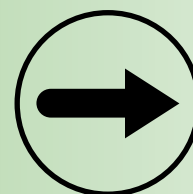


Teaching Drama: Guidance on Safeguarding Children and Child Protection for Managers and Drama Practitioners

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**Guidance
Circular**



**Teaching &
Leadership**



- Title of Document:** Teaching Drama: Guidance on Safeguarding Children and Child Protection for Managers and Drama Practitioners.
- Audience:** In Wales, all secondary schools, special schools and independent schools, primary schools, FE colleges including specialist drama schools, ITT colleges, theatre in Education groups, national drama organisations and Education Departments and qualification and curriculum regulatory authorities in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.
- Overview:** The Children's Commissioner for Wales published the Clywch report on 1 July 2004. The report examined allegations of sexual abuse of pupils by a drama teacher in a secondary school in Wales a number of years ago. Drama lessons and drama examinations provided the context for much of the Clywch report and the Children's Commissioner set out a number of specific recommendations relating to work in drama in schools and further education colleges.
- Recommendation 21.13 in the Clywch report identified nine areas where specific practice guidance should be provided in relation to the teaching of drama. This document contains the guidance which aims to provide advice for managers and teachers of drama and other practitioners working in schools and further education colleges, and those teaching drama in other settings, on how to deal with potential child protection issues.
- Action required:** This document should be made available to all drama teachers and other practitioners and their managers and the advice should be applied to all settings in which drama is taught to children.
- Further information:** Enquiries about this document should be directed to:
qualifications&curriculum14-19.info@wales.gsi.gov.uk
- Additional copies:** Can be obtained from: Jill Hancock, Qualifications and Curriculum Division, Welsh Assembly Government, Castle Buildings, Womanby Street, Cardiff CF10 1SX
- Related documents:**
- Clwyd: Report of the Examination of the Children's Commissioner for Wales into allegations of child sexual abuse in a school setting.
 - Safeguarding and protecting children and young people - A guide and good practice exemplification for awarding bodies

Teaching drama: guidance on safeguarding children and child protection for managers and drama practitioners.

Summary

The Children's Commissioner for Wales published the Clwyd report on 1 July 2004. The report is available from <http://www.childcomwales.org.uk/>.

The report examined allegations of sexual abuse of pupils by a drama teacher in a secondary school in Wales and number of years ago. Drama lessons and drama examinations provided the context for much of the Clwyd report and the Children's Commissioner set out a number of specific recommendations relating to work in drama in schools and further education colleges.

Recommendation 21.13 in the Clwyd report identified nine areas where specific practice guidance should be provided in relation to the teaching of drama.

This document contains the guidance which aims to provide advice for managers and drama practitioners working in schools and further education colleges, and those teaching drama in other settings, on how to deal with the potential child protection issues.

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Teaching drama: guidance on safeguarding children and child protection for managers and drama practitioners.

1. A summary set of guidelines for drama teachers, other practitioners and managers

Safeguarding children¹

Everyone working with children and young people must:

- treat the learners welfare as paramount;
- treat them with fairness, dignity and respect;
- be aware of indications of abuse and neglect;
- be alert to the risks that individual abusers or potential abusers may pose to them;
- protect them from harm, abuse, neglect and exploitation;
- allow them to express their views on matters that affect them;
- co-operate fully with other agencies in the interests of safeguarding children and young people; and
- report any concerns in accordance with the organisation's procedures for safeguarding children and for whistle-blowing.

All drama practitioners must follow the policies and procedures for safeguarding children in their organisation. These policies should be based on 'Safeguarding Children: Working Together for Positive Outcomes' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2004).

Schools and colleges must create an environment where teachers can come forward and speak up if they see signs of inappropriate behaviour, unethical conduct or wrong-doing.

Creating a safe environment for drama lessons and activities

Managers must:

- monitor and review the schemes of work of drama teachers and know what activity is planned in lessons and in rehearsals;
- agree with drama teachers the texts that children and young people will study and perform;
- be aware of rehearsal times and locations, and the pupils involved;
- make sure that the accommodation for drama is open and accessible to all staff;
- undertake visits to monitor drama sessions and to support the drama teacher in their inclusion in the wider work of the organisation;
- ensure that systems are in place to promote a safe environment for children, young people and staff, especially where the drama teacher is working in isolation;
- make sure that the child or young person is comfortable with any rehearsal arrangements that take place outside of normal classroom activities;

¹ See 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2000) and 'Safeguarding Children: Working Together for Positive Outcomes' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2004)

- make sure that other staff who are involved in drama only occasionally, for example during the school play, are aware of these guidelines and follow them; and
- make sure that children and young people are clear about what they can expect in drama lessons, know the organisation's complaints procedures and, where necessary, have an appropriate advocate. The Welsh Assembly Government Children's Health and Social Care Directorate plan to issue guidance "Children's Performance Regulations 1968: Best Practice Advice to LEAs in Wales", which will cover the issue of approving chaperones, in summer 2006.

Drama practitioners must:

- create an open environment for the teaching of drama in order to protect the children and young people, and themselves;
- create a culture of openness where it is natural and common for other staff or managers to 'drop in' on lessons and rehearsals;
- keep senior managers informed of any rehearsals that take place outside the normal teaching hours;
- keep senior managers informed of any rehearsals that take place with individual learners and make sure the location and environment in which that work takes place is as open as possible;
- make sure that the child or young person is comfortable with any rehearsal arrangements organised outside of normal classroom activities.

The selection of appropriate drama texts

Drama practitioners and managers must:

- consider carefully and approve the texts that children and young people will study during the drama scheme of work, and adapt plays where appropriate;
- approve the texts that children and young people study for examinations and follow the rules from the awarding bodies about submitting improvised scripts; and
- resolve any difficulties jointly and in the best interests of the children and young people.

Adult participation in drama and mixed-age groups

Drama practitioners and managers must make sure that:

- drama lessons are a vehicle for children and young people to develop their own performance skills;
- the focus of drama lessons is on giving learners the appropriate knowledge, understanding and skills to progress in drama;
- they only intervene in group improvisation to model techniques or to create a new character and not to use the lesson as a vehicle for their own performance;
- there is no intimate, sexual contact between learners or between children and adults;
- when working with a mixed-age group, the needs of the youngest or most vulnerable learners are given priority; and

- where children and young people take part in professional drama productions, this is with the informed consent of their parents or carers, and there are appropriate chaperoning arrangements in place

The use of improvisation and other dramatic techniques, including ‘method acting’

Drama practitioners and managers must:

- monitor improvisations carefully to make sure that they do not become inappropriate and that the practitioner remains in control of the activity;
- keep the learners focused on the activity;
- be prepared to stop or adapt any improvisation if there are signs that it is going too far or if children or young people are uncomfortable with what is happening;
- be able to justify the activity on the grounds that it is in the best interests of the child or young person;
- make sure that the activity does not lead to any harm, abuse, humiliation or neglect of children or young people;
- make sure that the improvisations are appropriate for the ages of the learners; and
- apply ‘method acting’ techniques sparingly and only with great care in practical work with pre-16 learners.

Nudity and intimate sexual contact

Drama practitioners and managers must:

- never allow nudity or intimate sexual contact in drama lessons or productions;
- make sure any physical contact is justifiable and acceptable; and
- make sure that any physical contact between the drama practitioner and a child in the course of dramatic work is justifiable, agreed by the child and is approached carefully and sensibly by the practitioner, using a stepped approach.

Strong, offensive language

Drama practitioners and managers must:

- limit the use of offensive language in performances by pre-16 learners
- use their common sense and make sure that any language used can be justified in terms of its dramatic impact and purpose
- make sure that the language used remains appropriate to the learners’ level of maturity, the nature of the group and the vulnerability of individual learners; and
- make sure that the learners feel comfortable with the language being used.

Video recording and parental consent

Drama practitioners and managers should obtain consent from parents before taking photographs or making video recordings of learners. The same applies to photographs and video recording of adults (see appendix).

2. Context

The Children's Commissioner for Wales published the Clywch report on 1 July 2004. The report examined allegations of sexual abuse of pupils by a drama teacher in a secondary school in Wales a number of years ago. The Children's Commissioner concluded that the evidence he heard established, on the balance of probabilities, that an unscrupulous drama teacher sexually abused pupils in his care over a number of years. Drama lessons and drama examinations provided the context for much of the report and the Children's Commissioner set out a number of specific recommendations relating to work in drama in schools and further education colleges.

Under recommendation 21.13 in the Clywch report (see appendix), the Children's Commissioner for Wales identified nine areas where specific practice guidance should be provided in relation to the teaching of drama in schools and further education colleges. This guidance document aims to address the specific issues raised in the Children's Commissioner's report and its recommendations.

The purpose of this guidance is to provide advice for teachers and other practitioners of drama working in schools and further education colleges, and those teaching drama in other settings - such as youth clubs, theatre groups and drama organisations - on how to safeguard children and how to deal with potential child abuse issues. It also provides important advice on these matters for leaders and managers in schools, colleges and other educational settings, including the governing bodies of schools and the corporate boards of further education colleges.

This guidance should be read in conjunction with the policies and procedures for safeguarding children operating within a specific LEA, school or college under section 175 of the Education Act 2002. It does not replace these important policies and procedures. It is also important for drama practitioners and managers to take account of 'Safeguarding Children - Working Together Under the Children Act 2004', which is due to be published in Summer 2006. It should also be read in conjunction with:

- the All Wales Child Protection Procedures published by Local Safeguarding Children Boards; and
- forthcoming guidance on whistleblowing policies for schools, due for publication in Summer 2006.

Children and young people have rights and entitlements, including those set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The convention applies to all children equally and the Welsh Assembly Government has adopted it as the foundation of principle for all its dealings with children and young people, and local authorities and their relevant partners should have regard to its principles in providing services. It means that the best interests of the child must be paramount when adults make decisions about them and that the child has the right to say what they think about matters that affect them.

As this guidance stems from the recommendations of the Clywch report, it focuses mainly on drama. However, it contains important messages and advice for all those practitioners and professionals who work with children and young people especially in the expressive and performing arts, such as music and dance, but also for those in other subjects, such

as physical education, music, English and media studies, who need to ensure that young people and young people can grow and develop in a safe environment.

It is aimed primarily at schools and colleges, but the principles also apply in less formal settings, such as drama clubs and theatre groups for example, and within national organisations, such as the Urdd. The guidance also relates to settings such as residential schools, independent schools, residential courses and workshops. Wherever organisations offer drama experiences to children, young people and vulnerable adults, it is important for the practitioners and managers involved to understand this guidance and to put it into practice.

3. Young people and drama

Drama is increasingly popular in schools and colleges. It is also a popular activity for many young people in amateur drama groups that meet out of school hours in other settings. Drama forms an essential part of the English curriculum in primary and secondary schools and more and more post-16 learners are following drama courses at A level and as a vocational programme in schools and further education colleges, often as part of a performing arts course.

The experience of participating in drama is enjoyable and rewarding for many children and young people. Drama provides many opportunities for them to work in groups, to solve problems within tight deadlines and to address issues of importance in their own lives and the lives of their communities. Drama practitioners continue to produce new generations interested and excited by dramatic performance.

However, for other children and young people, work in drama can present a challenge and it can have a negative impact on their self-esteem. Sometimes, the dramatic work may relate closely to difficulties in their current or past lives. Therefore, it is essential for practitioners of drama to use their professional skills and to display appropriate sensitivity in taking dramatic work forward with all children and young people.

4. Safeguarding children

There are some key general principles that should underpin every practitioner's work with children and young people and that will lead to the creation of a safe environment both for them and the practitioner.

Everyone working with children and young people must:

- treat their welfare as paramount;
- treat them with fairness, dignity and respect;
- be alert to indications of abuse and neglect;
- be alert to the risks that individual abusers or potential abusers may pose to them;
- protect them from harm, abuse, neglect and exploitation;
- allow them to express their views on matters that affect them;
- co-operate fully with other agencies in the interests of safeguarding children and young people; and

- report any concerns in accordance with their organisation's child protection procedures.

All practitioners must be aware of their organisation's policies and procedures for safeguarding children and they must operate in accordance with them. Like all practitioners, drama practitioners must do whatever is needed to safeguard children and young people, and to promote their welfare.

All drama practitioners must follow the policy and procedures in their organisation for safeguarding children

Each school and college in Wales must have a policy and procedures for safeguarding children for teachers to follow. Other organisations that undertake drama activities with young people should also have suitable policies and procedures in place. Every institution that works with children and young people must have a designated child protection officer and clear procedures for dealing with allegations of child abuse. Each institution should also have clear guidelines on the recruitment and supervision of their staff in relation to child protection issues. Every practitioner should be aware of the general guidelines within their own organisation and they must follow the agreed policy and procedures for safeguarding children. They must also know who to contact if they have any concerns.

These guidelines do not set out to repeat statutory guidance in relation to child protection. They set out additional guidelines for practitioners of drama and sit within the overall child protection procedures established within all schools and colleges and by local Area Child Protection Committees. [These will become local safeguarding children boards.]

Managers must establish an environment where other teachers or practitioners can come forward and speak up if they see signs of inappropriate behaviour, unethical conduct or wrong-doing.

Members of staff are often the first to realise that there may be something seriously wrong with the safeguarding of children in a school, college or other organisation. They may see the signs of inappropriate behaviour and begin to worry that things might not be as they should be. Teachers or other practitioners should know clearly what to do if this is the case by following agreed procedures relating to child protection, discipline and complaints. However, some staff may not be prepared to express their concerns because they feel that speaking up would be disloyal to a colleague. They may also fear victimisation or harassment. This could mean that they ignore the concern rather than report it.

To come forward and speak up can be difficult and can place an individual in an awkward position. However, if a member of staff has a concern about the safety of a child or young person, they must come forward. Otherwise, they will have failed in their duty to protect a child from possible harm and may allow an abuse of trust to take place². It is important therefore that managers establish a supportive culture where members of staff can express their concerns knowing that the appropriate body or person (in a school this would be the headteacher or governing body) will help to eliminate the bad or inappropriate

² See 'Joint NEOST/Teacher Union Guidance on Preventing Abuse of Trust' (September 2002) www.lge.gov.uk/conditions/education/content/allegations_preventing_abuse_guidelines.html

behaviour or malpractice. Organisations must make sure that staff are aware of the channels available to them to raise a whistle-blowing issue. It is good practice for schools and colleges and other organisations working with young people to have an agreed policy on whistle-blowing. It should give staff a clear assurance that they can raise serious concerns without fear of reprisals.

5. Creating a safe environment for drama lessons and activities

Managers and drama practitioners must take joint responsibility for safeguarding children and young people in drama lessons and activities

The key factors in developing a safe environment are a culture of openness and the effective monitoring of the work of the drama department by school and college managers. Managers and drama practitioners need to work together to ensure the safety of children in drama lessons and activities.

Managers must recognise the potential risks involved in drama teaching from the point of view of child protection. The best way to manage these risks is to establish a safe, open environment for drama work, to engage fully in the work of the drama department, to monitor on the activity and to make sure that they are managing the drama department in accordance with this guidance and that drama practitioners are following this guidance.

Managers also need to develop a secure understanding of the nature of drama as a subject so they can engage fully with the issues involved and have an effective dialogue with drama practitioners.

Drama practitioners must engage openly with managers and other staff

Drama practitioners in schools must be closely involved in the life and work of the school as a whole. There is the potential for difficulties to arise for both the practitioner and the children if a drama practitioner becomes detached and isolated from the rest of the school. In most cases, this does not happen. Drama is at the heart of many aspects of school life and there is a shared, open culture operating within the drama department. The drama practitioner is always part of a larger organisational structure, either as a member of a department or a faculty, and, above that, as a member of staff at a school or college. However, in a few cases, managers have tended to shy away from engagement and potential confrontation with drama practitioners or have characterised them as mavericks. This should never happen as it prevents the establishment of a safe, open environment for the learners and the drama practitioner. Mechanisms need to be clearly identified to make sure that an unsafe environment cannot develop.

Managers and drama practitioners must make sure that there is an open environment for the teaching of drama

The accommodation for drama should be open and accessible to all staff, especially to staff with wider managerial responsibility, for example for the department or faculty and for the organisation as a whole. While recognising that drama practitioners often wish to create a special place for drama, and intrusions may sometimes affect the flow of the dramatic work, all drama practitioners must accept that openness and scrutiny are

essential parts of the protection for children and young people. Such openness also provides themselves with important safeguards.

On occasions, the physical nature of the accommodation and facilities for drama may appear to exclude others, for example due to blacked out windows or black curtains. At other times, staff may feel reluctant to enter the accommodation because they do not want to disturb a performance or to put pupils off. However, creating a culture of openness where it is natural and common for other staff or managers 'drop in' on lessons and rehearsals is vital. Senior managers must work actively with drama practitioners to ensure that there is an open culture and a right of access at all times to drama accommodation by relevant staff.

Drama practitioners must make sure other colleagues and managers know all the details of rehearsals and encourage them to 'drop in' at any time

In schools and colleges, it is common for drama lessons to take place separate from the rest of the school, perhaps in a mobile classroom, or in a hall with blackout facilities. Drama rehearsals often happen after school or at lunchtime and a small group may be asked to stay behind after school to rehearse. There is rarely a reason why an individual child or young person should stay behind to rehearse, especially as examination boards commonly stipulate three learners as the minimum size of group for examined practical work. However, a few learners may benefit from individual rehearsals, for example to prepare them for auditions or a part in a school or college production. Drama practitioners must inform a senior manager when any individual work of this kind takes place. Individual work may lead to situations where learners are potentially vulnerable to abuse. It may also leave the drama practitioner open to allegations.

In order to avoid any difficulties, drama practitioners need to make sure that these situations take place within an open environment. The time, location and details of the learners involved should be shared with other staff and managers and drama practitioners should make the arrangements for rehearsals clear to parents. Drama practitioners should encourage other staff to attend rehearsals, and managers should make a point of dropping into the rehearsals from time to time. Where possible, conduct rehearsals with another member of the drama department, or make sure there is another member of staff working nearby.

On occasions, rehearsals take place at weekends, especially before a large production. Drama practitioners should follow the same guidelines as above, and make especially sure that the parents of the learners involved are fully aware of the arrangements. During these occasions, it is common for a number of staff to be at the rehearsal and this provides a relatively safe environment for both the staff and the learners.

6. The selection of appropriate drama texts

Drama practitioners and managers must consider carefully safeguarding and child protection issues when they select drama texts to teach

The selection of texts raises important child protection issues. Drama practitioners must select texts which are wholly appropriate for children and young people to study and to

perform. When a drama practitioner selects an appropriate text then other difficult issues, such as how to deal with the presence of inappropriate language or sexual content, often do not arise. There is some protection for the learners and the practitioner in this approach.

It is not practicable to establish a prescribed list of drama texts for use in schools and colleges. This would create an unnecessary degree of censorship. If drama practitioners were told to select plays that contained no references to love, sex or violence, then it would be impossible for young people to perform many great and valuable plays. It is also impossible to say how a drama practitioner might approach any particular text, even one that might appear innocuous at first sight or is well-established within the drama curriculum, as there is always the potential for new readings, interpretations and performances.

Drama practitioners must cut or adapt plays if they have to in order to protect children and young people. Their safety must always take priority over the artistic work

For some drama practitioners, cutting or adapting a play is a difficult decision as it interferes with the artistic integrity of the play. It becomes something not wholly intended by the author. However, the safety of children and young people in schools and colleges must always take priority over the integrity of the artistic work.

In the Children's Commissioner's report, there were issues raised about certain drama texts, which it appears were used by the drama practitioner involved in the alleged abuse to encourage pupils to engage in inappropriate sexual activities. Some texts contained explicitly sexual scenes and language and contained stage directions that indicated a role for nudity in the play.

Clearly, texts such as these create problems for a drama practitioner in a performance within a school or college setting. There is no place for nudity in such settings and so it is only with great care and significant adaptation that it would be possible to perform or to study plays of this nature in schools or further education colleges. This means that drama practitioners and managers must approach such difficult and challenging texts very carefully and always with the best interests of the children and young people uppermost in their minds. In deciding how to proceed, drama practitioners and managers must follow the guidelines set out in this guidance. They should not allow the performance of a play in such a way as to abuse, exploit or harm a child or young person through the representation of explicit sexual activity. This means that drama practitioners should adapt scenes in performance in order to avoid the potential for harm or they should cut a scene or specific lines or stage directions from the play. In most instances, this allows the play to remain a coherent piece of theatre, but it does lead to a necessary degree of self-imposed censorship.

Drama practitioners must always consult managers when faced with these difficult decisions and they should agree jointly with managers how they should proceed. It may be necessary and sensible to decide not to use a text at all if it creates too many difficulties and potential risks for the learners and the practitioner.

Drama practitioners must inform and consult senior managers if they have concerns or anxieties about a text

When drama teachers are deciding which texts to teach they must follow the general principles of child protection set out at the start of this guidance as well as the more specific guidance about the selection of texts and the appropriateness of various types of drama practice with young people. If drama teachers have any concerns or anxieties about a text, then they must inform and consult with the manager in the school who has responsibility for monitoring the work of the drama department. Decisions about how to proceed must be made jointly between the drama teacher and manager. If there is disagreement, the manager must have the last say.

Drama practitioners and managers must always act in the best interests of the child and young person, not the play or the dramatic activity

When thinking about a specific scene in a text that may cause difficulty, drama practitioners must apply the best interests test: is this in the best interests of the child or young person? Drama practitioners should be able to provide a proper justification for what they do based on the best interests of the learner and not rely on arguments about the artistic integrity of the text, the author's intention or the specific disciplines of dramatic performance. This is an important point for drama practitioners and their managers to understand and appreciate. There is no safeguard for the drama practitioner in the argument that the play itself requires sexual content or nudity. In the past, some unscrupulous drama teachers have used the integrity of the play as an argument to provide cover for their abusive practices. They have argued that they are simply following the text and the expressed wishes of the author. This is wrong within the context of a school or college, or any other setting, as safeguarding children and young people is a more important consideration than the integrity of the play.

Managers and drama teachers must follow the rules of the awarding bodies for submitting texts or improvised scripts and take full responsibility for them

The Children's Commissioner for Wales' report in 2004 raised specific concerns about the way drama examinations were conducted at the time of the alleged abuse. The Clywch report contains a specific recommendation (21.12) for awarding bodies to improve their child protection procedures in relation to drama examinations. The Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (ACCAC) has produced guidelines for awarding bodies in response to the recommendations in the report (see www.old.accac.org.uk/eng/content.php?mID=717).

It is essential that drama teachers and managers are fully aware of the procedures for informing the awarding bodies of the texts or improvised scripts that learners will use in their examinations. Managers and drama teachers must take full responsibility for the appropriateness of the texts studied and submitted for examination. Drama teachers need to consider carefully the texts they choose for drama examinations in the same way as they choose them for studying in class. Awarding bodies select acceptable texts and there is some security for the teacher in using these 'set' texts.

The Children's Commissioner's report also highlighted specific issues about the late submission of pupil-generated scripts, especially where these were inappropriate in terms of their content and language. As noted earlier, inappropriate work cannot be defended on the grounds that it was derived from improvisation or from the learners themselves. In the end, the drama teacher has to take responsibility for the appropriateness, or not, of the texts studied and submitted for examination.

7. Adult participation in drama and mixed-age groups

Drama practitioners must not dominate children by performing too much themselves

There is a role for drama practitioners to intervene in learners' work, especially when they are involved in improvisation. This may be in order to model dramatic techniques and skills to show to the class or to individuals. A drama practitioner may wish to enter a group's improvisation to create a new character or to move the work in a different direction. This kind of teacherly intervention is appropriate and necessary on many occasions. There is also an occasional role for a practitioner to use their own dramatic skills to show effective ways of working. The technique of 'teacher-in-role' is often a valid and effective approach. However, it is important to get the balance right and for the practitioner not to dominate unduly. The practitioner's role should focus on giving the learners the appropriate knowledge, understanding and skills to make their own progress in drama. The practitioner should be designing lessons and activities that take the learners forward. It is not appropriate for the practitioner to dominate performance work or to use the drama lessons as a vehicle for their own performance. In nearly all cases, performance should involve the children and young people as much as possible and not focus too much on the practitioner or other adults.

Drama practitioners must protect the most vulnerable learners when teaching mixed ages together

Where younger children are involved in performances with older children or young people then the drama practitioner needs to consider carefully what the implications are for the most vulnerable learners, usually the youngest children, in taking part in the performance. In most instances, this causes no problems as the entire play is appropriate to the youngest performer. Most school and college productions are like this and there are no difficulties. However, where a younger child has a part in a more mature play then this may cause some difficulties for the drama practitioner. In the end, the most appropriate course of action is to focus on the most vulnerable person, in this case the younger child. If the material is not appropriate to the younger child, then it is not appropriate for that child to take part. If the child takes part, it may open up the drama practitioner to the charge of not taking the best interests of the child into account and leaving that child open to harm, abuse or exploitation.

When children and young people under the age of 16 take part in professional drama productions, it is important for parents and carers to be fully informed of the nature of the production, the young person's role and the commitments required. The participation of the child or young person should require the permission of the parents or carers. In all cases, there should be chaperoning arrangements in place to ensure that someone known to the child or young person is protecting their best interests at all times.

In colleges of further education, and in some other settings, for example amateur drama groups, young people may sometimes find themselves undertaking drama activities with adults. This is particularly the case on vocational courses in performing arts in colleges. In these cases, the practitioner should be aware of the range of experience of people taking part in the activity and try to handle the mix of inexperience and experience sensitively. Although the presence of adult learners may suggest that it is more acceptable to adopt more adult approaches, the practitioner needs to focus on the potential vulnerability of the younger members of the class. The practitioner must continue to apply the best interests test and, when appropriate, tone down the approach in order to match the needs of the most vulnerable, usually the youngest, members of the class.

In the exceptional circumstance where a child or young person has become ill just before a performance, then it would be appropriate for the drama practitioner or another adult to step in at the last minute to allow the performance to go on.

8. The use of improvisation and other dramatic techniques, including ‘method acting’

Drama practitioners use various techniques to develop acting skills and to build a convincing performance from the learners. Improvisation is an important element of drama teaching and it occurs more often in drama lessons than almost any other activity. Improvisation develops learners’ imagination and provides a context for the development of specific dramatic skills. In general, a lot of improvisation is linked to the development and representation of convincing, individual characters through dramatic work.

Improvisation requires the practitioner to be very skilful at intervening only as much as is required to move the learners on in productive ways. In some cases, the practitioner needs to do nothing more than observe the work; on other occasions, the practitioner may have to help the learners to develop the dramatic potential of their work. In many instances, the practitioner needs to keep the learners focused on the activity in case they slip into stereotypes or if they allow their natural exuberance to bubble over too much.

Drama practitioners must monitor carefully where improvisation goes and stop it if it goes too far

In improvisation, the practitioner often will provide a starting point, with the learners then picking up the task and taking it wherever they feel it is appropriate to go, usually within some parameters set by the practitioner. The practitioner needs to monitor this carefully in case the improvisations begin to get out of control or if the work moves down an inappropriate avenue, for example towards sexually explicit references or crude language. There is clearly an element of risk in improvisation and the practitioner needs to be aware of this and manage the activity appropriately.

The freedom of some improvisation also creates the risk that it may allow an unscrupulous practitioner to manipulate the improvisation towards areas of enquiry and activity that are inappropriate for the children, but desirable from the unscrupulous practitioner’s point of view.

This is why the culture of openness is again important and where the best interests test needs to be invoked. The improvisation tasks should form part of a coherent scheme of work that is available and accessible to all, including parents, managers and learners. The lessons should be taking place within a culture of openness where other members of staff can visit the lessons at any time. The practitioner should be able to justify the activity on the grounds that it is in the best interests of the child or young person and does not lead to any harm, abuse, humiliation or neglect. The improvisation must follow the general and specific guidelines set out in this guidance, especially in relation to sexual content, intimate physical contact and strong language.

It is not a sufficient defence to say that the improvisation happened to go in an inappropriate direction because it came from the learners themselves, or that it is in the nature of improvisation that you could not predict where it would go. The drama practitioner must monitor improvisation carefully and stop it if it goes too far or in an inappropriate direction.

Drama practitioners must take children and young people seriously when they appear to be experiencing undue anxiety or say they feel uncomfortable with an activity. In these cases, the practitioner must stop or adapt the activity.

Drama practitioners must always be alert to any indication of genuine discomfort on the part of children or young people. A drama practitioner may notice that a child or young person is feeling uncomfortable with a certain activity that the practitioner has asked them to undertake, perhaps as part of an improvisation or performance. At other times, learners may say that they feel uncomfortable about proceeding with the dramatic activity. This creates problems for the drama practitioner. On the one hand, the practitioner may feel that it would be useful for the learner to develop greater confidence or a wider repertoire of skills. This may involve taking the learner beyond their 'comfort zone'. Most practitioners would encourage the learner to try and would explain the reasons for asking them to develop their skills in this way. However, if a learner appears to be or says openly that they are genuinely anxious about an aspect of improvisation or performance then it is important that the practitioner listens to this, reacts sensitively and acts accordingly, perhaps reallocating roles or stopping the activity and moving on to something else.

Children and young people have the right to express their views on matters that affect them. Drama practitioners need to respond sensitively in these cases and avoid situations which may lead to a child or young person feeling humiliated.

Drama practitioners should apply 'method acting' techniques sparingly and only with great care in practical work with pre-16 learners

A technique used by some actors and directors has become known as 'method acting'. In broad terms, this involves performers using experiences that they have been through themselves either in their own lives or as part of their research into the character they are portraying as the basis for their representation of a character. This can be a very intensive technique and, in some forms, is akin to depth psychology in bringing up buried experiences and unresolved conflicts and emotions from the past and using these to shape a convincing performance. The method actor aims to become, or to inhabit, the character he or she is portraying whereas other techniques focus more on the actor

representing a character in a convincing way through the use of specific acting techniques and devices.

It is appropriate for drama practitioners to introduce learners to the study of different forms of drama. Many focus profitably on Stanislavski's 'System' and Brechtian theatre. Practitioners may discuss with learners the concept of 'method acting' and its association with Lee Strasberg as part of a discussion of theatre history or the development of theoretical approaches to performance. However, in relation to practical drama work and character development, method acting needs to be approached with caution.

Overall, pre-16 learners do not need to develop 'method acting' as a regular practical technique at this stage in their development of practical drama skills. At this stage, they should focus more on developing appropriate, representational acting skills. Often, practitioners will encourage learners to relate the characters they portray to elements within their own lives and experience, to emotions they have felt, and to people and situations they have encountered. This often informs the learners' acting and helps them to produce convincing dramatic work. The focus of this work with pre-16 learners should be on the development of physical movement, posture and voice rather than any deep exploration of psychology, or summoning up difficult, unresolved experiences from the past. At this stage in their lives, children and young people may find method acting techniques disturbing and uncomfortable, and this may inhibit their progress in the subject. Consequently, it needs to be used sparingly and with great care with pre-16 learners.

Drama practitioners and managers can consider more flexibility in post-16 work, but always within limits and always taking full account of the vulnerability of the children and young people involved

When young people are over the age of 16, then it is appropriate to introduce them to a wider range of dramatic work. Young people with an interest in drama will want to explore what modern theatre has to offer and drama practitioners are right to direct them to works of significance in contemporary theatre. This may often mean that post-16 learners may encounter swearing, strong language, challenging situations and attitudes more regularly than pre-16 learners. Some modern theatre is raw and uncompromising. Some contemporary work deliberately aims to make the audience feel uncomfortable.

However, just because the learner is over 16 does not mean that the practitioner can allow every kind of approach or all types of language in the classroom or drama studio. The drama practitioner needs to continue to act openly and sensitively. The practitioner needs to be aware of the stage of development of the most vulnerable learners in the group and think carefully about what is appropriate and acceptable. When learners study plays and go to performances, these should form part of an agreed scheme of work that is shared with other staff and managers in the area/department. Where learners feel uncomfortable with approaches in the classroom, then the practitioner needs to listen to the learner and stop or adapt the activity appropriately.

After the age of 16, there is scope for learners studying level 3 qualifications (such as AS/A levels and BTEC National Diplomas) to experience 'method acting' as a practical technique in a limited fashion in order to give post-16 learners a few practical examples of

techniques that are sometimes used in professional theatre. This means that the practitioner might run some practical sessions so the post-16 learner can experience how an actor or director might use 'method acting' techniques to develop a character or to explore a dramatic situation. The aim should never be to use this technique as the main method for developing dramatic work in a school or further education college. The full application of 'method acting' techniques should be left to work with adults after the age of 18.

9. Nudity and intimate physical contact

Drama practitioners and managers must never allow nudity

There is no role for nudity or for intimate physical contact in drama lessons or performances for young people under the age of 18 in a school, further education college or other setting.

Drama practitioners and managers must never allow any deliberate intimate, sexual contact

There is no role for intimate, sexual contact in drama lessons or performances in schools, further education colleges or other settings for teaching young people. However, it is difficult to define exactly where the dividing line is between physical contact and intimate, sexual contact. Acting involves gesture and physical movement and it often involves physical contact between individuals or groups. A character might need to be restrained by others; two characters may fight each other; characters may hug each other in friendship. Without physical contact of this kind, drama could not happen.

To avoid any difficulties, drama practitioners need to use their commonsense. This means that children and young people should not have any deliberate sexual contact in lessons and during performance. Sometimes children and young people may have accidental sexual contact of a fleeting nature, for example brushing against each other in warm-up exercises or in performance or improvisation. Where this is purely accidental and it does not upset the children or young people, then it is just an acceptable part of what may happen during physical activity. The key point is that this takes place in a clearly non-sexual way. Intimate, sexual contact should have no place within a scheme of work for drama in a school or further education college or other setting for teaching young people.

Drama practitioners need to consider carefully what gestures and movements are appropriate to communicate the emotion or idea required in the play or improvisation and what gestures and movements are acceptable. In school and college settings, it is usually possible to replace any explicit actions and gestures within a text with more acceptable forms of dramatic activity that still communicate substantially the same emotions and ideas to the audience. In this way, the overall dramatic performance retains its integrity and coherence, but the learners and the practitioner are not placed in a difficult position.

For example, many learners are uncomfortable with some kinds of kissing in performance because of the physical intimacy that it entails, whatever the motivation of the characters or genre of the performance. A commonsense approach is to focus on the emotion that needs to be communicated. Often the aim is to establish affection or love between two

characters. In most cases, a kiss on the cheek or an embrace can communicate the required emotion. These gestures show affection in an acceptable and obvious way.

Practitioners should be very sensitive to these concerns and must never insist that any child or young person should kiss another. There should always be a clear rationale for the use of an explicit gesture or action, such as a kiss, taking place within any dramatic work, and the drama practitioner should be able to justify the gesture to parents and managers, if required.

Drama practitioners must use a stepped approach before any physical contact with children or young people

Where a drama practitioner feels that a learner is not acting well and needs help with a physical action or gesture to improve, then the practitioner should use verbal instruction first to get the required response from the learner. If that fails, the practitioner should model the action or gesture for the learner. In most cases, these two stages are enough to prompt the required response. If these interventions fail, then the practitioner may help the learner by offering to adjust a particular physical gesture or movement. The practitioner should proceed only if the learner is comfortable with this intervention and agrees to it. This need not be a formal, long-drawn out process. It will usually happen quickly in the normal course of the teaching. It might take the form of a quick question, such as 'Do you mind if I help you with this?' or 'Can I intervene here?' or 'I need to move you here – is that OK?' So long as the learner agrees and the physical contact is not intimate in any way then the practitioner can act safely. The interaction should also take place within an open environment and this will also offer security to the learner and the practitioner.

10. Strong, offensive language

Drama practitioners and managers should limit the use of strong, offensive language in performance by pre-16 learners.

The use of strong, offensive language can create difficulties for the practitioner and for children and young people in drama activities. In most situations, learners and drama practitioners use their commonsense. Many learners use strong and offensive language in their everyday, informal interactions with each other. However, it is uncommon to see this reflected in the dramatic performances and improvisations undertaken by children and young people in schools and colleges. Most children and young people recognise that offensive language is not appropriate in the classroom and they censor their own language accordingly.

The use of strong language causes offence to many people today. Even though attitudes towards offensive language have softened in some quarters, children and young people continue to recognise that they are crossing a line when they use strong, offensive language in the company of parents and practitioners. Yet, the existence of such a line means that strong, offensive language can create an emotional intensity and verbal assault that is in itself useful for performers in dramatic work.

Many contemporary plays contain examples of strong, offensive language as they attempt to reflect the language used by many adults and young people in their everyday lives. In

modern theatre, strong language reflects the almost accidental, casual use of expletives that occurs in society. In this sense, offensive language is part of the play's representation of a shared, real experience. Children and young people involved in improvisation may also feel that it is legitimate to use strong language in order to represent the real world that they experience every day.

Drama practitioners normally use their common sense when making judgements about what is and is not acceptable in terms of spoken and written language. Normally they recognise that learners' use of offensive language is often a result of children and young people pushing at the boundaries to see how far they can go, and practitioners quickly and sensitively reaffirm and establish the agreed practices and customs of the formal setting, such as the school or college, namely that offensive language is inappropriate in the classroom. Children and young people use swear words in drama activity in the belief that it will be shocking and add intensity to their work, but this is often not the case. Swearing is often the result of a lack of dramatic ideas, a poor substitute for real dramatic skills and creativity.

There is a legitimate place for strong language and swearing on limited occasions. When reading and studying modern plays, it is inevitable that learners will come across some strong language. In all cases, there must be a legitimate point to this use of language. It should not be used a great deal in the play being studied or performed. On the few occasions that it is used, it should have dramatic impact and a purpose. When strong language is used, it should remain appropriate to the learners' level of maturity, the nature of the group and the vulnerability of individual learners within it. The learners themselves should also feel comfortable with and understand the language they are using.

11. Video recording and parental consent

Drama practitioners and managers should obtain consent from parents before taking photographs or making video recordings of learners. The same applies to photographs or video recording of adults.

It is not unlawful to take photographs or video recordings of children or young people in a school or college. However, some aspects of the Data Protection Act and the European Convention on Human Rights may apply in these cases (see the appendix for the Information Commissioner's guidance on taking photographs in schools).

The safest course for drama practitioners is to make sure they get consent from parents before taking photographs or making video recordings of children and young people. This includes rehearsals, drama examinations and performances. Practitioners should also get consent from any adults involved.

Drama practitioners could meet these requirements by asking parents to **sign a consent form at the start of the course** allowing the dramatic work of their child to be recorded on camera or video during lessons and rehearsals. The letter to the parents, which might issue from a Headteacher / Principal to cover all relevant departments/courses, should make it clear that the images will be stored securely and used for no other purpose than the one for which the permission was originally obtained.

If videoing/photographing is a requirement of the examining body, learners whose parents do not give their consent will be unable to pursue the course of study.

Appendices

1. Extract from the Recommendations of the Clywch report of the Children's Commissioner for Wales (July 2004)

21.13 I recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government, in partnership with the DfES, ACCAC and the equivalent qualifying curriculum and assessment authorities in Scotland, Northern Ireland and England, consider the way in which drama is taught and examined in schools and further education colleges, with the aim of producing practice guidance within 2 years of the publication of this report that will include consideration of the following issues:

- (i) selection of appropriate drama texts in education and examinations;
- (ii) adult participation in school drama and drama practical examinations;
- (iii) safe teaching of drama, in particular the practitioner's role in pupil improvisation and method acting;
- (iv) venues for timings of drama examinations and rehearsals;
- (v) video recording of children and young people in drama rehearsals and practical examinations and the need to obtain parental consent;
- (vi) the practice of involving younger pupils in drama practical examinations of older pupils;
- (vii) monitoring and sanctions in relation to the late submission of scripts for practical examination to examining boards;
- (viii) express guidance relating to sexual content and language, intimate physical contact and nudity in drama practical examinations and lessons;
- (ix) the duties of schools and college management in monitoring the implementation and observance of guidance.

2. Information Commissioner's guidance on taking photographs in schools

Data Protection Good Practice Note: Taking Photographs in Schools

Aim of this guidance

This good practice guidance is aimed at Local Education Authorities and those working within schools, colleges and universities. It gives advice on taking photographs in educational institutions and whether doing so must comply with the Data Protection Act 1998.

Recommended Good Practice

The Data Protection Act is unlikely to apply in many cases where photographs are taken in schools and other educational institutions. Fear of breaching the provisions of the Act should not be wrongly used to stop people taking photographs or videos.

Where the Act does apply, a common sense approach suggests that if the photographer asks for permission to take a photograph, this will usually be enough to ensure compliance.

Photos taken for official school use may be covered by the Act and pupils and students should be advised why they are being taken.

- Photos taken purely for personal use are exempt from the Act.
- Photos taken by the media are usually exempt from the Act.

Examples

Personal use:

A parent takes a photograph of their child and some friends taking part in the school Sports Day to be put in the family photo album. These images are for personal use and the Data Protection Act does not apply.

Grandparents are invited to the school nativity play and wish to video it. These images are for personal use and the Data Protection Act does not apply.

Official school use:

Photographs of pupils or students are taken for building passes.

These images are likely to be stored electronically with other personal data and the terms of the Act will apply.

A small group of pupils are photographed during a science lesson and the photo is to be used in the school prospectus. This is unlikely to be personal data and the Act wouldn't apply.

Media use:

A photograph is taken by the local newspaper of a school awards ceremony. This is unlikely to be covered by the Act. Even if it were covered, personal data processed for journalistic purposes are exempt from the main provisions of the Act. However, as there may be concerns in individual cases about pictures appearing in the press, it would be good practice for schools to advise people that the press will be attending certain events.

Further Information

If you require any further information about this or any other aspect of Data Protection, please contact us using the details below:

Web: www.ico.gov.uk

Email: mail@ico.gsi.gov.uk

Telephone: 01625 545700

Information Commissioner's Office - GPN

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