



# THE SHOW MUST GO ON

It's a lot of effort and can be an emotional rollercoaster – but encouraging young people to take part in performance can bring impressive benefits across the curriculum, argues **Holly Barradell**

**A** school performance can mean so many different things dependent on your facilities, the teachers, the students' hunger to perform, the age ranges and unfortunately, of course, the budget (and it must be admitted, for some, it will always be perceived as little more than a one-hour Thursday night after school detention...) Wherever you teach, performances usually take place in the form of the nativity, end of year showcase, assembly, or the whole school musical or play. For secondary and sixth form students there are also the GCSE, BTEC and A level performances, which are sometimes public, and there are even end of term teacher assessed performances in some schools. Why, though, actually do these kinds of performances beyond what is required for specialist drama studies? For the teachers (and the students) it is a lot of hard work - and most educators would agree that the real reward is seeing the curtain go up on opening night with their talented students taking to the stage - but what if it could be more than that?

Since I left the classroom I have had time to reflect on my practice and experiences whilst teaching and the opportunities there are for drama teachers and their students. For example, Trinity College London exam board provides a qualification for the school play called 'Plays in Production'. This assessment is available from Grade 1 to 8; students on and off the stage are acknowledged for their commitment within the three-page theatre review, written by a Trinity examiner, who is just an ordinary member of the audience.

As a drama teacher you are often placed in a department on your own with little time and a small budget, so how can you be resourceful? If you have GCSE and A Level students

who are taking the technical options for their exams you could get them to use the designs they are working on within your production. If your school is teaching the Extended Project why not speak to the teacher in charge so some students' projects could coincide with your school production? Likewise, consider Arts Award, a qualification available at five levels for children and young people aged 7 to 25 - they can explore any art form. The award builds confidence, helps young people to enjoy cultural activities and prepares them for further education or employment. If you are at a school that runs Arts Award do bear in mind that the school play is a perfect way for a whole group of young people to work towards this qualification, making the school play educational and even more value for money with that ever reducing budget.

Above all, think laterally! I have worked on school performances where I have created the possibilities to involve 17 other subjects from around my school. This cross-curricular approach involved more students and teachers which definitely made it a 'whole school' performance, in a very real sense. This is how I did it:

Looking forwards, 2014–2016 is Shakespeare celebration time! Good old William would have been 450 years old on 23rd April 2014, so many arts and cultural organisations are putting on the party of a lifetime for him... maybe your 2014 school play could be one of the bard's works? You could invite local primary schools to come and watch - in February 2014 primary schools who have signed up for Shakespeare Week (being organised by The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust) will receive their Shakespeare Passport, which is designed to encourage primary school children to collect stamps evidencing their cultural engagement with



Shakespeare. They could get a credit from attending your school performance!

If your school doesn't really have a suitable space in which to perform with an audience (and even if it does), the Shakespeare Schools Festival (SSF) is a fantastic opportunity to engage pupils with Shakespeare's work and provides the chance to perform on stage at a professional theatre. SSF gives young performers, technicians, designers, musicians and marketing students, from primary age through to sixth form, a unique opportunity. The cost of doing SSF might seem a lot initially, but when you consider it includes a CPD day for the director teacher, a workshop for your students as well as resources and the cost of the performance night, the value for money becomes apparent.

It's true, however, that the cost of putting on a school performance can be a real concern for some schools. With school budgets being cut and the pressure from league tables to constantly improve, understandably it makes a head teacher want to prioritise salaries for teaching assistants, better resources and staff CPD rather than the cost of the royalties for the school show. However, help is at hand. Trinity College London runs an annual International Festival of Playwriting and Performance. This event is created off the back of Trinity's International Playwriting Competition; winning plays are printed and produced for the sole purpose of giving schools and youth theatres access to new and exciting scripts for young people - without the heavy royalty costs. If you would like a copy of the plays to use in your school, just email: [dramateachers@trinitycollege.co.uk](mailto:dramateachers@trinitycollege.co.uk) to order.

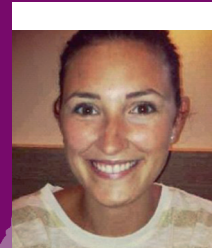
Let's not forget that the school performance fundamentally gives your students the public recognition they deserve for being talented and dedicated. And if you are a school that is considering applying (or you are reapplying) for Artsmark or Artsmark Gold, remember that any of your performances that happen during curriculum time are crucial in supporting your application.

With the latest reforms and changes to the curriculum it is a very worrying time for drama teachers. It is extremely naive for the current Secretary of State for Education to consider that taking what is left of curriculum drama away won't have a negative impact. The belief that young people will have access to drama outside of the curriculum is only going to be an option for some students. The narrow-minded view that drama and theatre is for the stereotypical, middle-class educated types was beginning to become something of the

SUBJECT	WHAT THEY DID...
D&T Textiles	Designed and made the costumes and any fabric scenery – some students did this for examination portfolio work.
D&T Food Technology	Made pre-show and interval drinks and nibbles – some students did this for examination portfolio work
D&T Resistant Materials	Worked from designs made by the Maths department to build the set.
Maths	Created a 1:25 scale model box and drew scale drawings for the carpenters.
Physics	Created Lighting designs
English	Designed Tickets and Programmes and wrote reviews of the show for class work.
ICT	Designed a website to promote the school play, created an online booking system for ticket sales.
Art	Scenic art and Make up design
PE/Dance	Choreography for musicals dance numbers and stage combat
Modern Foreign Languages	'A' Level students translated the performance to DVD for EAL pupils and also for the foreign exchange students when they came to visit!
Music & Music Technology	School orchestra involvement for musicals, percussionists for live sound effects, scene change and pre/post show music.
Media & Film	Created footage for performance to be projected and the recording of the show for the school archives.
Drama & Theatre Studies	Students who were not involved watched the performance and wrote reviews for GCSE, BTEC and A Level work.

past. A wider range of people are going to the theatre, possibly because of drama being taught as a discrete subject or having a stronger emphasis through the English curriculum, but, if not all of the next generation are educated about the rich and varied genres of drama, we are surely going backwards, are we not?

For some students the school play is (or soon will be) the only drama and performance they have access to and this opportunity can spark further interest in the subject of drama - for some it even becomes their career. Take Martin Green, for example, London 2012 Head of Ceremonies; one of his fondest memories is of taking part in the school play. I wonder, would he have ended up being a major event producer if he hadn't had that early chance to get a taste for the stage?



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**HOLLY BARRADELL** ([HOLLYBARRADELL.WIX.COM/DRAMA](http://HOLLYBARRADELL.WIX.COM/DRAMA)) IS A MEMBER OF THE EXECUTIVE FOR NATIONAL DRAMA AND WORKS AS THE DEVELOPMENT MANAGER FOR DRAMA AT TRINITY COLLEGE LONDON. SHE IS A QUALIFIED DRAMA TEACHER AND IS CURRENTLY COMPLETING HER DISSERTATION FOR HER MASTER'S IN EDUCATION. FOLLOW HOLLY ON TWITTER @DRAMA\_HOLLY