achieve high academic standing and recognition.

Co-Curricular Drama

Drama Australia advocates that

- students are provided with opportunities to engage with drama in co-curricular³ programs in schools
- in schools there is recognition of, and support for, those students, staff and others who participate in co-curricular activities, including productions, drama camps, excursions, participation in drama competitions/festivals and community projects.
- schools recognise the additional workload for teachers in co-ordinating co-curricular drama programs and adequately support and provide for such activities.



³ In some schools this is referred to as 'extra curricular activities'.

Guidelines into practice

Access to subject associations and professional development

- Schools will encourage and support teachers belonging to professional educational drama associations at the state or territory level – and by this membership recognise that they belong to Drama Australia and IDEA, the International Drama/theatre and Education Association.
- Schools and communities recognise that participation in quality professional development⁴ activities pertaining to drama will contribute to enhanced teaching and learning.
- Schools will provide resources for membership to professional drama subject associations.
- Schools will provide resources for professional development activities including registration, accommodation, travel and teacher release if appropriate.

Class Sizes

It is well recognised that class size effects teaching and learning. Appropriate class size ‘provides students with many benefits: greater opportunities for participation, greater individual attention, and improved instruction’ and ‘student achievement increases significantly’ when the class size meets the requirements of the subject area (NCTE, 1999)⁵.

- Schools should limit classes in drama to no more than 25 students per class in recognition of the practical nature of drama with its emphasis on group work, participation and presentation and the need for active teacher supervision and an appropriate level of duty of care.

Length and frequency of lessons

- The duration and frequency of arts-based lessons effects student learning (Burton, Horowitz & Abeles, 2000). In recognition of the need for sustained developmental learning in drama:
- Schools provide regular, on-going access to drama tuition so that students can develop and refine their skills progressively and in a sustained way.
- Schools plan coherent and organised drama programs that make appropriate

connections and progression between units and stages of schooling. One-off or disconnected experiences fall below acceptable standards for effective contemporary arts learning (Burton, Horowitz & Abeles, 2000).

- Owing to the practical nature of drama, schools timetable lessons of a suitable duration in recognition of the need to facilitate:
 - flexible delivery of practical learning
 - group work
 - time management for the needs of individual students
 - access to professional artists
 - skill development.

In secondary schools, single periods should be of no less than least fifty minutes duration for drama teaching and learning.

Access to performances

Experiencing and responding to a range of performances is an essential part of a drama education. Attending performing arts events helps students to develop an aesthetic appreciation of the art form as well as exposing them to the methods by

⁴ Known as ‘professional learning’ in some states and territories.

⁵ The National Council of Teachers of English, USA

which the arts works are created and made.

- In recognition that students learn from experiencing drama performances, schools should plan for students to see a range of performances and performers ('live' and recorded) through in-school events and activities (such as visiting artists, touring theatre for young people productions, access to pre-recorded and other forms of digital recording/retrieval of drama/theatre performance) and excursions (such as plays and other performing arts experiences performed in theatres and other performing venues).
- Students in drama should also have access to other arts-based experiences as required (such as music concerts, dance performances and visual art works).

Classroom spaces and resources

Many subject areas in schools have particular classroom requirements. In the Arts, there are particular and essential space and equipment/resource requirements (Araca, 1986; Arts Council England, 2003) and drama is a curriculum area which requires an appropriate teaching and learning space and associated equipment. Drama programs should be resourced to support teaching and learning that is appropriate for the development of each student.

Given the practical, presentational and performance nature of drama, schools should provide the following minimum classroom requirements for the teaching and learning of drama:

- **a dedicated space for drama.** While recognising the need to maximise the use of all teaching and learning spaces in the school, there is a need to provide a dedicated, well-equipped drama space(s).
- **a clear and uncluttered space.** While drama can take place in classrooms that are cleared for the purpose, dedicated spaces enhance learning and reduce disruption to learning programs. Particular attention should be paid to the surfaces in the Drama classroom. Walls should be free of protrusions and sharp corners.
- **an adequate sized space.** The Drama classroom space should be sufficient (a working floor area of approximately 13 squares) for students to freely move around and should be adaptable so they can engage in, make and present a range of work.
- **appropriate floor coverings/surfaces.** Floor coverings should be sufficient for the range of activity that occurs in drama. The floor surface should be such that it protects the users from injury when using it (e.g. free from splinters/chips/dents). Drama classrooms should have flat flooring with carpet or other suitable non-slip covering for movement, relaxation exercises and (when required) working in bare feet. If the drama program incorporates regular physical and movement work and/or if the space is shared with the teaching of dance, the flooring should be 'sprung'.⁶ Sprung floors have been proven to enhance performance and reduce injuries (Krasnow, 2005). Concrete flooring even covered with carpet is not desirable for regular physical/movement work.
- **sound isolation/sound proofing** should be provided 'sufficient to permit very noisy and very quiet activities to be performed without disruption' to the Drama class and to other classes (Dept. of Education, UK, 2003).
- **indoor space with blackout facilities** (such as black curtains over windows) to enable the use of theatrical/dimmable lighting as required

⁶ i.e. a floor that absorbs shocks. The surface of the floor is laid over battens and pads which assist in the shock absorption.

- **adequate ventilation** (natural and/or mechanical) and where required, air-conditioning
- **sufficient ceiling height** which permits students to take part in a full range of drama activity including standing on rostra⁷ with adequate head room from fans, lights and any other overhead fixtures/fittings
- **electrical equipment** necessary for practical, presentational and performance work including lighting which can be dimmed to create atmosphere, sound equipment which is of a suitable standard and amplification for presentations/performances, audio/video recording/playback equipment
- **access to ICT**⁸ such as computers (with Internet access if possible), printers, scanners, data projectors, digital camera(s) ‘to explore and record ideas, research themes and enhance ... production work’ (Arts Council England, 2003) and theatrical electronic equipment such as video/sound editing equipment and theatre software suites (e.g. for lighting, sound, costume and stage design)
- **texts** such as play scripts, theatre history books, subject textbooks and other printed materials
- **CDs, DVDs and mp3** such as music, sound effects, CD ROMS, DVDs of films/plays/television programs and access to equipment for playing these.
- **costumes, props, make-up, art materials.** A supply of costumes, props, make-up and essential art materials (e.g. ‘butcher’s paper’, coloured markers, glue) for use in the day-to-day drama classes
- **adequate power supply.** Supply should be sufficient for the electrical power needs of the Drama room. Where possible, especially if theatrical lighting is supplied to the Drama classroom, the electricity supply should be three-phase power⁹ with speared circuits to avoid overloading
- **a whiteboard/blackboard and data projection screen** and/or a cyclorama.¹⁰

Environmental, health and safety standards (as mandated/recommended by national and state/territory guidelines) must be met in the construction/fitting-out and maintenance of Drama classrooms.

Storage space

- In recognition of the need for security, good time management and practicality, immediately accessible and lockable storage space should be provided.
- A conveniently located large, secure storage space should be provided for the storage of large-scale sets/set materials, props, costumes and equipment.
- There is recognition that, on occasions for practical reasons, it may be necessary to leave equipment in situ in spaces used for drama in the school.

Budgets

It is widely acknowledged that, drama is a practical subject which requires its own funding.

- All drama activities, curricular and co-curricular should have an allocated budget to ensure the full entitlement of students within the subject/co-curricular area.
- Curriculum budgets should include provision for classroom/tuition

⁷ Known as ‘professional learning’ in some states and territories.

⁸ The National Council of Teachers of English, USA

⁹ Known as ‘professional learning’ in some states and territories.

¹⁰ The National Council of Teachers of English, USA

expenses such as:

texts, rostra, lighting, costumes, make-up, props, art materials, CDs/DVDs/mp3 and requisite players, audiovisual/computer/data equipment and software, professional subscriptions, access to performances (in-school and in-theatre)/artists-in-residence programs/professional development, maintenance of/repairs to existing equipment, materials and resources.

- Co-curricular budgets should include provision for: copyright licences/royalty fees/performance fees, staging, venue hire (if applicable), equipment hire as applicable (e.g. stage lights, sound equipment, audience seating, set items), costs associated with the design and construction/application of costumes, make-up, set, props, payment of fees for outside artists, maintenance of/repairs to existing equipment, materials and resources.

Production work and other co-curricular activities

- All production work undertaken within the curricular/ co-curricular programs should take into account:
 - each participating student's workload across all learning areas
 - each participating teacher's existing workload (curricular and co-curricular)
 - timing within the school's calendar to maximise participation and attendance
 - timetabling to ensure adequate rehearsal/production time
 - budgeting that is realistic and adequate
 - that teachers and schools need to operate within statutory and ethical guidelines governing copyright and intellectual property rights (such as photocopying of scripts, modifying scripts, use of music, payment of royalties, citing appropriate acknowledgements)
- When undertaking co-curricular activities, schools should consider:
 - the purpose(s) of the activity
 - who the participants will be and their needs
 - the proposed audience
 - financial, material and human resources
 - the selection of appropriate form, content and style of the activity
 - duty of care responsibilities including required adult-to-student ratios
 - timetabling of rehearsals and performances in consultation with drama staff and other staff members to avoid conflicting demands
 - any environmental, health and safety issues pertaining to the implementation of the activity
 - that the activity will be inclusive of the diverse range of students and their abilities.
- Schools should allow for the provision of time allowance, financial remuneration or trade-offs for teachers who are involved in co-curricular activities. Relevant activities include: excursions out of regular school hours, co-curricular productions (concerts, dramas and musicals), curricular productions where some rehearsals/production work takes place out of class time, running of/attendance at drama camps, events that publicise or showcase the school to the wider community, works developed for and performed at, festivals and competitions.
- Trade-offs in lieu of financial rewards could include release from some other school duties, preparation and marking time or time in lieu. A useful benchmark when calculating financial or time allowance is that it be

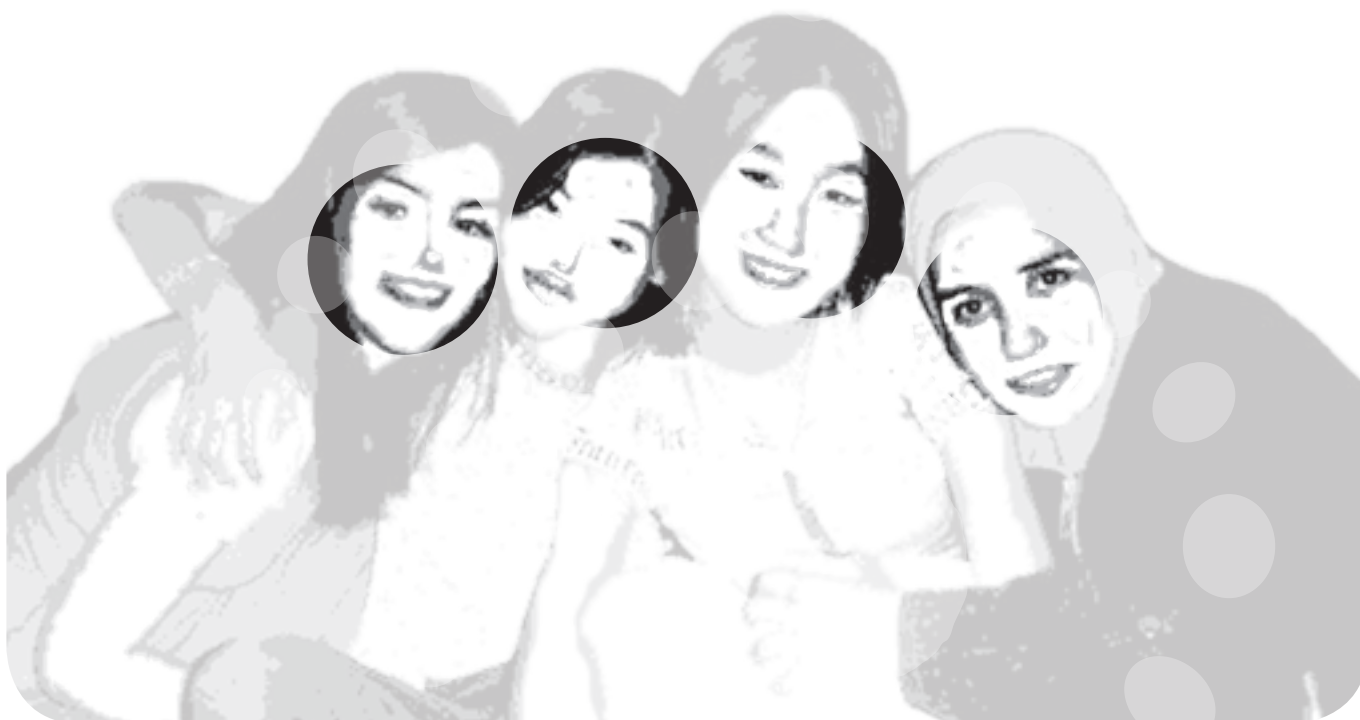
commensurate with other special duties at the school such as co-curricular sports training, subject coordination, additional administrative duties.

Environmental, Health and Safety

It is the responsibility of the school to ensure that the work of its drama teachers and students including the use of the Drama classroom, its facilities and equipment conforms to environmental, health and safety requirements as mandated/recommended by the appropriate state/territory education department and any other relevant governing body/bodies. It is essential that at all times an appropriate level of duty of care is exercised in the teaching and learning of drama (Kempe and Nicholson, 2007). At the present time within Australia there is no unified set of environmental, health and safety guidelines across the state/territory education systems. Schools and their Drama staff, whilst acknowledging and appropriately responding to the advice below, should also ensure that they adhere to any requirements as set down from the relevant education bodies within their local context.

- All schools and drama teachers should devise a risk minimisation plan for the teaching and learning of drama including identifying potential hazards, assessing likelihood of injury or danger, and evaluating those procedures.
- When planning drama teaching and learning programs, teachers should recognise the potential for emotional and psychological injury.
- The Drama staff at the school should be cognisant with the use of the equipment/facilities available in the Drama classroom and other spaces used for the teaching and learning of the subject. It may be necessary in some circumstances for the drama teacher(s) to undertake courses and/or professional development to gain the necessary knowledge and skills.
- Drama teachers should ensure their students have the requisite training/competencies in the use of specialist equipment (e.g. tools, lighting and sound equipment) and/or in carrying out certain tasks (e.g. climbing ladders, hanging lights, using paints, adhesives and solvents, making sets, costumes and prop items) and that, where necessary the appropriate protective clothing/protective eyewear/hearing protector is worn.
- Students using sound equipment must be made aware of the acceptable/safe levels of amplification – with a suggested maximum tolerable limit of 85dB(A).
- Drama teachers should ensure that they and their students work in ways that conform to sound environmental, health and safety practises at all times. This includes the use and supervision of equipment and materials such as:
 - lifting and carrying of large, heavy or awkward objects/equipment,
 - working at heights,
 - using electrical and other stage/theatrical equipment,
 - using ladders, tower scaffolds,
 - working with paints, adhesives, solvents and other chemicals/compounds,
 - using tools,
 - the laying-down and use of wires and cables.
- All materials deemed potentially hazardous should be appropriately stored when not in use.
- Drama teachers and their students should be aware of the emergency procedures in place for the use of the Drama room including its evacuation (e.g. in the case of fire). Exits should be clearly marked.

- Drama teachers should be aware of First Aid procedures as stipulated at the school level.
- Electrical equipment (e.g. lights, sound and computer equipment) should be checked regularly to ensure it meets safety requirements. It is recommend that periodical ‘testing and tagging’¹¹ of electrical equipment takes place.
- Rostra should be well-constructed and well-maintained.
- Audience seating banks/tiered seating should be constructed and used mindful of safety and ability issues such as provision of gangways, inclusion of rails, step height, number of seats per row, distance between rows, accommodating audience members with special needs.
- The use of stage special effects (such as the use of pyrotechnics) should be stringently supervised, and where necessary be operated by trained personnel.
- All drama teachers should recognise the potential for physical injury in drama work where students are engaged in high energy activities, performance and experimenting with and exploring movement and dramatic action requiring control and coordination. They should consider the experience of the students to carry out the activity, the need for appropriate floor surfaces, that there is adequate space available, removal of any obstructions or other hazards in the space, the proper use of any equipment which might require instruction or supervision.
- All drama teachers should recognise the need for appropriate vocal and physical warm-ups for students and demonstrate a capacity to adapt these learning activities to each student’s physical and emotional readiness, skill level, and where appropriate, special needs.
- Drama teachers should consider the vocal and physical demands of teaching within this subject area and take the necessary steps and precautions to ensure that they adequately safeguard themselves in respect to their use of voice and body. This may include availing themselves of relevant professional development programs.



¹¹ The electrical item(s) is tested by a person trained to carry out this duty and [should the item pass the test] a tag is placed on the item stating that it is in good working order. This is now becoming standard practise in theatres and educational institutions in Australia.

Conclusion

It is imperative that drama tuition is made available to all students in Australia and that they and their teachers are provided with the spaces, resources, equipment and materials to enable an effective and high level of teaching and learning. Schools should ensure that drama is taught and learnt in an environment which is safe, secure and well-maintained and that a suitable level of duty of care is exercised at all times.

The 2009 position paper was written by Richard Sallis (Drama Tasmania/Drama Victoria). It was based on the existing Drama Australia document, *Position Paper on Working Conditions for Teaching and Learning in Drama* (2001), a project which was begun by Jean Arthur (ACTDA) and completed by Debbie Wall (QADIE) under the direction of the then, Director of Projects, Richard Sallis. Drama Australia wishes to thank Drama Tasmania for proposing a Drama Australia special project to revise this document and the writer, Richard Sallis, for his careful consideration and effort in preparing the document.

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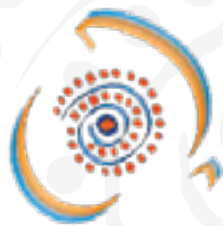
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