

**Road blocks, road works and continuing explorations of the terrain:
an examination of drama in education in New Zealand in relation to the UNESCO
Road Map**

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Introduction: terrain and maps

The UNESCO *Road Map for Arts Education* (2006) firmly asserts the right of every child and adult to education that “will ensure full and harmonious development and participation in cultural and artistic life, that cultivates in each learner “a sense of creativity and initiative, a fertile imagination, emotional intelligence and a moral ‘compass’, a capacity for critical reflection, a sense of autonomy, and freedom of thought and action”, and that “incorporate(es) elements of their own culture”. It proposes a structure to arts education that involves: ‘study of artistic works’, “direct contact with artistic works”, and “engaging in arts practices”. The document states that for such education to be of high quality it “requires highly skilled professional art teachers, as well as generalist teachers and is “enhanced by successful partnerships between these and highly skilled artists”. As an affirmation of the global importance of education in and through the arts the Road Map is a valuable document. It is also useful as a means to examine and evaluate the state of arts education in each of our countries.

The UNESCO document describes itself as a map because it offers “a template, a set of overall guidelines for the introduction or promotion of Arts Education; to be adapted – changed and expanded as necessary”. There is an implicit acknowledgement that the map is not to be seen in prescriptive terms, but rather as recognition that there is a journey to take and that there is an international consensus of informed opinion about the goals of the journey and the most effective ways of moving ahead.

This article examines the current state of drama in education in New Zealand, mapping out the overall terrain, using the principles cited above as useful check points on a map made by experienced international travellers, and suggesting further useful equipment and markers for the next stages in the journey.

The metaphors of maps might suggest a relatively static terrain, and the impact of seasons, floods, tornadoes, earthquakes and oil spills reminds us that our physical environment itself is by no means static. Moreover the landscape we explore in looking at drama education is primarily a human one, constantly evolving in response to changing political, economic, social and intellectual forces. To acknowledge the living energy of such a terrain I also draw on the metaphor of a tree, a living and changing element in the terrain. In this I borrow from the theme, *Branching Out*, of a recent New Zealand national drama conference where I was invited to give a keynote exploring the current state of our discipline.

I am an insider to the discussion that follows, a teacher of drama over several decades and an active member of Drama New Zealand. Consequently I draw on my own knowledge of drama developments in New Zealand and of drama teachers’ discourses, rather than on published accounts. What I discuss refers directly to our collective practice in New Zealand, relating it to the challenges offered us by the Road Map. However, because our curriculum

and practice development have strong parallels to those in other countries, I hope that the exploration offered here will have relevance beyond New Zealand.

Stop signs on the road

A cynical first look at our situation might evoke an autumnal image of wind-bent trees and wildly spilling leaves. We see cuts in the resourcing of drama education, a narrowing focus in educational policy, the impact on schools of socio-economic challenges, and an ever increasing pressure of paper work.

Drama teachers are concerned about funding cuts, particularly in the field of professional development. A recent initiative that provided funding for professional artists to take residencies in schools, Artists in Schools, has been discontinued. Centrally generated contracts for advisors to support the implementation of the arts curriculum have not been renewed. Funding for professional development in schools has been restricted to the government's current priorities of literacy, numeracy and physical education. At the level of initial teacher education, the pressure to cut costs has led to reduced contact hours, larger class sizes and in many cases to the replacement of specialist courses in each of the arts by composite or generic ones.

Current governmental policy frames educational problems and their solution within a narrow focus. Improved national attainment in literacy and numeracy has been identified as the key goal, and national standards have been developed against which all students are to be tested and against which schools' performance is to be evaluated. At the university level, a cap on enrolments is enforced by funding formulas and strategic priority focuses on admission and retention of immediate school graduates. Neither measure bodes well for teacher education generally, and more particularly for that of secondary teachers in specialist arts subjects. In a capped environment, it is against the financial interests of a university to maintain courses with relatively low numbers, at the same time as they turn down further enrolments in other large and growing courses. In all our universities the intake for specialist secondary teacher education courses is well below universities' desired norms and their continuance is under threat.

Within schools, the drama teacher's job seems to be becoming more complex and harder. In New Zealand, as in other countries, the gap between rich and poor is widening. Not only are the disparities between schools in provision of art-making resources and access to theatres and performances more obvious, but students are coming with very different expectations of success and future opportunities. Violence in school grounds and even in the classroom, with several recent reports of knife attacks on teachers, has become more common, and therefore a necessary component in teachers' planning.

Demands of internal assessment, moderation, and reporting against a range of government and school set criteria for accountability see an ever growing increase in paper work that has been called 'death by paper'. Drama teachers regularly report their struggle to mount the school production and teach interactive and practical classes at the same time as they deal with the mounting piles of paper-based administration.

From a view that shelters from the cold rain of funding cuts and societal problems there seem to be few green leaves visible on the tree of drama education.

New roadways

However, there are other sites on the terrain to look from.

Drama is the subject with the fastest growing numbers of students entering into assessment for NCEA, New Zealand's national qualification system, and succeeding at all levels, right up to Scholarship¹. There has also been a large increase in the number of drama teachers across the country. Where a larger secondary school may have had one drama teacher ten years ago, it could have five now. Few schools would not have a fulltime drama teacher, and most would have a small department.

While drama in the primary sector is seen as an area that is still generally underdeveloped, the enrolment of small but growing numbers of primary teachers in postgraduate drama courses² shows that primary teachers are wanting to upgrade their knowledge of drama processes and in many cases use drama across the curriculum.

Until very recently New Zealanders who wanted to undertake a Masters or Doctorate in drama education, the present author among them, needed to go overseas. We now offer both within our own country and tailor them to address our own socio-cultural contexts. Small course numbers pose a constant threat, but as research based dissertations are successfully completed they assure the place of drama education within our universities.

To a significant extent Drama New Zealand³ still sees itself as the younger sister of Drama Australia, though one that has her own perspectives. We look across the Tasman for opportunities to develop and share our scholarship and we admire the organizational depth the discipline has achieved there and its capacity for strategic influence. Nevertheless our own international credibility is growing. Our curriculum and some of our projects attract international attention. A small but growing number of our academics publish in international journals and contribute to books. We have launched our own peer reviewed journal⁴ that draws international as well as national contributions.

We are developing a sense of our own history and intercultural accountabilities in terms that are both bicultural (relating to the indigenous people and the partnership espoused in the Treaty of Waitangi⁵) and multicultural (relating to the increasing number and variety of international immigrants). And we are beginning to be aware of how they shape our theatre and how we might draw on aspects of history and culturally grounded performative style in our teaching.

While termination of the funding provided for the Artists in Schools programme is a serious loss across education in all the arts, quite a number of our secondary drama teachers (and teachers in other arts) are artists in their own right who have come into teaching after they had established their initial artistic direction. Moreover, many theatre companies have

¹ National Certificates of Educational Achievement (NCEA) are New Zealand's national qualifications for senior secondary students. They are comprised of both internal and external assessments. There are three levels of NCEA at Years 11 to 13 respectively. At Year 13 there is also a separate and highly competitive external scholarship examination that is intended for top students and carries tertiary study awards.

² What North America calls graduate programmes are called postgraduate ones in New Zealand (as well as in Australia and Britain). Moreover, we make a distinction between graduate diplomas which require an initial degree in any field and postgraduate diplomas which require an initial degree in the same subject field, and therefore our secondary teaching qualification is currently a graduate diploma.

³ Drama New Zealand and Drama Australia are the two countries' national drama organisations.

⁴ *New Zealand Journal of Research in Performing Arts and Education*. <http://www.drama.org.nz/?cat=78>

⁵ The Treaty of Waitangi, signed in 1840 by the British Crown and Maori, continues to define rights and differential sovereignty.

evolved partnerships with their surrounding schools and plan several productions a year to meet schools' academic needs, sometimes providing teaching resources. Drama teachers involve their students in competitions and festivals and take them to see neighbouring school productions, so creating an artistic community with a variety of aesthetic approaches.

Most importantly, perhaps, as a community of drama teachers we are becoming more aware that drama contains some particularly effective tools for dealing with social issues and for coping with the crowded curriculum.

Looked at from these perspectives one can see groves of young sapling surrounding the maturing tree of drama education in schools, and one might say we are moving steadily along the route signalled by the UNESCO Road Map. What remains as a challenge is to ensure that our teaching of drama really contributes to full and rich human development, and that, rather than being passenger in a vehicle of policy, we become navigators finding the best routes to travel.

Constraints and agency

Most New Zealand teachers would embrace a vision of arts education in terms of the liberationist goals described in the Road Map: stimulating cognitive development, cultivating creativity and initiative, providing a moral compass, developing capacity for critical reflection, fostering autonomy and freedom of thought and action. However many might say that they are restricted in their power to realise it. Primary teachers find that pressure to teach the entire curriculum leaves, regrettably, little room for the individual arts. Secondary teachers refer to the pressure of preparing students for NCEA and of meeting school expectations of high profile productions.

At the same time many feel troubled by the gaps between curriculum prescribed knowledge and the real world experienced by students, and hampered by the impact of social issues that bring students with low academic expectations and foreclosed futures into their classrooms. They experience a frequent mismatch between what they feel required, or able, to teach and the personal aspirations and employment hopes of many of their students. The real world and the curriculum of schooling are at odds with each other, and teachers are jammed between them, gradually pushed to the bottom by both.

A flip of the pyramid would put teachers at top, claiming their agency and powerfully mediating between the real world and the mandates of curriculum. Teachers would then be able to claim that they are indeed providing a drama education that facilitates the goals of the UNESCO document. What would it take to make it possible?

As stated above, drama processes offer a rich repertoire of tools that can be applied to exploring other areas of the curriculum (Miller & Saxton, 2004; Saebo, 2009) and addressing social issues (Donelan & O'Brien 2008; Gallagher, 2007). The pages that follow explore ways in which some of these tools work for purposes that range from developing literacy to dealing with violence. However, I am mindful, as I have discussed elsewhere (Greenwood, 2009), that drama tools are not magic wands. How they are used and what they can achieve depend largely on teachers' breadth and richness of knowledge, and willingness to acquire knowledge. Important areas of knowledge for us as teachers are ones concerning the society we live in: awareness of the impact of social and economic conditions, appreciation of the value of cultural difference and of particular values that underpin such differences, understanding of social justice and its demands. Others include good working knowledge of the developmental stages and ways of thinking of young people, of group process and negotiation, and a sense of when and how to take to leadership. And in addition we need to

have fine-tuned skill in managing drama processes. It takes a strong knowledge base to be a powerful drama teacher, and it calls for a comprehensive and a rigorous pre-service programme to educate one.

A curriculum of opportunity

The New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) mandates learning for the whole of schooling, Years 1-13. In the primary school the wide range of subjects creates a potentially 'crowded curriculum', and it is often translated into school schemes that focus on detailed subject content. However, the document itself is one that invites teaching and learning in terms that would closely match those described in the UNESCO document.

The schematic overview (p7) states a vision of "Young people who will be confident, connected, actively involved, lifelong learners", and identifies the principles that are to be the foundation of all school curriculum decision making: "High expectations, Treaty of Waitangi, Cultural diversity, Inclusion, Learning to learn, Community engagement, Coherence, Future focus." It then names the values that are to be encouraged, modelled and explored: "Excellence, Innovation, inquiry, and curiosity, Diversity, Equity, Community and participation, Ecological sustainability, Integrity, Respect", and the key competencies that are to be developed: "Thinking, Using language, symbols, and texts, Managing self, Relating to others, and Participating and contributing." The named vision, foundational principles, values, and key competencies (apart from emphasis on the Treaty of Waitangi) are ones that match other humanist based curricula such as the Scottish *Curriculum for Excellence* (Learning and Teaching in Scotland, 2008) and the Norwegian Core Curriculum (Norwegian Board of Education, 1994). They also align readily with the UNESCO's Road Map's affirmation of the importance of education that ensures "full and harmonious [human] development".

When we look towards the tree from this view point in the terrain we might see scores of little birds, nested, ready to take flight.

Room to explore

An older tree has magical fissures and holes where children might hide treasures. The international storehouse of process dramas offers a wealth of ways by which the key competencies named in the New Zealand Curriculum can be addressed. *Participating and contributing*, at the base of work in drama, is further explained in the curriculum in these terms: "Students who participate and contribute in communities have a sense of belonging and the confidence to participate in new contexts. They understand the importance of balancing rights, roles and responsibilities" (p13). *Managing self*, the curriculum says, results in students who "are enterprising, resourceful, reliable and resilient... They know when to lead when to follow, and when and how to act independently" (p12). *Relating to others* includes "the ability to listen actively, recognise different points of view, negotiate and share ideas" resulting in students who "are open to new ideas and are able to take different roles in different situations" (p12). *Thinking*, it is explained, "is about using creative, critical and metacognitive processes to make sense of information, experiences and ideas," and is evident in students who "reflect on their own learning, draw on personal knowledge and intuitions, ask questions and challenge the basis of assumptions and perceptions" (p12). *Using language, symbols, and texts* involves "working with and making meaning of the codes in which knowledge is expressed" and includes recognising "how choices of language,

symbol, or text affect people's understanding and the ways in which they respond to communications" (p12).

I have often played with adaptations⁶ of Cecily O'Neill's *Haunted House* (O'Neill & Lambert, 1982) The work begins with her famous pre-text which advertises: "£50 to anyone who will spend one night at Dartmoor Manor", which I adjust for relocation and inflation. I borrow heavily from O'Neill's use of an evasive teacher-in-role who subtly plants innuendo that provokes participants to doubt her veracity and speculate about the truth she is hiding. Their doubts led readily to further research, into which I introduce a former neighbour, an old lady who speaks of 'a great injustice' that took place in the house. Exactly where the drama leads us depends on the specific teaching aims for that class and on the ideas that students introduce into the drama. However, as the work unfolds students will develop questioning techniques, research a selected period in local history, shape and unpack freeze frames, create soundscapes, make and accept offers, develop character and plot, explore climactic moments, evolve dramatic symbols, move backwards and forwards through the emerging narrative, reflect on both their work and the story they are creating, and work collaboratively to understand and achieve their artistic goals. The learning in performing such activities aligns strongly with what the curriculum describes in the development of core competencies.

Drama and literacy

While the curriculum positions literacy as a complex and critical range of competencies, our government's current emphasis on measurable and nationally tested outcomes is rather more simplistic. However, numbers of New Zealand primary teachers are beginning to draw on the legacies of leading international practitioners (notably among them Wagner, 1998; Miller & Saxton, 2004; O'Toole & Dunn, 2002) in using drama processes as ways to develop not only the surface skills of literacy but also richer interpretive, creative and reflective skills. Dramas can be structured to encompass whatever specific or integrated literacy skills the teacher wishes to develop or review. Moreover, the nature of drama has embedded elements that are particularly useful to contextualise and animate text and to facilitate critical reflection. I would like to briefly examine five of these elements: agency, use of framing, taking of role, deconstructive strategies and per/pre-formance, and illustrate them with *Goldilocks in trouble* (Greenwood 2005), a drama I have adapted with various groups of students.

The drama starts where the traditional story finishes: the Bears find the havoc in their house and report it to the police, and the police challenge Goldilocks' family to take responsibility for ensuring that Goldilocks answers for her actions. The work might begin with the teacher asking to be reminded of the story, perhaps in comic strip format with six groups each showing one frame. Two parallel drama strategies are being employed: endowing the students with the role of expertise, and providing a structure with which to review, synthesis and sequence the key points of the story, one that allows everyone in a large class to take a role. *Agency, role and deconstructive strategies* are being employed, and a range of interpretive functions of literacy are being addressed. As the class in collective role as Bear Family writes their letter to the police and later takes role as Goldilocks' family to help her find a way of making restitution to the Bears, they explore agency, role and deconstruction further. *Framing* also plays a vital role, as in a real life setting contact and negotiating with the police would be the domain of adults, and role allows them to engage both emotionally and intellectually. Within the drama frame they can examine both sides of the conflict and explore values and decision-making that are often the province of their teacher and their

⁶ One of these adaptations is described in Greenwood, J. (2010). *Playing with text*.

elders. In the process of building to performance students try things out, refine and develop something they think works. In performance itself, they have the opportunity to make a mark, physically and before witnesses. As they do so they *pre-form* the expertise they expect to gain later in their lives: trialling and claiming future roles.

The National Certificates of Educational Achievement and the curriculum

The National Certificates of Educational Achievement (NCEA) are the formal assessments of learning in each subject. They take place, in incremental levels, in the last three years of schooling and consist of both internal and external elements of assessment. At a surface the requirements of NCEA focus specifically on the art form of drama, and one of the lowest moments in my career as a teacher educator occurred when, during a discussion of postcolonialism in theatre, a student told me: “I won’t have time to try and save the world; I just need to concentrate on getting my students through NCEA.” The rubrics of NCEA units make no reference to the principles, values and competencies outlined in the curriculum framework, and consequently secondary teachers have often tended to ignore the content of the framework document. Now, however, secondary schools are being asked examine their teaching styles and content in the light of the framework. Here I examine a possible approach to *Macbeth* that connects to the key competencies and that could form the basis of an NCEA unit, either for devising a drama or as a lead into performing a scripted play.

Those who see *Macbeth* in the theatre can get caught up in the power of the drama, but those who meet it first as a printed script may find the language daunting and perhaps off-putting. Approaching the play through games, exercises, improvisations and selected fragments of texts provides a way into the play that is accessible and meaningful and that scaffolds students’ encounter with the full text. In addition, such an approach provides a means to progressively explore a range of drama skills and concepts and wider questions about life and society.

In my plan, the work begins with orchestrated choral delivery of a single line from the play: “Should I wade no more, returning were as tedious as go o’er”. The teacher conducts a soundscape. Then she may ask for volunteers to take her place as conductors. The exercise allows students to explore the cadence and flow of Shakespeare’s language by approaching it through just one line. It is also an exercise in vocalisation: students increasingly find the freedom and confidence to use their voice as a vehicle for Shakespeare’s rhythms. Moreover the orchestration evokes feeling and ideas that begin to relate to the themes of the play. The next activity asks students to explore meaning for the line, devising a short sequence of physical theatre, that could include words or chants but not dialogue, to embody the line.

Both exercises invoke *participating and contributing* on the part of students: the stronger their collaborative skills become – of making offers, accepting them and working together to achieve their planned result - the better their improvisations, and the greater the fun. As discussed earlier *relating to others* and *managing self* develop as participants consciously restrain their own action to that which will enhance the group task. *Using language, symbols, and texts* is at the heart of these two interrelated exercises: students are becoming aware of how to manipulate verbal and physical language and they are also becoming aware of how symbolic and figurative texts are shaped and refined. *Thinking* grows almost unconsciously through the exercises. One of the most exciting things about drama is that while deliberate cognitive thinking is provoked and developed, students also begin to understand that they think physically as well as intellectually, and learn to trust and release their emotional and muscular responses to meaning.

A third activity in this particular sequence is a round of games of complicity and trickery. *Macbeth* is about taking initiatives, taking risks, tricking and betraying, feeling afraid and being caught out. Participants can explore the play's issues at a pre-conscious level and to lay experiential foundations for what they will meet in the written text. Dramatic *symbol* is being further explored. The work then moves to developing improvisations from short fragments of the script, in the making of which all the key competencies are again employed and further challenged to develop.

Finally a climactic scene is developed. First it is approached as a collage. One student is given the role of Macbeth and the lines that occur as he prepares to meet the invading army:

Hang out our banners on the outward walls;
The cry is still 'They come:' our castle's strength
Will laugh a siege to scorn.

The other students in pairs are given the roles of other characters in the play, perhaps including some of the lesser background voices, such as the children or peasant farmers. Using their own words they create a dramatic moment. The impact is one of multiple flashbacks, complicating and crystallising Macbeth's stand as the culmination of various intrigues and actions. The scene is later developed by having each student search the play for phrases that match the intentions they had created for their characters, and is played again with Shakespeare's words.

The way the key competencies are developed follows the lines discussed earlier. What is I want to emphasis with this example is that while NCEA does not overtly reference the rich generic competencies articulated in the curriculum, the making of the art forms of drama repeatedly invokes all of them. A similar tracking might be made of the nominated values.

Dealing with the world

The drama work I've discussed above approaches issues in the real world indirectly. However, drama teachers sometimes choose to tackle difficult problems directly. Boal's early work (1979) opened ways for theatre and drama to identify, examine and analyse problems in participants' lived experience, and to explore possible resolutions. Since then teachers, in and outside classrooms, have adapted his approach and strategies linking them to other strategies from the legacies of process drama and theatre practitioners such as Brecht. The Dracon project, growing out of a partnership between Australian, Sweden and Malaysia, used drama to explore and combat bullying and developed into a project that has led to not only a body of evidence-based research but also practical resources for classroom teachers, the best known in New Zealand perhaps being *Cooling Conflict* by O'Toole, Burton and Plunkett (2005). For the most part New Zealand secondary teachers would tend to use such problem-based drama in junior classes. Sometimes, however, risk-taking teachers have developed their major school production and their students' work for NCEA assessment around a challenging social issue.

Sutherlin's work (Sutherlin & Greenwood 2008) with family violence is one such example. When her students came to school shocked by a recent news story of an infant's death from family violence, Sutherlin agreed to work with the issue, devising a public performance. The school is in a low socio-economic community, in parts of which there is a backdrop of gang prospecting, unemployment, violence, and academic indifference. Her task as teacher involved developing strategies that allowed students to explore the complexities of the problem, and introducing dramatic forms that would avoid 'a shock-horror' approach. Aware of the gaps in her own sociological knowledge, she brought in community agencies who deal

with the risk of family violence to work with the students in problem analysis. And finally she brought in the wider community to respond to the performed work.

Initially, the students made it clear that they positioned themselves well aside from such acts and the mindsets that lead to them. As their work progressed, however, they began to explore how the socio-economic community they live in is constructed by society. This led to scenes that portrayed patterns of learned violence within a family and others that showed how a parent's frustration at work and final loss of job led to increasing aggression at home as his sense of self worth was eroded. They began to understand that violence occurs not only in the overt acts in which it breaks out physically, but also in the latent injustices and disenfranchisements that occur at a daily level.

On the second night the performance was followed by a forum lead by the community workers. The parents of the students on stage talked about how they experienced the pressures of life and parenthood and used the work the students had offered as an important part of their discussion about the issues. The theatre was being used as forum where issues of importance to the community were being debated, and the students' voices were being treated as serious contributions to the debate. As might be expected with work of such energy, the quality of their performances and their reflective comments was such that they also scored well in their NCEA assessments.

In terms of this discussion, the important point about this work is that it brought together the apparently competing demands of senior assessment and the teaching of the life skills that students believed were important.

Conclusion: examining roots, trunk and branches; grounding and theorising our practice

My argument is that, in surface terms at least, drama in New Zealand has come a long way in travelling along the routes indicated by the UNECSO Road Map. We have a curriculum that makes education in the arts compulsory throughout primary school and provides pathways in secondary school right up to Scholarship level. Drama is a fast growing subject, and teachers teach about, in and through the art forms. However, we are still in the early stages of exploring what we can do with our art, and what ends we want to use it for. As the conferences of Drama New Zealand indicate we are relatively strong in elements of our craft but we still need to theorise our practice. If maps, UNESCO's and ones of our own making, are to be useful we need to more fully interrogate why we undertake particular kinds of work, be they artistic performance or process, what we hope to achieve through them, and what differences are made by the intricacies of the ways we choose to work. And it remains an active challenge for Drama New Zealand to consider the relationships between our collective practice, our history as a nation, and the world we would like to leave for our children.

So if Drama New Zealand is a living tree and not a carved post on the terrain, it is something that is grounded and interrelated through all its branches. Our roots are in Papatuanuku⁷, making present not only our history but also the complex concerns of our daily world. Our leaf tips reach to the sky. As a tree we can laugh in the wind and rain and shelter children and birds. Our branches may break in the rain and become wood for the fire. Meanwhile we will cast new seeds.

Then the intentions as well as the map of UNESCO will become real.

⁷ Papatuanuku is earth mother, mythic parent and the living earth we stand on.

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