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THE BENEFITS OF **DRAMA EDUCATION** IN SCHOOLS

A RAPID EVIDENCE REVIEW

JENNIFER KITCHEN

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

What is a Rapid Evidence Review?

A Rapid Evidence Review (RER) is one form of systematic review (Dobbins, 2017; Petticrew and Roberts, 2006) a method of surveying published scholarly literature. As indicated by the name, an RER is designed to be a timely approach to reviewing literature in order to establish the scope of evidence on a particular topic. It is commonly used to inform developments in policy or practice, or as a basis to develop more structured systematic review metrics. Therefore, while RERs aim to be inclusive and representative of research evidence within their field, the focus on timely and responsive reviewing means they cannot make claims to full comprehensiveness.

While some RERs do create a hierarchy of research types within the selection and analysis process, this RER follows the convention which holds that:

1. A "mosaic" of different types of research about the same topic may constitute evidence that is worthy of consideration, and

2. Different types of research may be suited to different uses. For instance, large scale longitudinal studies are helpful for understanding trends over time, and small-scale classroom studies may be highly generative for teachers who are thinking about their own pedagogical purposes and practices.

Why a rapid evidence review on drama education's benefits?

Drama holds an enduring but contested place in contemporary UK education, which is the geographic focus of this RER. Despite not being included as a statutory curriculum subject in its own right within England's national curriculum, drama appears from Key Stages 1 through 4 as part of the English subject Speaking and Listening element and therefore in many English schools is taught as a separate subject without its own curriculum, a context which, as research has shown, presents particular opportunities but also challenges for the drama subject teacher (Hennessy, 2016; Pitfield, 2013). In Scotland drama appears as one of the strands of the Expressive Arts curriculum from Early to Forth stage and similarly in Wales is mandated under Expressive Arts from ages 5 to 16. In Northen Ireland, drama is a statutory curriculum subject under the area of The Arts from Foundation stage until the end of Key Stage 3. Furthermore, secondary and tertiary exams in Drama, Theatre

and Performing Arts are offered across the UK in the form of CGSEs, AS and A Levels (primarily taken in England, Wales and Northen Ireland); and National 5s, Highers and Advanced Highers (primarily taken within Scotland). This is in addition to other, more vocational qualification formats such as BTech and the LAMDA exam system. Internationally the situation is more varied and O'Sullivan et al.'s recent arts education literature review gives a picture of drama education's rich and diverse position in curriculum structures globally (O'Sullivan et al., 2023).

Yet, despite this embeddedness in the education systems of the UK and beyond, like many arts subjects drama has been subject to neglect, underfunding and decline over the past 15 years (Ashton et al., 2024; Ramaiah, 2024). Within England this is most stark, where by the 2022/23 academic year 41% of schools had no entrants for drama GCSE (Ramaiah, 2024:10), alongside drama A Level entries halving in number from the 2011/2012 to 2022/2023 academic years (Ramaiah, 2024:11). Unsurprisingly this fall in demand has led to reduced drama subject teachers in schools, and out of all arts subjects drama has seen the biggest percentage fall in teacher numbers from 2011/12 to 2022/23 (Ramaiah, 2024:11) alongside a 24% decline in Key Stage 3 drama engagement in England (Ashton et al., 2024:5). These numbers are more stable within the Scottish curriculum (Ashton et al., 2024:45) and nearby the Republic of Ireland has introduced a new School Certificate exam in Drama, Film and Theatre Studies (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), 2024), a significant policy achievement and evidence it is possible to revitalise centralised curriculum support for drama and the performing arts. Yet these more positive curriculum snapshots should also be weighed against evidence that access to the arts in school and beyond within the UK continues to strongly predetermined by socioeconomic factors (Neelands et al., 2015), as presented in the CLA's most recent 'report card': "where a child grows up, and their family's socioeconomic status, are significant social determinants in whether or not they will pursue Expressive Arts options from the age of 14" (Ramaiah, 2025:3). To quote the frank and sobering observations of one recent research study:

> It is probably fair to claim that whereas, at one time, the UK was a leading influence in the world in the development of drama in education, the contemporary situation is fairly gloomy. Excellent, creative work continues to flourish in many schools, but this is despite, rather than because of, official policies and infrastructures. (Elliott et al., 2019:13-14)

The challenges facing this area of arts education therefore invite a timely, effective and robust summary of existing evidence, accessible to policy makers, teachers and practitioners. As well as highlighting trends within extant research, this report seeks to critically identify gaps and silences within the evidence base where future research might continue to further understanding of the benefits, possibilities and complexities of drama education in schools.

How the Rapid Evidence Review was conducted

Scholarly papers and professional reports, published between 2004 and 2024, which addressed the benefits of drama education were the focus of this RER.

In order to source papers, several searching approaches were undertaken. Firstly, the content pages of key journals within the field (including *Research in Drama Education, NJ, SCENARIO* and *Drama Research*) were searched within the relevant dates. Furthermore, a larger-scale systematic search was conducted within the following databases: The British Educational Index (BEI), Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC) and the Education Research Index (ERI) using the following terms: 'drama', 'education', 'curriculum', 'extra-curricular', 'school', 'children', 'student',

'pupil', 'young people', benefits;', 'value', 'learning, 'impact'. Search terms were adapted and used in various combinations within individual databases. The complete search string can be found in Appendix 1. Google scholar was used in supplementation to the above searches.

In recognition of the fact that relevant research work from drama teachers, practitioners and institutions may not be published within peer reviewed journals, additional 'grey literature' was sought through a combination of google scholar searches and drawing on known research reports within the field. For reasons of resources and time, PhD theses and other postgraduate level dissertations have been excluded. Similarly, while there are several well-established UK-focused professional magazines for drama teachers, including *Drama,* from National Drama, and *Drama & Theatre* (though the latter sadly closed during the publication of this report) the scale of this area of literature has also been omitted for time reasons. Finally, Theatres' annual reports have not been included as standard. The exception to this are specifically commissioned theatre research/evaluation reports (for example: Galloway and Strand, 2010). While many theatres internationally undertake and therefore report on applied and educational work as part of their larger remit, it would have been unwieldy to include this scale of grey literature within the study. As with the exclusion of professional magazines, masters' and doctoral research in this report, the analysis of educational impacts in theatres' annual report publications would be a relevant avenue for further study in this area.

The Covidence review platform was used to organise, screen and extract data from the resulting references. After removing duplicates, titles and abstracts were subject to initial screening, establishing whether the paper in question dealt with drama education in a broad sense. Then, a screening of each full paper was undertaken, in which more focused inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. When locating a paper that seemed relevant, it was scanned asking:

1. Does this paper address the benefits of drama in schools or for directly educational purposes?
2. What are the benefits said to be?
3. What type of research is this?
4. What evidence is produced, and how?

Inclusion criteria for the review encompassed research literature published between 2004 and 2024, drawn from international sources but published in English. The research participants must be aged between 3 and 19 years, or direct educators or this age group. Educational practices considered in this review may be either curricular or extracurricular, provided they held a connection to formal education. Additionally, literature related to teacher education was acceptable as long as it directly explored benefits experienced by children. Systematic literature review, theoretical or 'think pieces' were also included if they either synthesised previous applied research (for example Carter and Sallis, 2016) or directly discussed the state of the field of drama teaching in terms of policy and curriculum (for example Duffy, 2016).

Recording the Details

A data extraction form was developed within the Covidence platform to capture relevant information. The following information was extracted from the included articles:

First author
Year of publication

Research aim
Study design
Study population
Setting
Country/Area
Benefits of learning
How are these produced
Barriers to learning
Recommendations

This was then extracted into a master spreadsheet for coding and analysis. Coding was undertaken by assigning a single word code or short code description for the key benefits of learning reported for each study. In order to reflect the findings as presented within the studies the use of 'in vivo' code names, i.e. codes using the specific language and terminology of the studies themselves, was prioritised during the coding process. Coding was also restricted to the findings as described within the study. For example, if a study stated drama supported learners' social skills and collaboration it might be reasonably assumed this had a positive impact on learners' sense of empathy, but if the study did not reference this as a finding, it was not coded for 'empathy'. Nevertheless it should be acknowledged that coding is always an actively interpretive process and a different researcher may have utilised a different set of codes, or coded studies differently from this report. For clarity, a full list of the codes is given below.

After a sub-sample of the full corpus was open-coded the codes were refined, merged and grouped iteratively to establish 5 key themes and 13 sub themes, which were then shared with stakeholders at the RSC to refine them. As detailed below, these key themes and subthemes frame the structure of this report.

Main Theme	**Subtheme**	**Codes**
Being and Becoming	Empowerment and Citizenship	empowerment and political awareness, citizenship, Inclusion, community of practice, values and morals
	Agency	Emotional/behavioural regulation, empathy, theory of mind, identity, self confidence, agency
	Social Skills and Collaboration	Collaboration, discussion complexity, social skills, 'safe space'
Literacy	Critical Thinking	Critical thinking
	Creativity, Cultural and Aesthetic Expressions	creativity, aesthetic expression, cultural learning
	Reading, Writing and Oracy	writing outcomes, interpreting texts, multi-modal literacy, 'complex' literacy, storytelling, oracy, reading outcomes, Shakespeare

Meta Skills	Motivation and Engagement	Investment, motivation, engagement
	Co-construction of Knowledge	Co-construction
	Other Meta-Skills	Focus, motor skills, memory recall, research skills, interdisciplinarity, meta-cognition, career, problem-solving
Transfer of Educational Drama	Language Learning	
	STEM	Science, maths
	Other Subjects	History, music, geography
Drama and Theatre disciplinary knowledge and skills	Drama and Theatre disciplinary knowledge and skills	moving in out of role, artistic expression, drama during Covid, performance semiotics, performance knowledge, plot and content of plays, engagement with theatre, exam achievement
	Policy	Policy Analysis

Table 1 Main review themes

Results

1496 records were identified from databases and other searches after excluding duplicates. This includes 180 papers selectively included from screening specific key journals as described above. After screening the papers for title and abstract, 624 papers were accessed in full and again screened. 430 papers met the review inclusion criteria. During coding and analysis, 79 further studies were excluded against the inclusion criteria upon detailed reading. In total, 351 publications were included in the review.

This report

As is usual in RERs, a complete list of the analysed corpus has not been provided. Indicative references are used throughout to support specifical analysis and claims within the report. Due to the number of papers included, not every text within the corpus is necessarily referenced, though the report aims to give a broad and representative sense of the scope of the corpus.

The report comprises of the following sections:

- The corpus
    - Country of origin
    - Time range
    - Study population
    - Focus of the research
    - Research designs
- The context for teaching drama education
    - Defining drama education in the context of this review
    - Policy context and its effects

- The benefits of drama Education
    - Being and Becoming
    - Literacy
    - Meta-Skills
    - Transfer of Educational Drama
    - Drama and Theatre disciplinary knowledge and skills
- Appendixes
- References

THE CORPUS

The initial categorisation of the corpus provides valuable insights. This section reports on the time range of the research, the countries of origin, the types of research conducted, study population and focus of the research.

Country of origin

As is perhaps to be expected for an RER focused on papers published in English, research is concentrated in the Global North with almost 70% of studies originating from the UK, USA, Canada, Australia and Europe. These are recognised hubs of drama education research (Turner-King and Kitchen, 2022) and while there will be a wider range of research outside the English language-focus of this review, the spread of studies outlined below would lend credence to arguments for the potential to more equally platform diverse global practice within drama education as a research field.

Yet, alongside this Global North focus is a smaller, though widely-ranged body of studies from beyond this context, with research included from each continent globally. Within this, the growing body of research in Asian contexts is worth noting, much of which explores the potential for drama practices to provide alternatives to high-stakes, exam focused curricular (To et al., 2011) as well as the implications and opportunities of combining 'Western' drama education practice with local cultural, aesthetic and pedagogic traditions (Zhou, 2023)

Country/Area	Number out of 351	Percentage to nearest 1%
UK	71	13%
USA	70	13%
Australia	56	11%
Europe	52	10%
Asia	34	6%
Canada	23	4%
Turkey	11	2%
Africa	10	2%
New Zealand/Pacific	8	2%
International	5	1%
Israel	4	1%
Saudi Arabia	2	0%
South America	2	0%
India	1	0%
Jordan	1	0%

Palestine	1	0%

Table 2 Country of origin

European Country	Number out of 52
Greece	11
Italy	4
Republic of Ireland	5
Sweden	4
Finland	3
Denmark	3
France	2
Germany	2
Cross-Europe	2
Belgium	2
Spain	2
Norway	2
Iceland	2
Hungary	1
Lithuania	1
Kazakhstan	1
Slovenia	1
Cyprus	1
Poland	1

Table 3 European studies by country

Asian Country	Number out of 34
Hong Kong	11
China	9
Taiwan	4
South Korea	3
Singapore	2
Japan	1
Vietnam	1
Sri Lanka	1
Cross-Asia	1
Thailand	1

Table 4 Asian studies by country

Time range

The RER encompasses studies from 2004 to 2024. Drama education research is a field that has grown rapidly from early studies in the 70s and increased interest in the 1990s to the present day. Academic publishing timelines can be notoriously long and unpredictable and it would be outside the scope of this RER to draw any detailed or direct comparisons between research publication frequency over time and specific policy or practice changes. However, notable most starkly within UK studies and to a lesser extent globally is the drop off of publication levels post Covid-19 from 2020 and 2021.

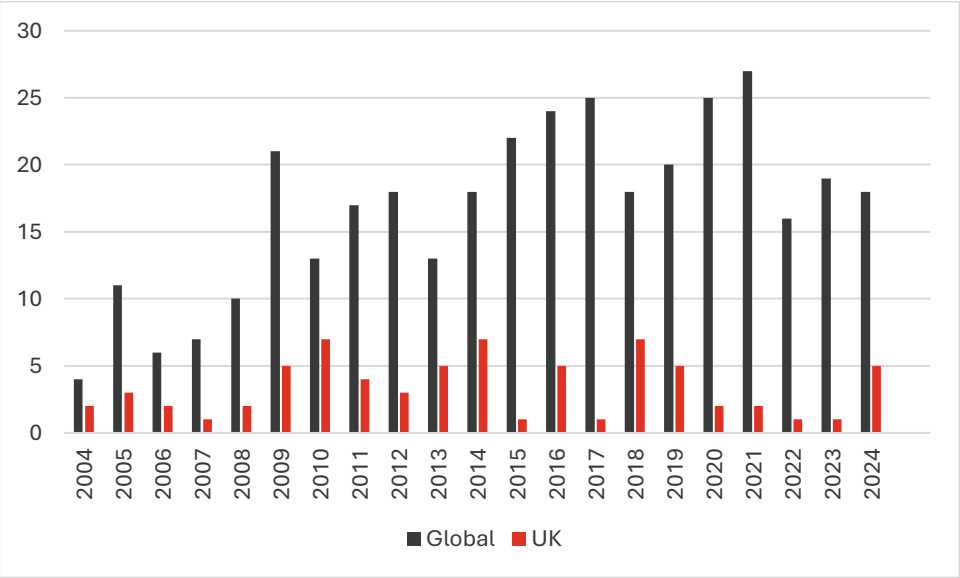

Figure 1 Studies by Year Globally and UK

Study population

In terms of the age/educational stage of the learner participants in the studies reviewed, almost a 3rd focus on primary age leaners (i.e. approximately age 5-11 years). Unsurprisingly, secondary drama classrooms are the next most popular population focus, followed by studies carried out in other secondary age settings (approximately 11-16 years), including a variety of subject classroom contexts. In some studies, typically those discussing touring drama and theatre education programmes (for e.g. Mailloux, 2023; Upton, 2021) the age of the learner participants is not specified, and in others such as literature reviews and policy reviews the population has been marked as 'not applicable' (Elliott et al., 2019; Erickson, 2004)

A range of other specialist and extra-curricular education settings such as after school programmes, Special Education Needs schools, Pupil Referral Units and summer schools are also represented, demonstrating the breadth of educational contexts in which drama-based work is undertaken.

Stage/Setting	Count out of 351
elementary/primary	105
Drama	56
pre-school	31

Secondary (general)	24
Language	22
extra-curricular	22
NA	20
English/Literacy	15
not clear	14
cross-age	10
Science	6
SEN school	5
middle school	3
teacher training	3
cross-arts	2
Music	2
PRU	2
Tertiary	2
External	1
life science	1
Maths	1
RE	1
SEND school	1
summer school	1
teacher training	1

Table 5 Study Population by education stage/setting

Though not represented in the table above, it is also worth noting that over 100 of the studies reviewed focused not on the daily classroom or extra-curricular practice of teachers and practitioners, but on specific interventions either designed for the purposes of the study or within studies that arose from commissioned evaluations of existing external programmes. Given the rapidly declining take up of drama at GCSE and A Level within England (Ramaiah, 2024) and the fact that a relatively small percentage of the overall corpus is comprised of studies which focus specifically on the teaching of drama as a discrete curriculum subject, this raises a question of whether daily drama subject teaching is an area worthy of more direct and sustained research focus going forward.

Focus of the research

As described above in the section 'How the rapid evidence review was conducted' the findings of each included study were coded for the educational benefits of drama they recorded. In grouping and collating these codes the following main benefits were identified. In the table below these are ranked for frequency within UK based studies and in the global corpus as a whole.

Main Benefits	Global rank	Global total	UK rank	UK total
Agency	1st	123	1st	25
Social skills and collaboration	2nd	99	2nd	24
Empowerment and Citizenship	3rd	96	3rd	22
Reading, Writing and Oracy	4th	65	4th	20
Motivation and engagement	5th	62	5th	18
Creativity, Cultural and Aesthetic Expressions	6th	50	9th	6
Other Meta-Skills	7th	40	6th	13
STEM	8th	38	7th	11
Drama and Theatre Knowledge and Skills	9th	37	8th	7
Language Learning	10th	33	=10th	4
Policy Analysis	=11th	23	=10th	4
Co-construction of Knowledge	=11th	23	=11th	2
Critical Thinking	12th	14	12th	1
(Transference of) Other Subjects	13th	10	=11th	2

Table 6 Main review themes

Several relevant observations can be made from these rankings. Firstly it should be noted that individual studies were typically coded under more than one key benefit, depending on the range of impacts reported by the study. A key example of this is 'motivation and engagement' which sits 5th both globally and within the UK, in many cases because increased engagement, motivation or enjoyment was frequently reported as a generalised outcome alongside the specific focus of the study.

In terms of trends within UK-based research, this broadly follows the global rankings, however there are some key deviations. Most notably benefits of 'creativity, cultural and aesthetic expressions' are 9th within UK research, compared to 6th globally; while studies that focus on the benefits of drama to support STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) learning are ranked 7th most frequent within the UK corpus, as opposed to 8th globally. This might point towards an interpretation that UK research over the past 20 years has focused more on exploring the instrumental benefits of drama education, compared to global research trends which are comparatively more focused on creative and cultural aspects of drama education's impacts. Given the increasingly challenging context for drama teaching within the curriculum (Ramaiah, 2024) and the funding context for theatres and arts organisations more generally (Ashton et al., 2024) it is perhaps not surprising that researchers have chosen to focus on more instrumental educational outcomes.

Despite this instrumental focus on the transference of drama's value in the teaching of other curriculum areas it is notable that the most common benefits reported, both within the UK and globally, are the three that sit under the theme of 'Being and Becoming': Agency; Social skills and Collaboration; and Empowerment and Citizenship. This demonstrates that, overwhelmingly, researchers have focused on drama's potential to support individual wellbeing and agency, our connections to each other and our ability to act as engaged citizens locally and globally.

Research designs

It is worth noting here that, as with the coding of findings within the included studies, wherever possible the terminology used within the papers to define methodological approach has been reproduced in analysis. The only exceptions are where either no

specific definition of research design was given within the paper, in which case a methodology was assigned based on a 'best fit' of the research design process described, or where small differences in phrasing would impede analysis – i.e. the difference between a study being described as 'practitioner enquiry' and as being carried out by a 'practitioner researcher'.

The overall corpus of research papers showed a heavy weighting towards small scale studies; with case studies, 'qualitative studies' and 'reflective practitioner' research making up almost a 3rd of the studies included. This is unsurprising, given drama education's disciplinary focus on small scale, qualitative work, often emphasising these designs' flexibility and nuance in capturing the embodied, holistic and dynamic nature of drama learning experiences (Ackroyd, 2006; O'Toole, 2006)

However, there is also a variety of mixed and more quantitative research designs present. This includes studies that in their use of more quantitative aspects, make the specific methodological point that these research designs have a role in capturing the value of drama education, not least in generating data which is readily accessibility to policy makers and funders (Fleming et al., 2004; Goldstein et al., 2017). This also includes large scale (DICE Consortium, 2010b) and recent randomised control trial-designed studies (Agley et al., 2021; Kisida et al., 2020).

Row Labels	Number out of 351	Percentage of sample to nearest 1%
Case study	66	19%
Qualitative research	63	18%
Reflective practitioner	42	12%
Mixed Methods	40	11%
Experimental or Quasi-experimental	24	7%
Ethnography	20	6%
Policy review	16	5%
Action Research	15	4%
Pilot Study	12	3%
Other	12	3%
Literature Review	11	3%
Evaluation Report	10	3%
Randomised controlled trial	6	2%
Survey	5	1%
Qualitative Mixed Methods	4	1%
Think Piece	3	1%
Phenomenological inquiry	2	1%

Table 7 Research designs

The break down of research design in UK-based drama education research roughly follows the global trends in this area, with a slightly less concentrated reliance on the top 3 research designs of case study, reflective practitioner and qualitative research and comparatively higher percentage of other, more structured whilst still largely qualitative approaches of pilot studies, ethnographies, evaluation reports and policy reviews. There has notably been just one randomised control trial focusing on drama education published within the UK between 2004 and 2024, the Royal Shakespeare

Company's *Time to Act* report, exploring the relationship between a 'rehearsal room' approach to teaching Shakespeare and students' writing outcomes (McCulloch and Collins, 2024).

Methodology	Number of UK titles out of 71	Percentage of sample to nearest 1%
Case study	13	18%
Reflective Practitioner	12	17%
Qualitative research	10	14%
Mixed Methods	7	10%
Pilot study	5	7%
Ethnography	4	6%
Evaluation Report	4	6%
Policy Review	4	6%
Quasi-experimental	3	4%
Literature Review	2	3%
Think Piece	2	3%
Action Research	1	1%
Grounded research methods	1	1%
Qualitative mixed methods	1	1%
Randomised control trial	1	1%
Survey	1	1%

Table 8 Study design UK specific

THE CONTEXT FOR TEACHING DRAMA EDUCATION

What is Drama Education in the context of this review?

There are a wide range of practices and terminologies that cut across educational drama and theatre practice (McCarthy, 2018), this has prompted many debates within the field both on what practices could be included and what terminologies could be used to refer to educational drama experiences. These debates have been most directly drawn between advocates for drama as an experiential pedagogy and drama as the teaching of skills for theatre as a performance art in its own right (Bolton, 1998; Hornbrook, 1998), and while it is not the intention of this report to revisit those divisions, it is worth highlighting this has been a contested area. It also therefore worth being specific on what practices *are* under study within this report. The following table details the specific terminology used to describe the drama education practice that is the focus of each study within the corpus.

Type of drama education practice studies	Count out of 351
Not Specified	78
Process Drama	45
Multiple approaches	22
Theatre in Education (TIE)	17
Full Scale Performance	15
Dramatic Play	13
‘Creative Drama'	12
Playtext-Based	12
Storytelling	12
Theatre of the Oppressed	12
Devised Performances	10
Devising and improvisation	7
Mantle of the Expert	7
‘Drama-based pedagogy’	7
Theatre Trip	6
Literature-Based	5
Rolling role	5
Puppets	5
Role Play	4
‘Acting Classes’	3
Playwriting	3
‘Speech Bubbles’	3
Digital storytelling	2
In-role writing	2
‘School Drama'	2
Shadow theatre	2
Other (single use terms)	40

Table 8 types of drama practice studied

After acknowledging the largest single proportion of studies did not specify any particular drama education approach or technique, the next key observation to make is the dominance of process drama-based pedagogy within the corpus, more so if the specific process drama-based techniques of ‘Mantle of the Expert’, ‘Creative Drama’ and ‘Rolling Role’ are included within this. Process drama techniques, broadly defined, are a series of experiential drama games and exercises in which participants work in-role and with given imaginative frames or pre-texts, without necessarily working towards a final performance or external presentation. They are also commonly referred to as ‘living through’ drama practices and drama education practitioner Dorothy Heathcote is credited with originating many of these approaches.

Beyond the dominance of process drama and associated practices, there is a very wide range of performance, improvisational, text-based and theatre skill-specific practice represented within the corpus, which broadly aligns with the range of the average UK secondary drama curriculum scope, with perhaps less focus on the historical and political context of theatre as a performance practice, as indicated by

the following indicative list from practicing drama teacher Hennessy:

- Learning about Drama (skills) mime, masks, acting training, practitioner theory and techniques, history of Drama in practice (e.g. Ancient Greek Chorus, Commedia del-Arte, Shakespeare's blank verse) and the Drama techniques set by GCSE exam boards (e.g. Still Image, Thought-tracking, Hot-Seating)
- Learning through Drama (issues) exploring social, political, emotional themes and issues using Drama strategies, such as play texts about, for example, bullying, alcohol abuse, eating disorders; using stimuli to explore themes such as madness, the futility of war, loss and change.
- Offering opportunities to gain specific qualifications general qualifications such as GCSE, BTEC and A Level; vocational qualifications such as Arts Award, London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA) and Trinity College London graded exams.
- An over-arching narrative or framework that builds an understanding of what Drama and Theatre are all about (historical and political context, range of styles and genres, to make and interpret original work) (Hennessy, 2016)

One thing is clear from number of studies and range of outcomes included: 'drama education' is not just one thing – it comprises the teaching of drama and theatre as a discrete subject, the use of drama-based practices as a pedagogy in a wide range of curricular and extra-curricular contexts, the viewing of theatre as an audience member and the performance of plays, either scripted or devised and either within or beyond school. Drama work variously invites young people to creatively explore ideas and express themselves; study the work of existing playwrights and practitioners; bring learning alive in other subjects; and be audience members, performers and theatre-makers both on and behind the stage. This is a clear strength of drama education, but when collating evidence around this rich, multi-faceted and intersecting group of practices a challenge is presented in terms of charting a simple and predictable relationship between an independent and dependent variables.

Relatedly, studies across the corpus also vary on *what aspects* of the drama education approach under study is cited as impactful. Not all studies specify this, but for those that do the following trends become clear:

- Embodiment; i.e. the process of learning, exploring and expressing with body (Cleeve Gerkens, 2024; Varelas et al., 2010).
- Sensorial and material aspects; i.e. the use of props, costume, theatre design and lighting and physical stimuli (Stagg, 2020; Walan, 2021).
- Mimesis; i.e. the process of moving in and out of role and story providing moments of both imaginative immersion and reflective distancing (Duffy, 2014; Gallagher and Jacobson, 2018; Kelman, 2011).
- Humanisation; because drama is about stories, and stories connect us to people and places that make them feel 'real' in a way hard facts often do not (Cahill, 2012; Davis and Phillips, 2020; Hatton, 2024)
- Collaboration; i.e. the process of co-creating meaning in peer and learner-teacher groups, not only individually (Williamson and Zimmerman, 2009).

- Fun, joy and playfulness; the educational value of play is a rich field of scholarship in its own right and one often drawn on in drama education research (Hui et al., 2015; Papadopoulos and Mamali, 2021; Tam, 2021)
- Ambiguity; arguably related to the processional nature of embodied, mimesis-informed and collaborative aspects of drama education, there is a frequently acknowledged sense that drama's ambiguous quality lends depth and richness to the learning it informs (Shenfield, 2016; Winston, 2005a)

These framings point towards not only the value of drama education as a set of practices within itself but also towards what potential impact the findings within this corpus could have on further developing understandings of effective pedagogy more generally. Specifying these qualities of the practice also serve as a reminder of Neelands' argument:

> Drama cannot, of course, of itself teach in any kind of way, nor can it, of itself, be powerful. It is what we do, through our own human agency, with drama that determines the specific pedagogy and specific powers… ascribe[d] to the idea of drama itself (Neelands, 2004:48)

Despite clear exclusion/inclusion criteria discussed in the above section 'How the Rapid Evidence Review was conducted' there were many studies reviewed that could be considered borderline cases for inclusion within this RER. It is therefore important to be specific here about areas of research that have been excluded and why this decision was taken.

Studies focused on youth theatre, outside of an educational or school-based extracurricular context, were excluded. There is a rich range of research on the impact of youth theatre experiences in its own right (Busby et al., 2022; Gallagher et al., 2016) but as these programmes are typically completely separate from school and education contexts, the decision was taken to exclude youth theatre as a focus here. Similarly, community-based projects involving young people as part of a wider public group were also excluded. 'Reader's Theatre' (Kristiawan et al., 2023; Moran, 2006; Stewart Freeman and Welsh, 2025) is an established educational practice that uses a fixed sequence of verbal reading and memorisation to support gains in reading fluency. Despite the name, the decision was taken to exclude studies addressing reader's theatre alone from this RER, as its fixed structure was deemed at odds with the understanding of drama pedagogy as a rich and holistic practice in the ways described above. Finally, within early years education research 'sociodramatic play' is a term utilised in developmental studies of young children's play behaviours (Hughes, 2011). Studies referencing this concept have been included only where drama is discussed as a pedagogy or curriculum area. Anywhere within the potential literature that sociodramatic or role-play is discussed as a child-led developmental play behaviour with no other reference to drama teaching practice, this has been excluded.

Research on TIE and children's theatre *has* been included *when* it has either been performed in schools or when research focused on students specifically visiting the theatre as a school trip. However studies focusing on the use of Applied Theatre or Theatre-in-Education for specific health or social interventions (for example Cheadle et al., 2012) have been excluded as having a ultimately social, rather than educational aim. As with the process of coding and thematic analysis, it is recognised that a different researcher may have treated these 'borderline' cases differently and hence presented a different slice through the available research.

Policy context

A summary of international drama teaching policy analysis as included within the corpus is presented under the theme of ‘Drama and Theatre Skills and Knowledge’. However, here it is worth highlighting a key tension between policy, research and practice identified within the corpus which could be termed the ‘edge/centre’ debate.

Much of the corpus relating to policy analysis either demonstrates or reports on direct engagement with issues of curriculum policy (Duffy, 2016; Elliott, 2016; Greenwood, 2009; Pascoe, 2009). Stinson and Saunders for example emphasise the role of national drama subject organisations in curriculum development (Stinson and Saunders, 2016), and indeed within the UK the two drama subject teaching organisations National Drama and National Association of Teaching Drama both consistently undertake policy advocacy work on behalf of their members (NATD, 2025; ND, 2025). In addition there are a small number of empirical studies that look at drama subject assessment practices (Hennessy, 2016; Jacobs, 2016, 2017). Pitfield also focuses on the positionality of Drama within the English (subject) curriculum within English policy and the challenges and opportunities this presents for novice teachers, arguing for the need for policy development in this area: “a case can be made for re-evaluating the nature of the relationship between drama and English and its representation in policy-constructed curricula." (Pitfield, 2013:403)

Yet, alongside this focus within the research on centralising and strengthening the relationships between scholarship and curriculum policy, there is an opposing discourse that points towards what can be lost when the rich, processional, humanised nature of drama pedagogy is centralised and mandated. Within the corpus O’Connor makes this point most fully, reflecting on his own time as National Drama Facilitator with the New Zealand Ministry of Education: “The paradox of drama education is that although it deserves to be central to everything we do in schools, it risks losing its very essence once it moves into the centre." (2009:26). Elsewhere in the literature Neelands makes a similar point when he asks:

> Does drama's space in the boundaries of the curriculum, its marginalised status, give it the opportunity to be the site for going 'beyond' the 'Curriculum' in counter-cultural and pedagogic terms? Can it be a site for the enunciation of alternative lived encounters with 'reality' that may transgress, or unmask, the 'truth' of the 'Curriculum'? (Neelands, 2004:54)

This points towards an enduring dichotomy for drama education scholars, practitioners and advocates, particularly within the complexity of the UK policy context: the impetus to push towards the ‘centre’ for legitimacy but also to pull towards the ‘edge’ to maintain drama’s capacity for artistic freedom and social critique. Yet, while this is a rich paradox to explore from an academic perspective, this should be held alongside the dire challenges facing subject drama teaching within the UK currently (Ramaiah, 2024, 2025), as well as reducing opportunities for educational drama experiences more broadly (Ashton et al., 2024; Neelands et al., 2015): the risks and limitations of an extended existence on the ‘edge’ are arguably outweighing the benefits.

BENEFITS OF DRAMA EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

Themes, Pillars and Capabilities

The RER encompasses a variety of focal points, design methods, and contexts. The following sections present 14 sub themes that summarise the benefits evidenced in the research. The subthemes are organised into 5 larger, themed sections as detailed in table 1, page 5. These 5 themes can in many cases be relatively directly mapped onto one of the 3 core pillars and 7 capabilities of the recent CLA Capabilities Framework, which aimed to effectively summarise the types of experiences, skills and knowledges that young people acquire from expressive arts subjects (O'Hanlon and Bacon, 2025). Apart from the theme 'Being and Belonging' which was utilised for consistency with the other RERs in this series, this confluence of themes between this drama education RER and the Capabilities Framework was not built into the design process, so the ease with which the core ideas and themes are comparable speaks to a high level of internal validity between the two thematic frameworks.

Main Theme	Subtheme	Codes	CLA Capabilities Framework
Being and Becoming	Empowerment and Citizenship	empowerment and political awareness, citizenship, Inclusion, community of practice, values and morals	
	Agency	Emotional/behavioural regulation, empathy, theory of mind, identity, self confidence, agency	Being, Becoming and Belonging • Agency • Wellbeing Relating • Empathy
	Social skills and collaboration	Collaboration, discussion complexity, social skills, 'safe space'	Relating • Communication • Collaboration
Literacy	Critical Thinking	Critical thinking	Creative and Critical Thinking • Interpretation
	Creativity, Cultural and Aesthetic Expressions	Creativity Aesthetic expression, cultural learning	Creative and Critical Thinking • Creativity
	Reading, Writing and Oracy	writing outcomes, interpreting texts, Multi-model literacy, 'complex' literacy storytelling, oracy, reading outcomes, Shakespeare	Creative and Critical Thinking • Interpretation
Meta Skills	Motivation and engagement	Investment, motivation, engagement	
	Co-construction of Knowledge	Co-construction	

	Other Meta-Skills	Focus, motor skills, memory recall, research skills, interdisciplinarity, meta-cognition, career, problem-solving	
Transfer of Educational Drama	Language Learning		
	STEM	Science, maths	
	Other Subjects	History, music, geography	
Drama and Theatre disciplinary knowledge and skills	Drama and Theatre disciplinary knowledge and skills	moving in out of role, artistic expression, drama during Covid, performance semiotics, performance knowledge, plot and content of plays, engagement with theatre, exam achievement	
	Policy	Policy Analysis	

Table 9 Main review themes mapped against CLA Capabilities Framework

It is also possible therefore, by looking at which themes map directly from the drama RER and CLA Capabilities to identify which key areas of evidence and impact appear more specific to drama as an arts discipline and educational endeavour. Arguably the most significant of these is 'Empowerment and Citizenship'. Drama education has a long history of connection with civic and even political endeavours, either in a normative 'civilising' or more active and empowering 'citizenship' frame (Nicholson, 2011). Scholarship in this field has, however, complexified and critiqued any easy claims towards drama practice as an inherent civic 'good' (Freebody and Finneran, 2016, 2021; Neelands, 2010) as has drama education's sister field of applied theatre (Freebody et al., 2018; Hughes and Nicholson, 2016). Yet, as borne out within this RER, there is an ongoing focus within drama education literature on the practice's potential to facilitate the empowerment, emancipation, social justice and active citizenship of young people.

Core findings

Despite the thematic structure of these findings, it is important to emphasise that the vast majority of the studies are coded within multiple thematic areas, due to the diverse foci of their reported findings. To give just one indicative example, Göksel's action research study on the use of drama and improvisational practices in with elementary students in a French Language School in British Columbia (Göksel, 2019) reported findings coded not only under transfer of learning to second language outcomes (theme: Transfer), but also increased motivation and enthusiasm (theme: Meta-Skills) and also under 'agency' where findings reported increases in learner autonomy (theme: Being and Belonging). This pattern of findings is repeated throughout the corpus: drama is consistently found to support not only specific educational outcomes, but to do so in ways that enforce underlying learning capacities and also personal, social and civic outcomes related to the learner's experience of themselves in society.

Beyond evidence in any one thematic area therefore, drama's *holistic, authentic and experiential* nature as an education practice is arguably the key single takeaway. As McNaughton observes in their study on drama's potential for the teaching of education for sustainable development:

> The power of the drama is not that it teaches facts about sustainability but that the underlying issues are explored in a more holistic multi-faceted way. Universal concepts such as oppression, dispossession and the misuse of natural and human resources lie at the heart of educational drama in Education for Sustainable Development (McNaughton, 2006:40)

Some other key cross-theme issues worth highlighting here include some conflicting claims around the accessibility of drama pedagogy for teachers. While some studies make a direct argument for drama as a readily 'accessible' approach for non-specialist teachers (Kalogirou, 2016; Kalogirou et al., 2019) there was a broader trend in findings and recommendations to highlight the need for skilled and experienced teachers (Duffy, 2016; Gallagher, 2016a; Hannigan et al., 2022), as one study emphasises: "a range of conditions are required for optimal learning which include: teacher efficacy; a change in the role of the teacher; the development of a well-structured drama driven by a sufficient level of dramatic tension; the building of a safe environment and the effective use of props" (Stevenson, 2014:64)

Supporting teacher development in this area is also emphasised within the corpus as having benefits beyond the delivery of drama education work itself "Facilitating and supporting teachers in the expression of their imaginative and creative skills must be a cornerstone of the full spectrum of teacher education: it is critical to good pedagogy, within the arts and beyond" (McDonagh and Finneran, 2017:181)

While the vast majority of studies across the corpus reported positive findings, there were a subsection of empirical papers which highlighted partially or even wholly negative findings. These included quantitatively designed studies, where no statistically significant improvements in the dependent variables were reported, including 'social emotional competence' (Agley et al., 2021); reduced 'public speaking stress' (Casteleyn, 2019) and another which found singing and song-related activities had a higher impact on language learning compared to drama activities (Ludke, 2018). Other studies reported partially negative or ambiguous findings, including Erickson's interview study with US teaching artist (TA) practitioners, whose comments in many case focused on the lack of flexibility and the challenges of meeting curriculum needs in their work (Erickson, 2004). In addition Williams and Morris' qualitative study with pre-service drama teachers in Australia, reported on the challenges of integrating indigenous perspectives into the curriculum, despite a strong desire from the teachers to do so (Williams and Morris, 2022) and Hennessy's response to a UK drama student-written piece in *Research in Drama Education* emphasised the pressures on teaching unions and demands of the GCSE drama criteria within the English teaching system.

Perhaps the most damning set of negative findings comes from the systematic literature review undertaken on behalf of the UK education policy organisation the Education Endowment Foundation. Collating the findings of 200 research reports, the paper concluded that while tentative evidence suggested potential beneficial effects to integrating drama in the classroom "No studies with high levels of supporting evidence were found because of serious weaknesses in design" and therefore the 'tentative' evidence "has to be taken with caution because of weaknesses in these studies, the lack of replication and inconsistent findings across studies. More robust and rigorous evaluations are needed to test the causal links" (See and Kokotsaki, 2016:234). While this analysis is framed around a normative

approach to research design and evidence quality which has been critiqued by education (James, 2013) and cultural (Belfiore, 2012) scholarship alike, it remains a cause for concern that much of the wide-ranging benefits reported by this corpus are derived from research designed in such a way as not to be visible to systematic review processes; particularly when the relative lack of generalisable, quantitative data within drama education research, and the potentials for addressing this have been well-discussed within the field (Fleming et al., 2004; Goldstein et al., 2017; O'Toole, 2010; Omasta and Snyder-Young, 2014).

Key examples

Finally, it is worth highlighting some key studies or collections of studies that represent particularly impactful or innovative research within the corpus. The body of work around South London theatre company London Bubble's speech and language programme 'Speech Bubbles' for example, is a highly useful model for how an evidence base can be built up around an external drama intervention in ways that are both responsive to the nuances of the programme and pragmatic about speaking to the needs of policy makers and funders (Annand, 2019; Barnes, 2014, 2020; Price and Ansong, 2018). Similarly, the Drama Improves Lisbon Key Competences in Education (DICE) research project (DICE Consortium, 2010a, 2010b; Eriksson et al., 2014) is worth highlighting as a large-scale, longitudinal, largely quantitatively-designed research project that sought to build a robust evidence base for drama education's benefits on a pre-identified set of outcomes. In this case 5 of the 8 Lisbon Key Competences in Education: communication in the mother tongue, learning to learn, social and civic competences, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship and cultural awareness and expression. While the specifics of the project's findings are discussed under their relevant thematic headings below, here it is the scale and scope of the project that is emphasised. While issues of funding and precarity within academia, and arts fields specifically, represent very real challenges to drama education researchers seeking to undertake studies at this scale, the DICE project is a key example of what is possible. It is therefore worth reproducing its key recommendations here in full:

- All children should have regular access to educational theatre and drama in their schooling, mandated throughout the national curriculum and taught by well-trained theatre and drama specialists.
- Primary school (age 4/6 to 11/14) and lower secondary school (age 11/14 to 16): educational theatre and drama should be realised in the national curriculum – as a learning medium across the curriculum as well as a subject in its own right.
- Upper secondary school (age 16–18/19): educational theatre and drama should be realised in the national curriculum – as a subject in its own right, as a learning medium across the curriculum and as a university entrance qualification course.
- All teachers working in European schools, including kindergarten and nursery teachers, should have a basic knowledge of what educational theatre and drama is and how the subject area can contribute to the enhancement of teaching and learning. It cannot be taught without proper training (Eriksson et al., 2014:406-407)

Being and Becoming

The impacts and outcomes thematically collected under 'being and becoming' are the most commonly cited benefits of drama in education within the studies of this review, with 219 studies in total referencing benefits under this theme. This range of evidence covers personal, emotional and social skills, as well as empowerment in more political and civic aspects, the furthering of 'inclusion' specifically as well as moral and value-focused benefits of drama education.

Several concepts within this key theme overlap and blend together, and indeed many studies were coded for multiple sub-themes within this area; either because they were looking at the holistic nature of personal, social and civic outcomes in drama (McDonagh and Finneran, 2017; Upton, 2021; Uria-Iriarte et al., 2021) or as additional benefits alongside more curriculum-focused outcomes (Bianchi, 2024; McGregor, 2012; Wongsa and Son, 2022). Within this, there was a particular strand of studies looking at drama's benefits for second language learning which highlighted the social and cultural benefits of drama in this context, either for those learning an additional language within their native context (Cheng and Winston, 2011; Cunico, 2005) or for refugees recently arriving to a new country (Dunn and Stinson, 2012).

Recognising the intersection of these sub-themes both conceptually and as represented within the corpus, discussion of this theme is divided into the following subsections. In descending order of frequency, firstly there is 'Agency'; which focuses on studies that explore more individual cognitive and developmental aspects of drama's impact. Secondly 'Social skills and Collaboration' looks specifically at studies which evidenced the impact of educational drama on interpersonal outcomes, including implications of this for understanding the drama classroom in spatial terms. Finally 'Empowerment and Citizenship'; focusing on studies which explore the opportunities for personal, local, civic and more explicitly political empowerment through educational drama practice.

Agency

123 studies presented findings coded under the sub-theme of agency. The spread of these internationally broadly follows trends in the corpus as a whole, with the most numerous studies hailing from the USA, closely followed by the UK at 25 studies, 19 from Australia, 18 from different European countries, 11 from Asia, 7 from Canada and smaller collections of studies from other countries globally.

The Corpus

Type of Study	Case study	Ethnography	Evaluation Report	Literature Review	Mixed Methods	A/r/tography	Action Research	curriculum/practice analysis	experimental	narrative research	Phenomenological inquiry	policy review	Think Piece	Pilot Study	Qualitative Mixed Methods	Qualitative research	Randomised controlled trial	reflective practitioner	Systematic review
Global	21	4	7	7	11	1	6	1	9	1	2	2	1	4	2	30	1	12	1
UK	1	2	2	1	1		1		1		2		1	1		7		5	

Table 10 types of research design for Agency

Studies were coded under this sub-theme when they reported findings related to drama education's benefits to intrapersonal development. This included: emotional and behavioural regulation; empathy and theory of mind; identity, self-confidence and agency itself. In terms of methodology, the scope of study designs broadly represents general trends within the corpus, with qualitative designs, case study and reflective practitioner approaches being the most numerous. However, these are closely followed in frequency by mixed and experimental studies and a range of established existing metrics were used in these studies to quantify the measure of agency-related outcomes.

With studies that report on drama education's impact on emotional and behavioural outcomes, there is a clear divide between studies that report on engagement with emotional and 'affective' aspects of learning through drama (Cunico, 2005; Dunn and Stinson, 2012; Fensham and Upton, 2023) for example Samuelson et al.'s qualitative study exploring how dramatic retellings of stories supported the exploration of emotions in English second language texts (Samuelson et al., 2018); and studies that report on drama education's impact for emotional and behavioural management. The latter is more frequently emphasised in the research (Brash and Warnecke, 2009; Clarke and McLellan, 2022; Gao et al., 2022; Larson and Brown, 2007; Uştuk and İnan, 2017), with some research phrasing this in more instrumental terms as in Annand's reflection on the various evaluations of the South London 'Speech Bubbles' programme which makes reference to improvements in 'emotional conduct' (Annand, 2019) or Burton's case study of a Melbourne anti-bullying programme which highlights positively 'modified behaviour and attitudes' (Burton, 2010).

Several studies focusing on behavioural and emotional management report on drama's value in this area within early years' education contexts (Kilinc et al., 2017) with puppet-based practices being particularly mentioned here (Asimidou et al., 2021; Korošec and Zorec, 2020), though the opportunity for emotional expression within secondary drama classrooms is also referenced (Law, 2018; McCammon and Østerlind, 2011). Drama education's potential for supporting the emotional and behavioural development of several specific vulnerable and marginalised groups is mentioned, including those with autism (Mizrachi et al., 2018), in foster care (Känkänen et al., 2022) and from 'vulnerable social backgrounds' (Mavroudis and Kondoyianni, 2023).

30 studies mention the development of empathy or theory of mind as a specific outcome of drama education practice (Ho, 2017; Wells et al., 2023a). This included studies that explored empathy development via work with Shakespeare (Athanases and Sanchez, 2020) and Forum Theatre (Burton and O'Toole, 2005) specifically. This was borne out not only in smaller scale qualitative studies but also in experimental studies (Goldstein and Winner, 2012) including Greene's longitudinal study which recorded higher levels of empathy in school groups randomly assigned to attend theatre trips over 2 years compared to those watching the same stories via a movie (Greene et al., 2018).

Other studies focus on drama's impact on empathy development for a particular group or context. Within in this, empathy in relation to environmental issues is a particular focus (Carson, 2016; Farrand et al., 2019; Kotler et al., 2024; McNaughton, 2006). Other foci of study within the corpus includes empathy development in historical learning contexts (Kisida et al., 2020; Kosti et al., 2015) and empathy for Palestinians by Israeli students (Gesser-Edelsburg, 2012).

Where studies explored the impact of drama education on identity formation, research designs were much more likely to be mostly or entirely qualitative in nature, making for an evidence base around this concept which is more interpretive. Nevertheless, 27 studies included reference to identity in their findings. Studies varied

between exploring drama's impact on participants' sense of learner identity in relation to specific subjects, such as science (Kotler et al., 2024) and literacy (Campbell, 2021; Medina and Campano, 2006). Other studies focused on drama's ability to support participants' sense of identity for specific vulnerable or marginalised groups, such as those with visual impairments (Brian, 2007), 'at risk' youth (Wales, 2012) and children at risk of school exclusion (Preston, 2011). Still others took at different track and focused on drama's potential to support identity development in diverse participant groups in relation to a specific issues, such as social media use (Dahl-Tallgren, 2023). Researchers have also explored the potential for participation in drama to explore 'subversive' (Cheng and Winston, 2011) and 'unruly' identities (Ramsay, 2014), focusing not on the use of drama to support any normative outcomes, but providing a space for young people to explore and play with possibilities of identity on their own terms. Finally the range of drama approaches recorded in relation to identity work in the literature is worth noting, with a focus on the process of moving in and out of role via work with playtexts (Cheng and Winston, 2011), masks (Roy, 2020) and physical comedy slapstick (Ramsay, 2014) indicating the complexity of drama work's verbal and embodied experiences in relation to identity awareness.

Finally, within the subtheme of agency, 48 studies reported drama education impacts on participants' confidence. This was defined in several ways within the corpus, with 'confidence' itself being the most common, as discussed below. Other analogous terms included agency itself, understood as a sense of personal independence and control within participants' learning (Abraham, 2017; Dunn et al., 2012) and self-efficacy, understood as an ability to both be and feel effective in their learning choices (Kyrimi and Tsiaras, 2021; Lee et al., 2017; Whitmore, 2018).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, a key strand of studies within this area of the corpus reported on improvements in participants' confidence after taking part in public and community theatre performances (Mackey, 2012; Rajan, 2017; Scales, 2022) though interestingly a 2023 study of participants' experience of the national Coram Shakespeare School Foundation festival performance showed increases in confidence reported as an observed outcome by participating teachers, but not the students' themselves (Thomas et al., 2023). Increased confidence in relation to Shakespeare-specific drama education experiences was however a finding echoed elsewhere, with the 2024 randomised control trial of students' experiences with RSC rehearsal room approaches reporting increased confidence as learners (McCulloch and Collins, 2024) and an earlier evaluation of the RSC's Learning Performance Network programme finding increased engagement for reportedly less confident children as a key outcome (Galloway and Strand, 2010). Beyond performance, other studies reported increased confidence in drama and artistic expression as a whole (Adams, 2014; Griffin et al., 2017; Mendez-Martinez and Fernandez-Rio, 2021) with one study finding confidence was one of the 5 key benefits secondary drama students reported when surveyed about their experience of the subject (McLauchlan and Winters, 2014).

As with 'identity', findings around confidence tended towards qualitative measures grounded in researcher observations and participants' open-ended reports and reflections, which while being rich and nuanced data sources, can lack the normative credibility of more quantitative measures. Likewise generally confidence was reported either as part of a wider evaluation of a programme or intervention or as a supplementary finding alongside the study's core focus. A notable exception to this on both counts was Asimidou et al.'s mixed method study that focused specifically on drama pedagogy's impact on adolescents' self-confidence (Asimidou et al., 2021). Using the Personal Evaluation Inventory (PEI) questionnaire designed and developed by J. S. Shrauger (1990) this study reported improvements in 6 out of 7 domains of

'special self-confidence' measured: Social interaction, Mood, Physical Appearance, School Performance, Public exposure and Personal relations.

Social skills and Collaboration

Following trends of the corpus as a whole, studies that report drama education's impact on social and collaboration skills come predominantly from research in the Global North. The UK has the most studies within this sub-theme at 24, with a further 19 studies from Australia, 15 from the USA, 12 from different European countries and 9 from Canada. Asian studies are the next most numerous with 7 included here, small contributions of between 3 to a single study come from other international sources, making 99 studies total coded under this sub-theme.

The Corpus

Type of Study	Case study	Ethnography	Evaluation Report	Literature Review	Mixed Methods	Action Research	Curriculum/practice analysis	Experimental	Phenomenological inquiry	Policy review	Practice as Research	Textual analysis	Think Piece	Pilot Study	Qualitative Mixed Methods	Qualitative research	Randomised controlled trial	Reflective practitioner	Survey
Global	21	9	3	2	10	1	1	3	1	3	1	1	1	6	1	20	1	12	2
UK	5	2	1	1	1					2			1	4		3		3	1

Table 11 types of research design for social skills and collaboration

Studies were coded under the sub-theme of 'Social Skills and Collaboration' where they reported findings relating to social skills, collaboration, complexity of discussion and references to 'safe spaces'. In this order, findings within this subtheme therefore stretch between cognitive and developmental skills of interpersonal communication to more sociological conceptualisations of the classroom as a community space. This range, along with the broad scope of methodological approaches and the sheer number of studies across this corpus speaks to both the enduring academic interest of drama education's value for social development and also the variety of research framings possible when studying this connection.

39 different studies referenced findings relating to drama's impact on social skills and 33 reported findings coded under collaboration. Inevitably, there is much conceptual overlap in these two concepts as reported in the literature, but typically 'social skills' appeared to refer to benefits to individual participants' capacity for social interaction and engagement, while collaboration as a benefit was more often reported in relation to specific tasks and activities. Findings in these two areas covered a range of subject contexts such as language learning (Alasmari and Alshae'el, 2020; Anderson and Chung, 2011; Dawoud et al., 2024; Pakkar-Hull, 2014), STEM education (Dawson et al., 2009; Hatton, 2024) music (Pitts, 2007) literacy skills (Welsh, 2017) and within

digital and ICT learning (O'Toole and Dunn, 2008; Strakšiene and Baziukaite, 2009; Zhang et al., 2009). This suggests drama's value as a holistic learning experience across the curriculum. Drama's impact on specific collaborative skills in written and oral storytelling was emphasised in several studies (Cremin et al., 2018; Gallagher and Ntelioglou, 2011; Raphael, 2009; Rowe et al., 2018). Similarly studies focusing on experiences within the drama classroom itself reported that both teachers (Davis and Phillips, 2020) and crucially students (McCammon and Østerlind, 2011; McLauchlan and Winters, 2014) valued the opportunity to develop social skills within their drama teaching and learning, a finding that was echoed in studies reporting on increased collaboration skills developed through performance projects (Thomas et al., 2023; Upton, 2021; Walan, 2021; Whitaker, 2016).

Drama's ability to support social skills has been specifically studied in early years (Gao et al., 2022; Harden, 2015a; Karaolis, 2023; Kilinc et al., 2017) and specialist education contexts (Kempe and Tissot, 2012; Mendez-Martinez and Fernandez-Rio, 2021; Peter, 2009, 2021; Trowsdale and Hayhow, 2015) as well as with vulnerable learners (Känkänen et al., 2022) where drama's imaginative, in-role and embodied qualities have been valued for their potential to support conflict resolution and teamworking skills (Catterall, 2007). Likewise the impact on learners' social skills has been reported in studies looking at drama's potential for exploring difference and conflict between peers and within local contexts (Law et al., 2017; Layachi et al., 2024; Uria-Iriarte et al., 2021).

Preston's reflective practitioner study into the use of drama interventions with excluded secondary school students in London makes an important critical point in this otherwise largely positive evidence base, drawing attention to "the limitations of applied drama interventions promising integration and inclusion against the material realities of urban disenfranchisement and misrecognition" (Preston, 2011:251), arguing practitioners and researchers should be alive to the ways such projects can unwittingly focus on learners progress in terms of dominant models of 'engagement' or 'disengagement' and minimise the impact of macro discourses of race and power. Some studies within this area of research focus specifically on collaboration in terms of empowerment and enfranchisement; looking at drama's capacity to build collective and critical hope, joy and care (Law, 2018) and specifically highlighting Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed as a framework for supporting this type of collaboration work (Nelson, 2010).

Finally, a small number of studies emphasise drama's capacity to support the role of the teacher as an active and equal collaborator with their students (McDonagh and Finneran, 2017; Wongsa and Son, 2022) and additionally students as active collaborators within the research process itself (Sallis, 2014) suggesting rich potential for co-production both within drama classroom and research spaces.

Drama's impact on facilitating complex discussions was another key area of social and collaborative benefits reported in the corpus. This was explored in relation to TIE, with an early case study from Joe Winston exploring how TIE's combination of "aesthetic form with values education [functions] so that the two re-enforce one another" via openness, challenge and offering multiple avenues of entry for young audiences within the 'thickness' and ambiguity of plot (Winston, 2005:319). Notably, considering the observations from Preston's study referenced above, Winston focuses on how secondary school participant audiences' responses were 'darkly playful', resisting normative institutionalised learnings from the sex education TIE piece under study but utilising the aesthetic and moral ambiguities to forge their own meanings through complex discussions during the forum theatre-style sessions. Other studies have similarly highlighted the fostering of complex discussions from TIE (Gallagher and Service, 2010) and specifically Theatre of the Oppressed practices (Desai, 2017).

This space for ambiguity and possibility as a framework for complex discussions is something likewise emphasised in studies focusing on process drama work (Brash and Warnecke, 2009; Carroll and Cameron, 2009; Shenfield, 2016; Wells et al., 2023a, 2023b). Drama's value for supporting complex discussion around particularly challenging topics such as religion (Mavroudis and Kondoyianni, 2023) and gender identity (Hatton, 2013) is referenced. Still other research demonstrates how drama work can support teachers to develop the capacity to engage in and facilitate complex classroom discussions (Cahill, 2012; To et al., 2011)

A final area coded under social skills are studies which discuss drama education's capacity to support the creation of 'safe spaces', with research reporting this occurring both within in-person (Caldas, 2018; Lambert et al., 2016) and online (Balt, 2024) drama-based classrooms. The idea of the theatrical ensemble as an authentic model of educational safe space is also referenced (Enciso et al., 2011; Neelands, 2009). This benefit of safe space creation within education is various framed as the experience of being 'seen' and 'listened to' (Cooper, 2004) but also via taking refuge in the 'pretend' environment of drama and performance (Griffin et al., 2017) and again as an opportunity to confidently occupy the 'in-between' (Sams, 2024). Stephenson's study complexifies this concept still further, offering the term 'brave spaces' rather than safe ones to describe social justice-focused drama practices that seek to give platforms to learners 'counterstories' of their experiences and perceptions (Stephenson et al., 2024). This small but rich range of studies chimes with wider education reports that have framed the value of arts pedagogy's capacity for creating hybrid, liminal, temporary 'third spaces' within normative school and cultural practices (Thomson et al., 2012).

Empowerment and Citizenship

Studies related to civic and political empowerment were the least frequently coded sub-theme within 'Being and Becoming', with 96 studies addressing these areas in their findings. Within this 'empowerment' was typically understood as students 'finding their voice' within their own communities (Gardiner and Anderson, 2015) and the wider cultural and political world (Adams, 2014). 'Citizenship' was similarly understood in more localised expressions such as public life within the school (Gourd and Gourd, 2011), local community (Bianchi, 2024; Enciso et al., 2011) or in wider civic and political contexts. Finally other, less frequently referenced finding codes were included under this sub-theme: 'inclusion', 'community of practice' and 'values and morals'.

The Corpus

Type of study	Case study	Ethnography	Evaluation Report	Literature Review	Mixed Methods	Action Research	experimental	Think Piece	Pilot Study	Qualitative Mixed Methods	Qualitative research	Randomised controlled trial	reflective practitioner	Survey	Other qualitative approach
Global	16	8	1	3	7	5	3	2	2	2	18	1	20	1	7
UK	6	1			1	1		1	1		5		6		

Table 12 types of research design for Empowerment, Citizenship and Inclusion

As acknowledged earlier within this report, the corpus of evidence for the values and benefits of drama within education broadly skews towards a qualitative methodological preference. Perhaps unsurprisingly for studies concerned with personal, political and civic empowerment, that is particularly the case here. There is a focus on smaller scale qualitative and individual reflective practitioner studies, with the limitations on generalisability this implies. However, these findings are consistent with larger-scale studies represented here, including the series of international ethnographic studies headed up by Canadian professor Kathleen Gallagher and the large scale experimental European study DICE (Eriksson et al., 2014). Within the UK portion of this corpus, it is notable there were no experimental or randomised control trial design studies included, this could both highlight the challenges of designing, funding and implementing robust and relevant large-scale quantitative studies in this more politicised and critical area of drama education research and also point towards an opportunity for the UK to further develop research in this area.

A range of international locations are represented in the data, including South America (Berselli and Lulkin, 2017), Africa (Ben Terdayet and Jebahi, 2019) as well as findings from India (Gallagher and Sahni, 2019) and Israel (Gesser-Edelsburg, 2005, 2012) in addition to global north contexts that are typical centres of educational drama and theatre research such as the UK (22 studies), Australia (17), USA (16), and Canada (11).

Within the 52 studies containing findings coded under empowerment and political awareness, 'empowerment' was understood in a variety of ways, roughly on a scale from a more personal 'finding your voice' (Harden, 2015a), through 'communal power' (Nelson, 2010) and active community awareness (Kipling, 2018) to the more overly politicised critical pedagogy (Kincheloe, 2008) concept of 'conscientisation' (Villanueva and O'Sullivan, 2020). A repeated claim within these studies is the potential of drama education to provide space for participants to 'contest and subvert' (Sallis, 2011) typical social roles on their own terms and to critically explore their socially-contextualised identities (Rivière, 2005). Studies have focused on the implications of this for raising engaged awareness of indigenous issues in different national contexts (Hradsky, 2017; Marunda-Piki, 2020). Mailloux's small-scale literature review, collating the findings of 3 past projects, offers a framework for *how* drama supports personal, communal and political empowerment by suggesting the evocation of empathy as creating an opportunity to challenge complicity in the "cisheteronormative structures of oppression" (Mailloux, 2023:15); a connection that would seem borne out by the 4 other studies connecting empathy and empowerment within the corpus (Burton and O'Toole, 2005; Gesser-Edelsburg, 2012; Greene et al., 2018; Kotler et al., 2024). An early qualitative study focusing on drama practices in multilingual classrooms in the US highlights the fictional framing of drama as significant here, describing how: "students mine [fictional and actual] cultural experiences to arrive at more complete and incisive understandings of how they are positioned by others, including educators, administrators, and policy makers" (Medina and Campano, 2006:339-340).

Notions of citizenship and inclusion are explored in a variety of ways within these studies, with 37 coded for findings in this area. Some focus on drama's value for exploring cultural diversity and belonging in general terms (Carter and Sallis, 2016; Neelands, 2009; Xu, 2023), including its potential to support integrated education through and for democracy in school contexts (Hammer, 2023a; Kusk, 2017; McNaughton, 2010, 2014; Simpson, 2010). Others take a more focused look at drama's potential for exploring and raising awareness of specific inequalities (Connolly and Hosken, 2006; García-Mateus, 2021) including issues of race (Fitzpatrick, 2011; Yilmaz et al., 2024), colonialism and refugee experiences (Aitken et al., 2007; Robinson, 2016), cultural conflict (Uria-Iriarte et al., 2021), gender inequality

and LGBTQ+ representation (Caldas, 2018; Gallagher and Sahni, 2019; Terret, 2013), bullying (Donohoe and O'Sullivan, 2015; Gourd and Gourd, 2011; O'Toole and Burton, 2005) and place and ecology (Bianchi, 2024; Gallagher et al., 2024; Mutlu, 2021; Wake and Birdsall, 2020). There are also studies that focus more on drama's potential for inspiring active criticality and direct social activism (Gardiner and Anderson, 2015). A longitudinal study exploring the impact of attendance of a performing arts festival suggests these social and civic impacts can continue at least 12 months after participating in drama-based experiences (Schiller, 2005).

In terms of the types of educational drama and theatre practice explored in this area of the corpus, there is an emphasis on Theatre of the Oppressed and other Augusto Boal approaches as well as process drama practice (Burton and O'Toole, 2005; Gourd and Gourd, 2011; Hammer, 2023b; Hatton et al., 2016; Terret, 2013; Xu, 2023). However trips to or visits from theatre performances (either with or without accompanying workshops) are also included here (Blazar, 2011; Gesser-Edelsburg et al., 2006) as are other performance arts practices such as playwriting (Gardiner and Anderson, 2015) and devising (Fensham and Upton, 2023; Wake and Birdsall, 2020; Wessels, 2014).

In terms of other, more precise concepts within empowerment and citizenship, drama education's impact on moral and values education is referenced in 11 studies (for example: Kılıç and Oğuz Namdar, 2021; Umirkhanovich et al., 2022; Xiajing, 2024); another 11 studies cite drama's potential for fostering educational communities of practice (for example Whitaker, 2016) and 'inclusion' is specifically referenced in the findings of 21 studies. Across these studies, inclusion is discussed variously as a pedagogic practice supported by drama education (Karaolis, 2020; Kilinc et al., 2017; Watson et al., 2016); drama work that acknowledges and celebrates diversity and inclusion (Mavroudis and Kondoyianni, 2023; Powell, 2021; Rosler, 2008) and projects, programmes and practices that have successfully provided inclusion for specific groups, particularly those with special educational needs (Law et al., 2017; Layachi et al., 2024; Ragnarsdóttir and Þorkelsdóttir, 2012; Roy, 2020). Alongside this range of positive findings however, research tempers this with recognition of the complexities of facilitating inclusive drama spaces, cautioning "This may not always be easy and requires effective educational routines… [teacher] competence and experience." (Storsve et al., 2021:77)

Likewise, Gallagher's 2016 policy review of drama's place in the Ontario curriculum emphasises the active role of teachers in maximising the potential of drama to support empowerment, citizenship and inclusion within education, commenting: "making social relations well, confronting those many moments of discomfort and disconnection that are bound to occur in any lively and diverse drama classroom, will require the ongoing efforts of skilled teachers" in order to achieve a drama curriculum that invites young people to "contemplate the diverse world in which they live and learn" and "examine and question perspectives, and to consider issues of power and exclusion." (Gallagher, 2016a:34)

Literacy

The findings collated here under literacy refer not just to literature and language arts as school subjects, but also to educational literacy practices in a broader sense. As such the 116 studies coded under this theme speak towards drama education's impact on a range of literacy skills; namely critical thinking, creativity, cultural and aesthetic expressions as well as reading, writing and oracy. Collated together thematically here, these outcomes and benefits of drama education are analogous to many aspects of the CLA's recent capabilities framework element of 'Creative And Critical Thinking' encompassing creativity, imagination, curiosity, originality,

interpretation, independent critical thinking, reflective judgement, meaning making (O'Hanlon and Bacon, 2025).

Critical Thinking

In the 14 studies coded under critical thinking, the majority came from non-UK researchers. With 4 Australian studies, 3 from Greece and 1 apiece from Turkey, France and China. While several other finding codes and themes – for example multi-modal literacy, interpreting texts, discussion complexity etc – could be said to conceptually speak to critical thinking, it is notable this is a relatively recent and currently small-scale area of drama education research focus and specifically one that has been afforded little explicit study within a UK context.

The Corpus

Type of Study	Case study	Ethnography	Mixed Methods	Action Research	quasi-experimental	Pilot Study	Qualitative research	reflective practitioner
Global	4	1	1	2	1	1	2	2
				1				

Table 13 types of research design for Critical Thinking

The majority of studies coded for critical thinking are not focused on this concept within the study's aims, but report it as a benefit of drama education alongside the study's core focus. For example, in Gallagher and Ntelioglou's study exploring of drama's role in supporting more diverse definitions of literacy for young people (Gallagher and Ntelioglou, 2011) or Feng's exploration of drama's impact on moral education in China (Feng, 2022).

Several other studies reported critical thinking benefits with drama education in specific subject teaching contexts. For example as an aspect of science education (McNaughton, 2014; Nicholas and Ng, 2008) or literacy (Macy, 2016; Teoh, 2015). Similarly, Gerkens et al. reports on drama' benefits for developing academic language skills, including critical thinking (Cleeve Gerkens et al., 2024). Two studies also explored drama's impact on critical thinking skills through digital learning contexts (Hatton and Nicholls, 2018; Maloney, 2022).

There are also findings that demonstrate drama's ability to support critical thinking skills with for early years children specifically (Çiftçi and Aykaç, 2022). Freebody's exploration of discourse analysis as an approach to drama education research methodology gives a suggestion that it is the opportunities within drama pedagogy to "seek ambiguity rather than clarity" (Freebody, 2013:73) that facilitates the benefits to critical thinking skills.

Finally, while the majority of these studies report on observed critical thinking gains from a case study, ethnographic, qualitative or reflective practitioner perspective, others take larger scale and robust measures of critical thinking, such as in Dima et al.'s mixed methods study with 400 primary school children in Greece which used a control group along with pre and post testing with a range of existing critical thinking

measurement instruments to show benefits to critical thinking skills, defined as: subtraction, induction, reliability, observation, identification and troubleshooting (Dima et al., 2020). This indicates one potential route to further explore this developing area of drama education research.

Creativity, Cultural and Aesthetic Expressions

For the 50 studies with findings coded under creativity, cultural or aesthetic expressions, in contrast to overall trends within this RER corpus the largest number are from Asian contexts (13 in total, with 5 from China, 3 from Hong Kong, 2 from South Korea and 1 each from Japan, Singapore and Taiwan), then 11 from Australia, 9 from different European countries, 6 from the UK, 4 from the USA, then 3 each from Canada and Turkey and a final 1 from Africa.

Corpus

Type of study design	Case study	Ethnography	Evaluation Report	Literature Review	Mixed Methods	A/r/tography	Action Research	Phenomenological inquiry	policy review	Experimental	Pilot Study	Qualitative research	reflective practitioner	Survey
Global	12	5	3	3	1	1	2	2	2	1	3	9	5	1
UK	1								2		2	1		

Table 14 Types of research design for creativity, cultural and aesthetics

Creativity and synonymous terms: 'imagination', 'innovation', 'freedom of/self expression' are a frequently cited outcome within this corpus. There is some conceptual overlap here with studies discussed in the section 'Drama and Theatre Disciplinary Knowledge and Skills' below, which includes the code 'artistic expression'. However, studies were coded under this sub theme when they either referenced creativity directly as an aptitude in general terms, or discussed drama's potential to support the development of creativity specifically as a literacy or learning skill. In the majority of cases, these outcomes are reported as supplementary or in parallel to the studies' core focus (Gibson, 2015; Ho, 2017; Kusk, 2017; Lin, 2010), suggesting researchers typically understand creativity as an integral aspect of drama education experiences. Alongside this however, there are studies in which the nature of drama education's relationship to creativity is the analytic focus. For example Lambert et al.'s ethnography of secondary drama classrooms, where they frame creativity as a key factor in facilitating critical and emancipatory 'safe spaces' in the drama classroom (Lambert et al., 2016).

Asian studies within this sub-theme advocate for the value of drama pedagogy by demonstrating drama's potential for supporting both traditional cultural learning (Chi et al., 2021; Sun et al., 2023; Wang, 2017; Xu and Zhou, 2021) and learning grounded in creativity, particularly for language learning outcomes (Araki-Metcalfe, 2007; Gattenhof, 2006).

Creativity is also discussed as holistic extension to learning in other contexts, such as science (Nicholas and Ng, 2008; Walan, 2021) literacy (Gallagher and Ntelioglou, 2011; Ramirez and Jimenez-Silva, 2015; Teoh, 2015) and language learning; focusing on the opportunities for authentic creativity and cultural outcomes via drama pedagogy (To et al., 2011; Uştuk and İnan, 2017). Studies also emphasise the potential of drama-based approaches to support creative communication and problem-solving for learners with autism in particular (Kempe and Tissot, 2012; Mendez-Martinez and Fernandez-Rio, 2021; Peter, 2009).

Finally, although it's interpretation in education research, policy and practice is contested (Enser, 2019; Mansell, 2019) increased cultural capital is referenced as an outcome both in performance (Thomas et al., 2023) and classroom drama projects (Medina and Campano, 2006).

Reading, Writing and Oracy

Of the 65 studies that explore drama education's impact of reading, writing and oracy outcomes, the vast majority are from either the USA (24 studies) or the UK (20 studies), suggesting an ongoing research impetus to focus on raising literary attainment in these two national contexts. Alongside these, 9 studies are from Australia, 3 each hail from Europe, Canada and Asia, 2 from Africa and just 1 from Turkey.

The Corpus

Types of Study	Case study	Ethnography	Evaluation Report	Literature Review	Mixed Methods	Discourse Analysis	Grounded research methods	Experimental	Pilot Study	Qualitative Mixed Methods	Qualitative research	Randomised controlled trial	Reflective practitioner
Global	13	2	5	5	6	1	1	6	3	1	11	2	7
UK	5	1	4		3		1	2	1		2		1

Table 15 Types of research design for reading, writing and oracy

Compared to the single experimental study within studies coded for creativity, cultural and aesthetic expressions, studies in this sub-section have a slightly higher representation of experimental, mixed method and even randomised controlled trial designs. These used such measures as number of total words (NTW), number of different words (NDW) and number of utterances (UTT) in written language samples (Anderson, 2012); Lexical, Syntactical and Semantic analyses on student writing samples (McCulloch and Collins, 2024); and the Hamburg Reading Test and ELFE 1e6 reading test (Stanat et al., 2012).

Studies focusing on the literacy skills of writing, reading (including text interpretation), oracy and storytelling have been coded under this sub-theme. In addition, studies

which specifically explored drama education as an approach to teaching and learning Shakespeare have been coded here as an aspect textual interpretation. While the majority of studies focus on just one aspect of these literacy skills areas, there are a minority which look at these in combination, highlighting drama education's capacity to support positive outcomes in a holistic range of literacy measures (Adomat, 2012; Fleming et al., 2004; Rieg and Paquette, 2009). Within this, the concept of multi-modal or 'complex' literacy is particularly referenced in relation to drama education, highlighting the combined creativity, criticality and collaboration of drama-based practice to support rich, authentic and multi-faceted engagement with literature (Beaumont, 2020; Campbell, 2021; Cremin et al., 2018; Gallagher and Ntelioglou, 2011). The embodied and dialogic nature of drama work is also referenced as a factor within this (Medina et al., 2021). Other studies chart how this functions to 'create possibility' in the literature classroom (Macro, 2015), and particularly opens up opportunities for empowerment and critical or alternative pedagogies (Hatton, 2013; Ramirez and Jimenez-Silva, 2015).

In terms of writing outcomes, studies have recorded a wide range of benefits from drama education activities across the writing process, from pre-writing and generating text (Ho, 2017), through stronger character development (Duffy, 2014), academic language development (Cleeve Gerkens, 2024), productivity and specificity (Anderson, 2012) and supporting writing as a social activity (Harden, 2015a). Writing in role has been highlighted in research as a technique particularly well suited to enhancing writing outcomes (Crumpler, 2005; Dalby and Burton, 2013; Harden, 2015b). Irish's study collating the reflections of UK English teachers utilising active approaches to teach Shakespeare records observations that these practices supported improved written responses and higher GCSE English grades (Irish, 2011) a connection that is echoed in a 2018 evaluation report on the RSC's Learning Performance Network programme, though the authors advise caution in this link, commenting "There were… strong indications that working with the RSC has a wider impact on written work and examination results, although a minority of schools were neutral on this outcome" (Lindsay et al., 2018:4)

Within the corpus there are a range of reading outcomes that researchers connect with drama education experiences, including learners undertaking more reading; small increases in positive attitude to reading overall (Güngör, 2008); enhanced reading capabilities (Xu and Zhou, 2021) and the value of process drama approaches to support 'embodied reading' (Medina et al., 2021). Studies also present findings exploring drama's impact on specific interpretive processes within this, from social and character interpretation (Adomat, 2009, 2012) through emotional engagement (Samuelson et al., 2018) to increased personalised interpretations (Bryer, 2024). Finally drama's benefits in interpreting a range of text types is highlighted, from storybooks (Mayes et al., 2020), poetry (Wang, 2017; Zhou, 2023) and playtexts (Kelman, 2011).

With 23 studies, storytelling and oracy is the most frequently coded finding within this sub-theme, perhaps unsurprising given drama's key focus on creative spoken performance. Studies in this area highlight a range of specific oracy outcomes, from improvements in story retelling (Schmidt et al., 2024) to increases in spoken vocabulary use (Joseph, 2019; Mardirosian and Lewis, 2009). The cluster of studies around London-based Theatre company London Bubble's 'Speech Bubbles' project, which focuses on oracy outcomes in young primary age children, recorded benefits including: improvement in learning, speaking and listening, improvements in confidence, social interaction and participation as well as enhanced development in speaking, listening, reading and writing outcomes (Annand, 2019). Later interview-based research with past project participants supports these findings, with improvements to listening, speaking and participation skills reported, as well

increased confidence in general terms being reported by respondents (Barnes, 2020). As with many areas of personal, social and communication-focused findings within this corpus, the particular benefits of drama-based practice on oracy skills for young people with additional needs is emphasised (McAtamney, 2021; Peter, 2021; Trowsdale and Hayhow, 2015).

While there is an argument that the teaching of Shakespeare does not require any particular specialist pedagogic approach (Thompson and Turchi, 2016) as the only writer mandated by name in the English national curriculum and a global cultural phenomenon, it is worth focusing on what the research shows with regards to drama education's impact on teaching and learning Shakespeare specifically. The RSC is a key contributor to research in this area, with a series of studies focused on their Learning Performance Network programme, which worked with schools over time to develop sustained engagement with rehearsal-based approaches to teaching Shakespear,; consistently highlighting the integrated cultural, social and educational benefits of the scheme (Galloway and Strand, 2010; Irish, 2011; Lindsay et al., 2018; Thomson et al., 2010) as well as more recent research focused on writing outcomes (McCulloch and Collins, 2024). Other major UK Shakespeare organisations have supported research into their education programmes, such Shakespeare's Globe (Athanases and Sanchez, 2020) and Coram Shakespeare Schools Foundation (Thomas et al., 2023) both again with findings that support the holistic value of approaching Shakespeare through drama-based practice. These findings have been supported elsewhere by smaller studies both within the UK (Powell, 2021) and beyond (Kelman, 2011; Kelman and Rafe, 2013).

Meta Skills

The theme of Meta Skills, following the definition from Skills Development Scotland, can be understood as "innate, timeless, higher-order skills that create adaptive learners and promote success in whatever context the future brings" (Skills Development Scotland, 2018:7) The term has been used here to collate codes which refer to benefits that are not directly personal or social in nature, but neither refer to curriculum subject specific outcomes.

Motivation and engagement

Overall 62 studies were coded under motivation, enthusiasm, engagement or enjoyment. Of these, 18 were focused on the UK, with 14 from the USA, and smaller groups of 8-1 studies from other international contexts.

The Corpus

Types of Study	Case study	Ethnography	Evaluation Report	Literature Review	Mixed Methods	Action Research	Experimental	Hermeneutic phenomenological	Think Piece	Pilot Study	Qualitative Mixed Methods	Qualitative research	Randomised controlled trial	Reflective practitioner	Systematic review
Global	11	1	3	2	13	4	4	1	1	2	1	9	2	7	1
UK	3	1	2		5		1		1	1				3	

Table 16 Types of research design for motivation and engagement

The wide range of research designs represented under this sub-theme are in line with the corpus as a whole, unsurprising as the findings codes 'motivation', 'engagement', 'enthusiasm' and 'enjoyment', while being the 5th most common sub-theme overall, were almost always reported as a secondary or supplementary finding within research. In short, a great many studies observed increased levels of motivation and engagement as a result of drama education practice, but very little research has directly studied this link in and of itself. For example, increased motivation is reported as part of drama's impact on second language learning (Alasmari and Alshae'el, 2020; Early and Yeung, 2009), STEM subjects (Darlington, 2010; McGregor, 2014) and music history (Stephens, 2013) as well as within broader learning skills such as reading (Samuelson et al., 2018).

Two studies notably reported increased enjoyment and engagement as a result of drama education with no other discernible impact: a randomised controlled trial looking at the impact of a drama-based anti-bullying programme on participants' 'social emotional competence' (Agley et al., 2021) and an action research study into the impacts of 'Drama for Schools', a US teacher CPD programme, which stated though teachers reported high levels of student engagement "findings were largely non-conclusive about the impact of arts integration on student outcomes" (Cawthon et al., 2012:217).

Alongside this, other research within the corpus emphasises the inherently valuable nature of engaging learning experiences, drawing connections between fun, active learning and a sense of educational freedom and agency (McSwain, 2014; Thorkelsdóttir, 2023) and highlighting the value of finding joy in drama education as enacted moments of care (Law, 2018). Research has also shown that drama-prompted motivation can have concrete impacts on school attendance (Brouillette et al., 2014; Burton, 2010). Finally studies have focused on drama education's capacity to prompt motivation for those learners who face added challenges engaging with education, including learners with autism (Loyd, 2015), those new to learning English and learners with physical and learning disabilities (Kilinc et al., 2017; Johnels et al., 2024).

Co-construction of Knowledge

23 studies have findings coded under the theme of co-construction of knowledge. Of these, the majority came from the USA with 8 studies, followed by 6 from Australia, 5 from different countries in Europe, just 2 from the UK and finally 1 each from Turkey and Canada.

The Corpus

Type of study	Case study	Ethnography	Literature Review	Mixed Methods	Action Research	Phenomenological inquiry	Pilot Study	Qualitative research
Global	10	1	2	2	1	1	3	3
UK	1						1	

Table 17 Types of research design for co-construction of knowledge

A small but notable number of studies reported findings making connections between drama education and the co-construction of knowledge between peers or between learners and teachers. This draws from the educational theory of social constructivism, (Bruner, 1972; Vygotsky, 1978), which emphasises the communal and collaborative nature of education as well as its active relationship to broader society and social norms.

Within this, studies emphasise the collaborative and dynamic nature of drama practice, discussing how this can support collective, embodied and negotiated meaning making (Dawson et al., 2009; Donelan et al., 2006; Varelas et al., 2010, 2022). In Gerkens' recent Australian case study of a teacher using drama-rich pedagogy in elementary science teaching, they discuss how this approach facilitated 'making visible' students' prior knowledge and drawing on this to build connections to more abstract concepts (Cleeve Gerkens, 2024). McDonagh and Finneran's phenomenological inquiry into primary teachers' experiences of co-creation in the drama classroom emphasise both the opportunities and challenges of this approach (McDonagh and Finneran, 2017).

While much of this evidence relating to drama as co-constructivist experience is drawn from smaller scale qualitative studies, which arguably limits the generalisability of their claims, the 2 mixed methods studies included under this sub-theme align with these more qualitative findings, emphasising opportunities for more 'elaborative and dialogic' teaching within drama pedagogy (Anderson and Berry, 2015; Gallagher and Service, 2010).

Other Meta-Skills

Of the studies which mention drama's capacity to support other meta-skills, the largest number came from the UK with 13, followed by 11 from the USA, 4 each from different countries in Europe and Asia, then small groups of between 3 to 1 from other global contexts.

The Corpus

Types of Study	Case study	Ethnography	Evaluation Report	Literature Review	Mixed Methods	Action Research	Experimental	Historical overview	Practice as Research	Think Piece	Pilot Study	Qualitative Mixed Methods	Qualitative research	Reflective practitioner	Survey
Global	6	2	1	4	4	2	3	1	1	1	4	2	2	4	3
UK	3	1	1	1	1					1	2	1		1	1

Table 18 Types of research design for other meta-skills

40 studies reported impacts of drama education on other meta-skills not related to motivation or co-construction. These cover a range of specific skills and impacts. Studies looked at cognitive and developmental skills such as the ability to focus (Anderson and Berry, 2015; Jackson, 2005; McSwain, 2014; Peter, 2021); motor skills and bodily expression (Medina et al., 2021; Zhou, 2023) particularly for SEN (Goldstein et al., 2019) and early years (Hope-Southcott, 2013) learners; and memory ranging from recall of specific story or curriculum content (Mages, 2008; Schmidt et al., 2024; Walan and Enochsson, 2019) to improvements in executive memory function (Çiftçi and Aykaç, 2022). Drama's capacity to support problem-solving has also been noted within the corpus (Hammer, 2023a; Tam, 2021; Walan, 2021). Drama's connection to meta-cognition skills has also been observed in a small number of studies (Catterall, 2007; Eriksson et al., 2014) with O'Mara's case study of the intersections between drama and digital gaming drawing on Schön's concept of 'reflection in action' (1983) to discuss how the experiential qualities of drama can support meta-cognition skills (O'Mara, 2012).

Research has also demonstrated links been drama education and cross-curricular activities or interdisciplinary learning (Ben Terdayet and Jebahi, 2019; Galloway and Strand, 2010; Kim, 2017; McNaughton, 2010); the development of research skills (Asiedu and Brew, 2016; Kosti et al., 2015; McGregor, 2012); and career-related impacts (Mehta-Diston, 2018; Prior, 2010; Zhang et al., 2009).

Transfer of Educational Drama

This section of the report presents studies which explored drama education's capacity to support learning outcomes in other curriculum areas. These studies, taken together – 78 in total – raise questions when compared to the 37 studies that focus on learning outcomes within drama as a curriculum subject itself on the implications for this imbalance between research focus between exploring drama education's more

intrinsic learning outcomes and its transferability as a technique to support other subjects.

Yet, it is also important to recognise that within the practice and scholarly history of drama education there is a long-standing understanding of drama as a pedagogic form: a way of teaching and learning in and of itself (Bolton, 1986; Caldwell Cook, 1917; Slade, 1954; Way, 1967). While there are relevant historical and contemporary debates about the implications for education policy and practice of positioning drama both as a *way of* teaching and a subject in its own right, this report takes the position that research into and advocacy for the transfer of learning benefits from drama to other curriculum subjects can and should exist alongside understandings of its importance as an artistic discipline, with a rich set of theories, histories, knowledges, skills and cultural traditions within its own right.

Language Learning

There are 32 studies included that report on the benefits of drama for second and additional language learning, with just 4 of these focusing on a UK context. The others have a global reach, with 9 European-focused studies, 6 from different countries within Asia, 4 from the USA, 3 each from Canada and Australia and a further 2 each from Africa and Saudi Arabia.

The Corpus

Type of study	Case study	Evaluation Report	Literature Review	Mixed Methods	Action Research	experimental	Interviews	Practice as Research	quasi-experimental	Qualitative research	Randomised controlled trial	reflective practitioner
Global	2	1	3	6	3	2	1	1	4	7	1	2
UK			1						1	1	1	

Table 19 Types of research design for second language learning studies

While positive impact of drama on participants language learning skills was most commonly reported in general terms within this section of the corpus, often referencing increased enthusiasm and motivation as key outcomes, there was also a wide range of specific language learning outcomes cited. The most common of these being pronunciation, vocabulary and complexity of language with 4 studies each reporting this as an outcome of drama-based second language teaching. Other specific outcomes included: better retention of target language, more accurate use of punctuation and writing more generally, fluency, discourse patterns, accuracy, confidence, emotion-focused vocabulary gains, connections with multi-modal and embodied expressions of language and gains in reading skills in the target language. This demonstrates the range of impacts recorded and also strengthens the evidence

base around drama's benefits for oracy development more broadly, as reported under the literacy theme in this report.

This range of measures, along with the methodological variety detailed above, including a randomised control trial as well as a number of experimental, quasi-experimental and mixed methods indicates a relatively robust level of evidence in this area of drama's educational benefits.

Within these different methodological approaches it is possible to see a corresponding difference in how drama as an educational variable is operationalised. As a general trend, more quantitative and experimental studies take a more instrumental or fixed 'intervention' framing of drama, often using a specific, acronymised term such as 'dramatic arts intervention' (Anderson and Loughlin, 2014), STARS (STudent Activating Role-playing gameS) (Geneuss et al., 2020), CD (contextual drama) (Zhang et al., 2019), or the 2019 randomised control trial which focused on what it called the 'new' technique of VAD (Vocabulary Acquisition via Drama) (Kalogirou et al., 2019). Given papers exploring drama's impact on second language learning appear almost at the beginning of the timescale for this RER (Cunico, 2005) these framings of specific drama-based internation as fixed and novel has the potential for the evidence base to shift away from a focus on drama's more holistic and creative legacy as an artistic and pedagogic practice, a concern practitioners and scholars in the field have expressed in the past (Bowell and Heap, 2010; Dunn and Stinson, 2011).

In comparison, the trend within the qualitative and reflective practitioner studies is to focus on the impact on second language learning with more holistic and explicitly theatrical projects, such as playwriting, devising and performance (Asiedu and Brew, 2016; Bora, 2019; Carson, 2016), partnerships with arts organisations (Gattenhof, 2006), playful exploration of existing playtexts (Cheng and Winston, 2011) and longer term projects looking at teacher collaboration and training partnerships (McAtamney, 2021; To et al., 2011). A key exception to this methodological divide is a 2022 experimental study charting the impact of a 10 week playtext-based performance project with final year high school students in Italy (Bora, 2022), demonstrating there is further scope to capture systematic, quantitative education data within holistic performance-focused projects.

In closing this sub theme, it is also relevant to note research into drama's impact on second language learning has been a consistent enough interest to prompt several literature reviews collating research on the topic (Belliveau and Kim, 2013; Mages, 2008; Uştuk and İnan, 2017), including a special edition of the journal *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre* in 2011 (Stinson and Winston, 2011). Research also emphasised that drama offers an alternative to 'deficit' models of novice language learners, particularly in refugee contexts (Elliott et al., 2019).

STEM

There are 38 studies that explore the benefits of drama education for learning within STEM subjects, though these focus exclusively on science and maths education. Almost a third of these studies (11) come from the UK, with the USA and Australia each contributing 7 each, followed by Europe and Turkey with 3 studies each. Two studies come from New Zealand, a further 2 focus on international contexts and researchers from Africa, Canada and Israel each contribute one study.

The Corpus

Type of study	Case study	Ethnography	Mixed Methods	Action Research	Discourse Analysis	Quasi-experimental	Pilot Study	Qualitative Research	Reflective Practitioner
Global	12	1	7	3	1	3	3	6	2
UK	2		3	1		1	2	1	1

Table 20 Types of research design for STEM learning

Within these studies that focus on the benefits of drama education for STEM learning there are several key approaches explored. Firstly is the study of the use of (typically) science-focused Theatre in Education performance projects. These range from more 'lo-fi' solo in-role performances as historical scientists (Stagg, 2020) to larger scale productions (Burgin et al., 2016; Stagg and Verde, 2019) supporting learning in such topics as atoms and matter (Peleg and Baram-Tsabari, 2011) findings in these studies describe how the performance of scientific individuals and process can humanise otherwise potentially abstract ideas and support accessibility and engagement.

Secondly, a series of studies explore the use of drama-based pedagogy practices in the science classroom. Across the age range from early years transition classes (Harden, 2015a) through primary/elementary age, which was most commonly researched context in this area (Cleeve Gerkens, 2024; McGregor, 2014), to a smaller number of studies looking at drama pedagogy in the secondary science classroom (Swanson, 2017). Darlington's reflective practitioner paper on the use of drama in their UK secondary science classroom gives some insight here where they comment: "A number of issues surround the use of drama in teaching secondary school science: whether it is an effective method of teaching; the circumstances under which it becomes effective; the constraints of the prescribed curriculum; assessment of the completed work; and assessment of whether the activity enhances learning." (Darlington, 2010:112) Perhaps unsurprisingly, Dorothy Heathcote's Mantle of the Expert approach is a particularly commonly cited practice within these studies (Maxwell et al., 2019; McGregor et al., 2019; Nicholas and Ng, 2008) with researchers reporting that the opportunities this gives for learners to take on the identity of practicing scientists supports their knowledge development and sense of confidence and self-identity as a science learner.

A third, smaller but still notable, set of studies focuses on the STEM-learning opportunities within the physical construction elements of drama and theatre making. Walan's case study of a 3 month 'makerspace' project, in which participants both wrote, rehearsed and performed in their own production but also created all their own props and set using a variety of design and manufacture process, found that this experience developed an interest in science and technology as well as developing the twenty-first century skills of creativity, problem-solving and cooperation (Walan, 2021). Similarly in Hannigan et al.'s ethnography of Australian secondary students' participation in a project involving a local theatre company and a zoo, the creation of 'trash puppets' and their use in a student performance about endangered animals, the process of collaboratively creating the puppets was found to promoted students learning in science, support them to apply knowledge to real world contexts, develop aesthetic judgement and 'multi-dimensional' science discussions (Hannigan et al.,

2022). In the same vein, the creation of shadow puppets has been found to support science learning about light (Mutlu, 2021).

In terms of the topics of science learning outcomes these studies focused on, there was a clear emphasis on ecological learning and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). In a series of studies from McNaughton drama was found to support ESD through its development of both empathy and distancing and opportunities to develop 'environmental citizenship' through the exploration of real life or imagined contexts in drama (McNaughton, 2006, 2010, 2014). Likewise Hatton's research has focused on the use of Dorothy Heathcote's techniques to support environmental learning (Hatton, 2024; Hatton et al., 2016) a theme echoed in other studies (Everett, 2015; Harden, 2015a).

There was also a smaller but notable focus on studies that looked at drama education's capacity to support learners 'seeing themselves' in science, with papers focused on the impacts for Latinx students (Kotler et al., 2024), girls (Walan, 2021) and secondary school students collaborating with undergraduate medical students (Cahill, 2005).

Despite this range of positive findings reported, researchers also caution against drawing too direct or predictable relationship between drama education and STEM learning outcomes. One study noted no impact on students' attitude to science after attending a TIE performance (Peleg and Baram-Tsabari, 2011) while another recorded a negative impact on students attitude to science after the implementation of creative drama practices in a US elementary classroom, though actual science knowledge levels did increase (Hendrix et al., 2012). Still another study found that after attending a science TIE performance, surveyed teachers reported much stronger impacts than the students did themselves (Burgin et al., 2016). This all serves to problematise any fixed claims towards drama's impact on STEM learning, though the range of research and ongoing interest in this relationship, particularly pertaining to complex real world issues such as ESD and environmental citizenship speaks to the rich potential in transference of outcomes from drama to this curriculum area.

Other Subjects

There are a small number of studies that touch on the transfer of learning from drama education to other curriculum subjects outside of language learning and STEM, as explored above. Eight studies look at the impact of drama on history education (including one that looks at both music and history), one further study that looks just at music learning outcomes from drama education (Johnels et al., 2024) and a final study explores drama educations benefits for learning in geography (Hatton et al., 2016).

The Corpus

Type of Study	Ethnography	Pilot Study	Qualitative Research	Randomised Control Trial	Reflective Practitioner	Survey	Case study	Experimental
Global	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	1
UK	1		1					

Table 21 Types of research design for transference to other studies

Despite the small numbers of studies coded under this catch all sub-theme, it includes a rich range of data. Studies looking at the impacts of process drama (Kosti et al., 2015; O'Toole and Dunn, 2008; Stephens, 2013), playwriting (Bianchi, 2024) and attending history-focused performances (Taylor, 2008) on history learning outcomes typically cite the engagement of empathy, active and participatory experiences and 'real world' contexts as the reasons for drama's impact in this subject area. Duffy's 2014 pilot study delves deeper into these claims and draws on the cognitive science concepts of conceptual blending, embodiment and analogy to explore how drama-based pedagogies strengthen history classroom learning, charting how process drama-based sessions exploring local South Carolina history supported increased recall of historical details and more accurate and frequent references to historical facts in writing.

Similarly, a randomised control trial exploring elementary students' engagement with immersive local history-based performances at their local arts centre found attendance at the performances increased not only historical content knowledge, but also enthusiasm for learning about history and participants' sense of historical empathy (Kisida et al., 2020)

In terms of drama's impact on geography learning Hatton et al.'s study of the international, digital rolling role project 'Water Reckoning' reports how empathy developed through the drama project's opportunities for connections and intercultural relationships supported discoveries related to geography (Hatton et al., 2016). Across the research exploring the transfer of learning to different subjects via drama, it is the practice's capacity to foster human connection and mutual understanding, as well as authentic, active learning experiences, that is cited as the catalyst.

Drama and Theatre Disciplinary Knowledge and Skills

37 empirical studies featured findings relating to drama education's impact on skills and knowledge within drama and theatre practice. The largest number of studies originated from Australia, with 9 studies, followed by 7 from the UK, 6 and 5 each from different Asian and European countries respectively, 5 from the USA, 3 from Canada and 2 international projects.

The Corpus

Type of Study	Case study	Ethnography	Evaluation Report	Literature Review	Mixed Methods	Action Research	curriculum/practice analysis	experimental	policy review	quasi-experimental	Pilot Study	Qualitative research	Randomised controlled trial	reflective practitioner	survey
Global	7	5	2	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	6	1	5	1
UK	2								1			2		2	

Table 22 Types of research design for Drama and Theatre Disciplinary Knowledge and Skills

Alongside these empirical studies, a further 24 papers gave policy analyses of the 'state of the field' of drama teaching from a specific national or regional perspective. The geographic focus of these papers is as follows:

Policy Analysis Country/Area	Count out of 24
Africa	1
Asia	2
Australia	5
Canada	1
Europe	5
New Zealand/Pacific	2
Turkey	1
UK	4
USA	2

Table 23 Policy Analysis studies by Country/Area

Even taken together these 61 papers focusing on curriculum issues of drama and benefits of drama teaching on specific disciplinary knowledge and skills comprises a relatively small proportion of the overall corpus of 351 studies: a point for consideration within the drama education research community. Given the challenges posed to drama as a curriculum subject in various national policy contexts, as detailed in many of the policy analysis papers below, this raises the question of whether there is a case to be made to further develop this area of research focusing on subject-specific skills, knowledges and experiences within drama classrooms themselves, as well as the more well-established social, emotional and cross-curricular research areas presented elsewhere in this report.

Policy Analysis

This summary of a wide range of national drama education policy analyses can only be given a relatively brief discussion within the confines of this report, and a more thorough critique could draw out more granular lines of analysis in greater detail. Three key themes emerger however, in the 2007-2019 period this section of the corpus covers. Firstly, the tensions between seeking validity for drama as a school subject through enshrinement in national curricula and the restrictions that can be put on the creativity, criticality and responsiveness of drama teaching in formal curriculum policy confines. Secondly, the position of schools as institutions and teachers as individuals as at an axis between policy mandates and the expectations of school leadership, parents and the students themselves. Finally, there are also repeated references to the status of theatre and performance arts as a creative discipline more broadly within different geographical contexts, and the implications of that when bringing drama and theatre teaching into school spaces.

Working chronologically through the policy analysis studies focused on a UK context, Pitfield's 2013 study focused on trainee drama teachers navigating the pedagogic implications of statutory drama guidance sitting within the English subject curriculum. Their findings highlight that trainee drama teachers in the English geographic context valued autonomy over curriculum content and viewed the English subject policy guidance "as an inadequate host for drama" going on to conclude: "This

suggests that a case can be made for re-evaluating the nature of the relationship between drama and English and its representation in policy-constructed curricula." (Pitfield, 2013:403) A teacher-focused perspective is continued in two policy-focused papers from practice English drama teacher Hennessy. In the first, they appear to give an example of Pitfield's observed focus on autonomy, outlining the secondary curriculum they designed and implemented in their secondary school, made up of a range of skills, performance and theory knowledge that would be familiar to many practicing drama teachers in the UK: Learning about Drama (skills) mime, masks, acting training, practitioner theory and techniques, history of Drama in practice (e.g. Ancient Greek Chorus, Commedia del Arte, Shakespeare's blank verse) and the Drama techniques set by GCSE exam boards (e.g. Still Image, Thought-tracking, Hot-Seating) Learning through Drama (issues) exploring social, political, emotional themes and issues using Drama strategies, such as play texts about, for example, bullying, alcohol abuse, eating disorders; using stimuli to explore themes such as madness, the futility of war, loss and change (Hennessy, 2016). But this paper concludes with the point that the lack of subject specific national curriculum for Drama within the English education system impacts negatively on the status of drama within government educational policy, stating: "As Drama teachers, we need to push for this or else Drama will soon disappear from our schools as a separate subject. It will become just an extracurricular enrichment, and all the years of building its status as an essential subject holding equal value to others will have gone to waste." (Hennessy, 2016:87) This argument is further re-emphasised in their 2018 paper, responding to a piece published within the journal from a current UK secondary drama student (Hennessy, 2018).

In Elliott and colleagues' broad overview of historical and contemporary performance arts pedagogy across the UK cautions against making over generalised statements about any one age range, context or regional area of the UK when undertaking an analysis of curriculum trends, yet also come to the conclusion that while drama education work still flourishes in many places within the UK "this is despite, rather than because of, official policies and infrastructures. (Elliott et al., 2019:13-14)

From the US, Erickson's 2004 interview-based policy analysis invites 4 practicing teaching artists to reflect on their experiences of delivering drama education work in schools (Erickson, 2004), while more recently a broader overview of the state of curriculum drama teaching highlights conflicts between the common core and daily teaching practices, emphasising that: "While teachers realise the potential curricula have to inspire and challenge, curriculum decisions at the local, state and federal level become politically, socially and economically contested ones" (Duffy, 2016:37)

From a Northen European policy context, there is a content analysis of Swedish drama education PhD thesis, reflecting at that point that both research and curriculum practice opportunities for the field were underdeveloped (Österlind, 2007). A later study, also from Österlind and colleagues, reports some improvement on the status of drama education in neighbouring Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Norway as well as Sweden, stating "The optional choices [of drama] in Finland, Norway, and Sweden are remarkably good, especially regarding theatre subjects."(Österlind et al., 2016:52). Yet they report continuing issues around drama teaching for grades 1-3 in Sweden and where drama is compulsory in these Nordic contexts, problems of the content being squeezed into a small number of lessons.

In the first of a series of Australian-focused policy analysis papers, Pascoe undertakes a survey of drama education documents in 2009, breaking this down by province, emphasising "The current coherence and strength of drama education in Australian schools described in this article is not accidental or happenstance but the outcome of successive generations of drama educators building a socially-constructed consistency" (Pascoe, 2009:62) and argues that future development should be neither

set in stone nor risk-averse. Österlind then takes up the Australian drama education policy focus 6 years later, focusing on Queensland and the context and conditions that supported drama in the formal curriculum. Based on surveying a sample of key Australian drama education informants, they present a list of strategies for drama curriculum developers, which is worth reproducing here:

> (1) Always be alert, and look for openings and possibilities.
> (2) Build on what has already been achieved.
> (3) Make sure you are reasonably unified within the drama community.
> (4) Build a strong coalition of all the Arts, and speak with one voice.
> (5) Work only with positive messages, never complain
> (6) Argue that it is every child's right to have access to drama as an art-form and a way of expression.
> (7) Involve people who already have political contacts, and invite successful artists, to become advocates.
> (8) Identify and approach politicians who are in favour of the Arts.
> (9) Make sure the subject is being reported, otherwise it doesn't count and nothing happens.
> (10) Forget about any theories of conspiracy, and count your blessings (Österlind, 2015:13-14)

There are 2 Australian policy analysis studies published in 2016, the first focuses on the influences on drama performance assessment, emphasising the role of not only local curriculum and assessment practices but also school and class cultures as well as the approach of the teacher in enacting assessment in curriculum drama (Jacobs, 2016). The second reflects on the then-contemporary process of drama curriculum development, focusing on concerns that drama remained at this time outside the educational entitlement for all children in Australia (Stinson and Saunders, 2016). Finally, in the most recent Australian study, Williams focuses on non-indigenous pre-service drama teachers' perceptions about integrating indigenous perspectives in their work, concluding with the need for specific support and training in this area to break the cycle of inadequate teaching of indigenous perspectives in Australian schools (Williams and Morris, 2022).

The inclusion of indigenous perspectives has also been a drama education policy concern in New Zealand, where a 2009 study highlighted "the almost complete absence of Maori perspectives in most contemporary drama classes" (Greenwood, 2009:246) as well as voicing concern about Drama teachers losing status control when drama falls under government curriculum. This is a concern that seems borne out in O'Connor's reflections, published the same year, of being a drama education specialist involved in New Zealand curriculum policy development, stating "In moving to the centre, nearly all that attracted me to drama and sustained me was either compromised or lost" (O'Connor, 2009:23) and concluding: "The paradox of drama education is that although it deserves to be central to everything we do in schools, it risks losing its very essence once it moves into the centre." (2009:26) reflecting the concerns voiced in many of these policy documents of both the opportunities and fundamental challenges of establishing drama education work within normative models of mainstream curriculum development.

A 2019 review of drama education policy in a Chinese context reports positively on the perceived accessibility of drama as a subject and approach to pedagogy from teachers, as well as their interest its relative novelty in the Chinese school context but also highlights issues of limitations of training, funding and 'parental scepticism' (Zeng, 2019). Elsewhere in Aisa a drama education policy summary from the NIE4 (Newly Industrialized Economies) Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore highlight a similar growing range of interest in and opportunities for drama teaching in each of these national contexts, but also highlights challenges for the subject,

focusing on underlying cultural and pedagogic issues: "Drama Education and Applied Theatre challenges the status quo of Confucian educational philosophy and the traditional roles of teachers and art education, especially in Taiwan and South Korea where Confucian ideology is a dominant discourse" (Wang et al., 2013:91)

In Gallagher's 2016 policy analysis of drama's place on the formal curriculum of Ontario, Canada she emphasises the power of drama to motivate and engage young people to "examine and question perspectives, and to consider issues of power and exclusion" (Gallagher, 2016:20) but also the active role of skilled efforts of classroom teachers needed to achieve these outcomes. In an analysis of drama education policy in South Africa from 2016, Elliott highlights cost barriers to accessing education in general and how this impacts on drama teaching and learning. They highlight the rarity of schools having a specialist drama teacher and the lack of training opportunities (Elliott, 2016) Studies from both Greece (Giannouli, 2016) and Turkey (Güven and Adıgüzel, 2015), in parallel with the context described in China, emphasise while opportunities for classroom drama teaching are increasing within these 2 countries, there continue to be issues in implementation, such as a lack of specialist drama teaching spaces and training opportunities, a perception of drama as 'just playing' and the limitations of high-stakes testing regimes.

Knowledge and Skills

Performance skills, artistic expression and the process of moving in and out of role (at 14, 10 and 7 studies respectively) where the most cited subject-specific knowledge and skills supported through drama education. In terms of performance skills, this broad term is defined and referenced in a range of ways within the corpus. From the notion of 'performance semiotics' in an aesthetic sense and how students make use of these to structure social considerations in their theatre-making (Franks, 2008) to the increased understanding of culturally specific performance traditions when drama is used to support heritage and community language learning (Anderson and Chung, 2011). Findings speak to how drama works with theatre partnerships (Upton, 2021); visiting teacher-artists (Kelman and Rafe, 2013); extra-curricular theatre performances (Pitts, 2007) and in drama subject teaching (Jacobs, 2017; McCammon and Østerlind, 2011; McLauchlan and Winters, 2014).

Interestingly, in McLauchlan and Winters' mixed method survey seeking the perspectives of year I secondary drama students in Ontario, Canada reported that at the beginning of the school year:

> 48% of students expected to engage in activity primarily related to their identities as 'performer/actors', anticipating that the course would emphasise theatrical/performance skills.... Asked to reflect at the end of the course on the benefits of studying drama... The performer/actor role diminished to approximately one-tenth of responses. (McLauchlan and Winters, 2014:60)

The benefits the students in this study ended up rating most highly were 'risk-taking' 'collaborating'. This would seem in broadly in line with some of the most common benefits this research corpus identifies: agency and social skills.

Alongside performance skills in general terms, just one study mentions the benefits of drama for developing knowledge about specific playtexts, Greene et al.'s quasi-experimental study that found school theatre trips resulting in a stronger command of the vocabulary and plot of the play compared to watching a film of the same story (Greene et al., 2018). Though this benefit is emphasised further by acknowledging here the previously discussed studies that explore the impacts of drama education of Shakespeare knowledge, nevertheless, in combination with the relatively small

number of studies focused on the benefits of drama education in the develop performance skills, this raises perennial questions about the balance of research evidence focusing on the teaching of discrete skills of theatre as a discipline and the fostering of personal, social and creative capacities.

The development of artistic expression was another benefit of drama education discussed within the corpus. Though this is analogous in many ways to the broader findings relating to 'creativity' and 'aesthetics' discussed earlier in this report; these studies were coded distinctly where they directly referenced artistic expression specifically within the discipline of performing arts. Several studies note this as a benefit when young people work in partnership with external practitioners (Adams, 2014), in arts centre settings (Selderslaghs, 2020) and mounting their own youth theatre performances (Mackey, 2012); suggesting a link between professional theatre personnel and spaces and the development of artistic expression. However other studies cite this as a benefit in school settings, from the first building blocks of artistic expression in the socio dramatic play of pre-schoolers (Hui et al., 2015; McCabe, 2017) to subject specific secondary settings. Hogan's case study into student experiences of teacher feedback in drama concludes "drama as a subject... offered a greater sense of freedom and opportunities for self-expression" (Hogan, 2019:12), echoing the key findings of Sallis' 2014 ethnography following the experiences of male drama students in a Melbourne school (Sallis, 2014).

Several studies focus on the benefits of drama education for navigating process of moving in and out of role within drama work. Wales' case study of a longitudinal storytelling project in Singapore discussed how the process of shifting in and out of role provides a framework for playing with a range of personal identities as well as developing performance skills (Wales, 2012), while other research focused on specific elements of drama practice which can support these experiences such as the use of masks (Roy, 2020), changes to student-teacher discourse patterns within in-role work (Freebody, 2013) and the role of humour in the drama classroom to support transition in and out of character during performance (McCabe, 2023). Further to this, Loyd's case study of curriculum drama experiences for students with autism emphasises the value of moving in and out of role as a particularly useful framework to navigate and gain insights into identity for these students (Loyd, 2015).

In more recent research, the impacts on and potentials for drama under Covid-19 lockdowns and the post-Covid educational landscape has unsurprisingly been a topic of research since 2020. Studies explored the challenges posted by Covid lockdowns as drama lessons went online, including reduced student engagement (Gallagher et al., 2020) and the loss reported by drama teachers of the 'human dimensions' of teaching (Davis and Phillips, 2020). However, other studies highlighted the potential for drama pedagogy approaches to support a more creative and engaged online teaching and learning practice (Balt, 2024), it's potential to support the resilience of both students and teachers returning to school (Tam, 2020) and to provide a platform to reconnect through performance projects (Scales, 2022).

Three studies reported on the impacts school partnerships with cultural organisations (Kisida et al., 2020); school theatre trips (Leroux and Moureau, 2013) and 'arts based teaching' practice (Li et al., 2015) had on the likelihood the participants would visit the theatre or seek out drama opportunities in the future. While finally one study reported on benefits in terms of drama exam achievement, with Lee's reflective practitioner paper highlighting 'Imitation, Inflection, Imagination, Interpretation, and Innovation' as the teaching qualities the supported student achievement for Hong Kong secondary students in solo performance training for speech and drama at level 8 (Lee, 2015).

APPENDIX

Appendix (1) - Search string for Databases

drama AND education OR curriculum OR extra-curricular OR school AND children OR student OR pupil OR young people AND benefits OR value OR learning OR impact

Appendix (2) – Source Journals

Arts and Academic Achievement International Dialogues on Education
American Educational Research Association Open
American Journal of Play
Applied Theatre Research
Australian Journal of Environmental Education
Australian Journal of Language and Literacy
Bilingual Research Journal
British Journal of Educational Technology
British Journal of Learning Disabilities
British Journal of Religious Education
British Journal of Special Education
Canadian Children
Canadian Journal of Education
Changing English: Studies in Culture and Education
Child & Youth Services
Child Development
Childhood
Childhood Education
Chronicle of Higher Education
Cypriot Journal of Educational Sciences
Drama Research: international journal of drama in education
Early Child Development and Care
Early Childhood Education Journal
ECNU Review of Education
Education 3-13: International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education
Education Sciences
Education Tech Research Dev
Educational Action Research
Educational Psychology in Practice: theory, research and practice in educational psychology
Educational Psychology: An International Journal of Experimental Educational Psychology
Educational Researcher
Empirical Research
English Education
English in Education: Research Journal of the National Association for the Teaching of English
Equity & Excellence in Education
Ethnography and Education
European Early Childhood Education Research Journal
Gender & Behaviour
Gender and Education
General Music Today
Gifted and Talented International

Informatics in Education - An International Journal
Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching
Innovations in Early Childhood Teacher Education: Reflections on Practice
International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education
International Journal of Artificial Intelligence in Education
International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism
International Journal of Early Childhood
International Journal of Early Years Education
International Journal of Education & Literacy Studies
International Journal of Education & the Arts
International Journal of Education through Art
International Journal of Human-Computer Interaction
International Journal of Inclusive Education
International Journal of Progressive Education
International Journal of Science Education
International Journal of Science Education, Part B Communication and Public Engagement
Irish Educational Studies
Issues in Educational Research
JMIR Mental Health
Journal for Learning through the Arts
Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy
Journal of Applied Arts and Health
Journal of Baltic Science Education
Journal of Biological Education
Journal of Children's Literature
Journal of Cognition and Development
Journal of Curriculum Studies
Journal of Early Childhood Research
Journal of Educational Computing Research
Journal of Inquiry Based Activities
Journal of Instructional Psychology
Journal of Intellectual Disabilities
Journal of Intelligence
Journal of Literacy Research
Journal of Moral Education
Journal of Research in Childhood Education
Journal of Research in Science Teaching
Journal of Science Education and Technology
Journal of Science Teacher Education
Journal of Staff Development
Language Arts
Language Learning Journal
Learning and Instruction
Literacy
Malaysian Online Journal of Educational Science
Multicultural Perspectives
Music Education Research
New Theatre Quarterly
NJ: Drama Australia Journal
Open Journal for Educational Research,
Pastoral Care in Education: An International Journal of Personal, Social and Emotional Development
Pedagogies: An International Journal
Pedagogy, Culture & Society

Perspectives in Public Health
Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth
Reading Research Quarterly
Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance
Research in Education
Research in Science & Technological Education
Research in Science Education
Research on Youth and Language
Review of Education
Review of Educational Research
SCENARIO
School Science Review
Science & Education
Science Activities
Science and Children
Science Education
Social Research Reports
Support for Learning: British Journal of Learning Support
Teacher Development
Teacher Librarian
Teaching Artist Journal
TESOL Journal
The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education
The Australian Journal of Language and Literacy
The Canadian Modern Language Review
The Design Journal: An International Journal for All Aspects of Design
The Educational Forum
The English Journal
The History Teacher
The Journal of Aesthetic Education
The Journal of Environmental Education
The Language Learning Journal
The Reading Teacher
The Social Studies
The Urban Review
Thinking Skills and Creativity
Urban Education
Waikato Journal of Education
World Matters
Yaratıcı Drama Dergisi
Young Children
Youth Theatre Journal

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