

Drama for Learning and Creativity (D4LC)

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Abstract

Rationale and background

D4LC involves training and supporting primary and secondary teachers (whether drama experienced or not) to become better at working alongside children and young people in imagined worlds that they create together for learning purposes. Both the teacher and children are in role, with the teacher as enabler, focussing and mediating the learning experience. D4LC involves skilfully creating shared, engaging fictions with whole classes in a sustained way, with the children being empowered and offered shared ownership of the drama and the learning and with the teacher maximising and being clear about the impact on their learning.

In the UK (where D4LC started) drama as a pedagogy is not new but the way that it is being used strategically and linked to school improvement outcomes now in some local authorities, is innovative and significant. In the UK during the 1960s and 1970s drama as pedagogy was at its most prevalent but the advent of the first national curriculum followed by the introduction of the national strategies for maths and English in the early 1990s (1) led to twenty years of prescriptive teaching methods and a significant reduction in creative approaches to teaching. Teachers became proficient at delivering prescribed lessons in maths and English and often the time for arts subjects was lost. This linked to the introduction of high stakes assessments in maths, English and Science, led to drama as an approach to learning across the curriculum being all but eradicated. Drama co-ordinators and drama subject leaders' posts rapidly vanished, as did most Drama Advisers in local authorities. Within the statutory national curriculum Drama was placed within English as an aspect of speaking and listening (2), whilst standardised national testing and teaching focussed on reading and writing. This meant that drama (supposedly statutory) was ignored by most schools.

Several factors have gradually led to a shift in attitude towards Drama in schools. The publication of the report, "*All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education*" in 1999, (3) raised awareness of the detrimental effect of prescribed teaching methods on children's creativity and the lack of equal status for arts subjects. Subsequently the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority set about finding examples of the national curriculum subjects being taught creatively (4) Drama is not recognised as a national curriculum subject and yet the examples of curriculum teaching for creativity that were published, mainly involved drama and learning in fictional worlds.

There was also a growing awareness that prescriptive and repetitive teaching methods were not supporting sufficiently the personal development of children. Gradually a focus on developing children's thinking skills and other more humanistic initiatives, activities and strategies were introduced, albeit in a rather "bolt-on" manner, e.g. Citizenship (5), SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) (6), Circle Time (7). Again it was noticeable that Drama was frequently used with these as an approach. The focus started to shift from the teacher towards the learner and the need for the centrality of the child was made explicit in "*Every child matters: Change for children*" (2003) (8) and "*The Children's Plan*" (2007) (9).

Another key factor that helped pave the way for D4LC were the discoveries being made by neuroscientists about the way that the human brain learns most effectively and there were new links to be made between the imagination, high quality learning, high quality thinking processes and Process Drama (10). Drama is highly motivating, multi-sensory and active, links learning cognitively and affectively and is therefore memorable. Drama has roots in imitation and mimicry (the first learning style) and then through dramatic play, which is holistic and helps develop strong neural pathways for children who are developing normally. Drama in schools develops this.

Finally links between outstanding teaching and drama as a method are filtering through the Ofsted inspection system (11) and it was noteworthy that excellent teachers put forward for the Teaching Awards in England were disproportionately Drama teachers or teachers who had received some drama training.

It was against this background that in 1995 Norfolk County Council partnered with National Drama (UK leading subject association) to fund a D4LC pilot for 60 schools (Phase 1 D4LC) to improve drama teaching with a focus on learning and developing children's creative thinking.

Funding and partners

- *Norfolk County Council* funded the D4LC pilot and now funds it through national strategy funding. This was only possible once research provided the evidence of impact. They also organised a national Conference for local authorities, "School Improvement Through Drama – what every local authority needs to know" (2007). D4LC has spread across the UK (where several local authorities now are formally part of D4LC, e.g. Dorset, Kingston, Newport and several others are discussing involvement or have now set up similar projects based on D4LC).
- *National Drama* successfully acquired additional initial funding from the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts. ND also provided consultants to help shape the project and support the research. They also gave much publicity to D4LC and help disseminate the research outcomes.

- *Qualifications and Curriculum Authority* (now QCDA) supported the bid to NESTA and facilitated a national meeting of key agency representatives to receive the research outcomes at the end of the first year (2005/6). They made D4LC a development strand of English 21 and work with some D4LC schools on curriculum co-development.
- *National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts* funded the first year's research and dissemination of outcomes at Conferences in each UK country.
- *Creative Partnerships* (CP) supported the bid to NESTA and funded a one day research Conference (2006) to bring together D4LC action research outcomes with their own drama action research outcomes.
- *General Teaching Council* enabled D4LC teachers to have their action research verified through the Teacher Learning Academy.
- *University of Brighton* set up a post graduate certificate in D4LC (60 M-learning credits).
- *National College of School Leadership* enabled a national online discussion forum to discuss D4LC and enabled a Conference presentation of the model to school leaders.
- *The International Drama Theatre and Education Association (IDEA)* accepted D4LC formally as an IDEA project to help National Drama spread it worldwide. Iceland set up D4LC with 10 schools in Reykjavik (2006-8) and was presented in Austria (2006), Hong Kong (2008), Turkey (2008), Taiwan (2009), Poland (2010), Greece (2008), Germany (2010) and Brazil (July 2010).

The model

Headteachers apply to a D4LC letter of invitation from the local authority and provide up to six reasons for seeking involvement. These reasons must link to identified priorities and current school improvement and development plans. This helps ensure school leaders have carefully considered their applications and have a shared improvement focus. It ensures that D4LC is seen as an integral method of school improvement and not "bolt-on".

Headteachers must attend a briefing meeting, where the aims and methods, opportunities and different levels of school/teacher engagement are explained. The expectations of all partners (including the headteacher and teachers) are made clear. At this point schools may withdraw (but only one has).

The headteacher nominates at least two D4LC teachers (enabling peer support). The teachers must want to become "D4LC teachers". No school or teacher should be involved in D4LC other than voluntarily. The teachers decide whether they want to just improve their drama teaching or whether they would additionally like to carry out action research (supported through National Drama online and face to face). They also decide whether they wish to connect D4LC with accredited learning at M-level or have action research validated through the Teacher Learning Academy (General Teaching Council). The teachers may also elect to attend 26 hours of drama training sessions and can attend teacher drama network sessions.

Before D4LC commences (at the start of the school year), the headteacher completes a school self evaluation (using a proforma provided) for Drama and sends it to the local authority. The process highlights what is needed for improvement. They review this form after a year to record progress and outcomes. A school governor is designated by the school to also become involved in monitoring the impact of D4LC.

The D4LC teachers all attend a Launch Conference, listen to a keynote about school improvement and drama, attend high quality drama workshops led by National Drama practitioners and meet the drama specialist they will work with in their schools. They set up the first visit from the specialist who will work alongside them with their own classes and their own learning agenda. Their allocated specialist from the D4LC team visits at least termly and work as a co-participant in the drama, with responsibility for the lesson shifting gradually to the teacher with the specialist supporting rather than leading over time.

The teacher agrees to teach whole class Drama at least weekly (or equivalent) for at least two terms (and not just use drama techniques in lessons other than Drama). They agree to evaluate lessons and document and share their best lesson via the D4LC website www.d4lc.org (using an agreed proforma). The lesson they share will have the learning purposes and outcomes for children recorded and shared. At each visit there is time made available before and after the lesson for discussion.

All teachers are expected to attend termly planning meetings and those involved in action research are invited to research support meetings also. They have opportunity to submit research for publication to National Drama for its online research journal.

All teachers are expected to register with the D4LC website (12) and may choose to also join the open D4LC group on Facebook (13) which has many international drama, arts and creativity specialists within the group.

At the end of each year of D4LC the teachers who have been involved are invited to attend an evaluation meeting, where they talk with an external evaluator from the University of Brighton. The headteachers are asked to return to their reasons for wishing to be involved in D4LC and evaluate its effectiveness in relation to the areas for school improvement they identified. They should also report this to the visiting School Improvement Partner and ask it be recorded.

The Core Team

A different local team is drawn up for each D4LC with the guidance and support of the D4LC Director. Typically it will consist of the D4LC Director and a local authority adviser and specialist drama teachers provided by the local authority. The team can additionally employ National Drama specialists. The main emphasis is on quality provision and sustainability, so local drama teachers are an important part of the core team. National Drama can provide a research consultant. The local specialist teachers are typically Advanced

Skills Drama teachers or Leading Drama Teachers or sometimes theatre educators with some training in whole class drama.

Reasons for the success of D4LC

D4LC is successful because teachers have evidence it improves learning and supports creativity. It has the support of the headteacher and local authority and so is legitimised, which particularly supports the many teachers who are fearful of criticism. Headteachers direct commitment ensures that the desired outcomes for the school are a focus and the impact for the school is evaluated. Teachers enjoy being involved and feel part of an enthusiastic movement that has been encouraged and empowered to take creative ownership of their teaching methods with a focus on both desired and unexpected outcomes. There has been improvement in the quality of both drama teaching and learning across the curriculum and in drama itself. Teachers expectations of children and of themselves in drama have been raised.

"Drama for Learning and Creativity' has been a learning journey for all the teachers and consultants involved. The success of the project is due to their individual and collective energy. There is a passionate commitment to whole class Drama as a teaching and learning medium ... Without exception, there is a determination to move children's learning forward. Equally importantly, the participants recognise that this project is a way to improve their own and others' understanding of what it is to be a teacher in the early part of the twenty-first century."

Dr David Simpson, External Evaluator (University of Brighton) (13)

D4LC is also successful as it meets the varying needs of all partners:

- *Norfolk County Council* has had drama mentioned increasingly positively in its schools Ofsted inspection reports, often in relation to drama's impact on writing particularly and attitudes to learning. Norfolk was recognised by QCA as setting up a national and innovative school improvement initiative.
- *National Drama* has received recognition from local authorities and key agencies for the way it has guided and strengthened D4LC in a sustained way through its provision of specialists and its support of the research and its dissemination.
- *Qualifications and Curriculum Authority* has benefitted from working with a hub group of schools committed to feeding back on the use of drama across the national curriculum and D4LC research schools have contributed to the proposed new primary curriculum for England.
- *National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts* have invested well in a project that has a legacy and supports the creative thinking and outcomes of both children and teachers.
- *Creative Partnerships* provided and used a D4LC partnership forum for gathering and presenting research into drama and creativity. D4LC is a good example of partnership working for CP.
- *General Teaching Council* have benefitted from the promotion of the Teacher Learning Academy.

- *University of Brighton* has benefitted from recruiting for its post graduate certificate in D4LC (60 M-learning credits) and being the first university to accredit a D4LC module.
- *National College of School Leadership* has acted as a conduit for enabling a national dialogue between D4LC and headteachers online.
- *The International Drama Theatre and Education Association (IDEA)* has strengthened the existing D4LC project. D4LC and IDEA jointly benefit from publicity and other countries are more likely to start D4LC because of the IDEA link.

Assessing and documenting the outcomes – where is the evidence and who needs to know?

Assessment for learning by teachers shows improved achievement across a range of areas (writing, speaking and listening, pupil motivation, confidence and attitudes to learning, as well as personal, social and emotional development). These are in field notes and teachers'/pupils records.

Standardised Tests indicate improved attainment particularly in writing, and speaking and listening but also in maths taught through drama.

Action research questions are decided by the teachers themselves and shaped with specialist research support in ways that ensure judgements are evidence based and provide both quantitative and qualitative evidence that is documented in a research log. Each research teacher has a learning journey log. These logs have been used anonymously to partly inform the External Evaluator's report in Phase 2.

School Self Evaluation (SEF) produced by the headteacher provides evidence of baseline provision and gives a benchmark by which to judge improvement. It also informs school improvement planning. The progress made against stated areas for improvement is documented after two terms.

Inspection reports (Ofsted) provide external evidence of the impact of drama on learning in individual schools and are public documents.

Lesson evaluations provide evidence of teachers' professional and evaluative judgements about the impact of the drama on the learning and creativity of groups of pupils and individual pupils (unnamed). The "best practice" shared lesson evaluations on the website are public documents.

D4LC lesson observation records provide judgements about the impact of the drama lesson observed on the learning and suggest ways of improving the teaching. These are made available to the Director only with the teacher's agreement and are not public.

School Improvement Partner Records of Visit provide documented evidence for the headteacher, Chair of Governors, local authority and inspectors about the impact of D4LC in relation to the identified priorities.

External evaluation report by the University of Brighton (Phase 1) is available on the D4LC website and thereafter in DRAMA (the journal of National Drama) and on request.

Pupil voice is gathered throughout the year in Drama and about Drama, by teachers as field notes or recorded in filming. Some children have produced written or recorded outcomes.

Filming lessons and teachers talking about drama planning, outcomes and evaluation. There are a bank of recorded lessons (unedited) and a DVD with parts of edited and evaluated lessons.

Teachers TV (14) produced two programmes of D4LC lessons with joint evaluations by the Director and class teachers.

Facebook has enabled a D4LC networking open group where evaluative comments and outcomes are sometimes posted.

Articles within a range of relevant publications on school improvement, creativity and Drama nationally and internationally

Working wall is the place (at the Professional Development Centre) where teachers can post successes, outcomes, photographs, children's work and comments to share with other teachers passing by.

Displays in prominent positions to support advocacy, e.g. the teachers' centre and the local government offices as well as stands and banners at national and international education, arts and creativity events, e.g. World Creativity Summits, Education Show, World Congress of IDEA, WAAE, etc.

Outcomes

- 80% + of the schools now of the schools for 5 to 11 year olds now have a teacher responsible for Drama
- 100% schools surveyed have Drama in their development plans
- 60% are working with Drama for more than an hour a week (a 25% increase)
- 90% teachers report a gain in confidence
- 60%+ now confident to teach Drama to classes that are not their own
- 80%+ teachers say they have acquired new teaching strategies
- 20% more use of Drama in other subjects, i.e. Citizenship, Geography, Religious Education, Visual Arts, Physical Education
- 33%+ see a connection between maths and Drama and Science and Drama
- Less than 20% see a connection between Drama and Information and Communication Technology
- There were increases in purposeful thinking, generation of ideas and empathy
- The most favoured purposes of Drama were Communication and Expressive Skills (67.2%); Creative and Thinking Skills (63.6%)

- Used to enhance enjoyment in learning and as a non-academic route to learning (12.5%)

Keywords:

Drama in education, aesthetic learning process, action based research, creativity

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