

Sense or Séance?



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On Halloween I wrote to the government on behalf of National Drama. I did so under the Freedom of Information Act. I asked for specific information about how and why drama had been cut in the national curriculum and who specifically had made this ghostly (sorry, I meant ghastly), decision? Of course, I did not expect earthly answers to earthly questions. A séance might have been more informative. Almost two months later, I received an evasive and ambiguous DfE 'non' reply from a political wordsmith, somewhere, 'up there'.

'Drama is an important part of pupils' school experience,' the wordsmith echoed. I started unpicking this apparently innocuous communication. If Drama is important then where is the word 'all'? Learning about Drama is no longer an *entitlement* for all pupils? So, just how important is Drama, Mr Gove? Just important enough for some pupils to have it and not important enough to be in the curriculum for all? I noted the deliberate omission of the word, 'all' and the deceptive reference to 'school experience' creeping in, rather than 'curriculum experience;' or 'learning' or 'knowledge'. Maybe if a subject is not full of knowledge that can be tested online, it is no longer able to be a subject? Maybe if it is not in the PISA race then it does not matter anymore?

The DfE went on to say, *'...and while not in a separate domain, it (drama) is referenced throughout the curriculum, including into key stage 3'.*

Referenced? This is a 'smoke and mirrors' distraction. Meaningful and specific 'references' to drama are somewhat ethereal and are mainly in the introduction section of the English curriculum or in the non-statutory guidance for writing. Real, solid, statutory content in a programme of study is missing, (especially if you think drama is more than reading a couple of Shakespeare's plays).

The next sentence from the DfE is the real thunderbolt:

'The department did not want to require every child to perform drama, because that is a professional judgement that is best left to teachers as part of the school curriculum'.

Who in the department actually decided this? Why has there been no open consultation or dialogue around this unqualified statement? Where is the logic in ensuring that children are taught about music and perform music but not learn about and perform Drama? Is this ridiculous statement underpinned by logic or just making sure more curriculum time can be grabbed for the PISA score subjects?

The email I received reminded me that the new primary national curriculum refers to 'drama

opportunities' that children should be 'given' and acknowledges the artistic practice of drama. The implication is that children should be the audience for the artistic drama practice of others (ensuring some 'bums on seats' in theatres) but may never get the chance to actually perform or practice any themselves. Children as consumers and not makers of Drama?

With the sparse 'references' to Drama being locked within English, the DfE goes on to claim that

'The secondary programmes of study also highlight where drama approaches could be used to help pupils comprehend text and to prepare for and perform their writing'.

This is all very well but Drama is an art form in its own right and should not be seen by children primarily as an approach to writing with an overdose of 'hot-seating' and 'Role on the Wall'. Interesting that the DfE actually refer to children performing their 'writing'.

The new, 'slimmed down' curriculum in England has cleared the way for a few subjects to dominate. We are told that

'individual schools should have greater flexibility to construct their own programmes of study in subjects outside the national curriculum'.

Will 'outside the national curriculum' soon come to mean outside the traditional school day? How does this 'flexibility' work for children who move from school to school? How does it work for assessment? I will write and ask, of course; but I don't expect to get a logical, or straight, answer.

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