

Ode to Drama

By Melissa Webster B Ed, A.S.D.A., G.S.M.D., A.T.C.L.

Ever since I was a very little girl, I have wanted to do something with my life that meant something. At first I wanted to be a writer, and write stories that people could read and enjoy. All through my schooling the only two things I really excelled at were creative writing or presenting orals in front of the class. I have always been intrigued by stories and make believe. As I got older I discovered further the land of make believe and the joy of taking on the role as somebody else – the art of pretending - magic!!

I had found my place in life – acting!!

How neat it was, to pretend to be someone else and entertain other people as you do it! I also discovered from the age of seventeen the great combination of working with children, using the tool of Speech and Drama. After acting in a variety of amateur productions and even landing a brief contract at Dreamworld as a roaming entertainer, I went through every path I could to become the most qualified Speech and Drama teacher I could be. This was made easy with a brilliant teacher – Pamela Greatorix. I underwent my A.S.D.A., which to this date was the hardest lot of examinations both practically and theoretically. My A.T.C.L and then my Guildhall Solo Acting certificate then followed. I finished this off with four years at Griffith University to gain my Bachelor of Secondary Education English and, of course, Drama.

As I underwent my study, I taught. I had my own acting school alongside with Pam – The Academy of Dramatic Art in the Redlands. I also taught many students privately.

Teaching and learning is a beautiful process and a process that I am still heavily entwined in, to this day.

After five and a half years teaching senior Drama and English full time at Ormiston College, I did a full professional circle and started my company **Let's Talk Kids**. I decided full time was not for me as I planned to have children and wanted flexible working hours. I started offering programs in primary schools mainly before and after school. I started off in just two schools. I now, after nine years, have a staff of five girls and operate in eight schools and five kindergartens throughout the Southside. I have over 300 students and I love it!!

Did I become the person that makes a difference? I am not saving lives, creating or writing important policies or assisting in world peace. I am however very passionate about working with young people and I believe strongly in the value of Speech and Drama. I love walking onto an assembly stage (generally after the sport results) and talking to primary schools about how great Speech and Drama is. How Drama lessons can benefit both the children who are shy and the children who love to perform.

I turn 40 next year. Shock. Horror. I started teaching at 17, both in schools and in my home studio. I started speech training at 14. I look back at 23 years and this is what is apparent to me. This may be useful to beginning teachers and hopefully make experienced teachers smile:

*Generally boys, particularly boys under eight, NEED Speech and Drama more than girls. Their communication skills on the whole are just not as developed.

*Children love music. Teach through music and incorporate music at least twice within an hour lesson.

*Try hard to role model, clear, expressive, interesting speech. Let's face it, a lot of people are bad communicators.

*The constant competition of Sport versus the Arts will never go away. Just NEVER back down.

*Your speech qualifications are so worthwhile attaining. They are portable degrees. You have a mobile job wherever you go. A great job for women who wish to teach from home whilst being a mum!

*There will always be parents that whinge and parents that don't pay for your services. You need to concentrate on the 90 percent that do. Try to not let the negatives get you down.

And finally...

When you are at another one of your productions and your fingernails are full of stage make up, your lead has a stomach upset, the lights are malfunctioning and the performance you had in your head just isn't working, when you haven't seen your own kids and husband for a while and you feel no more Coffee Rush drinks (your dinner) will energize you...

Your show starts. Your lead is better and he/she is amazing. The lights work out and add to your performance. A few of your shy children really surprise you and their parents are beaming with pride. You breathe and realise that maybe you made a difference, on a small scale.

As I skip happily into my third decade of Speech and Drama (now that is a lie – getting older from what I see is not great, but what are the options?), and my third decade with SDTAQ Inc, I hope with every fibre of my body that I have another three decades of the same madness in front of me. I know I will meet a lot of you on the way.

I believe what we do is important, **how can you quantify teaching children the value of themselves.** There is no doubt that involvement in the PERFORMING ARTS arouses the imagination like no other. ***I have never been prouder to be a speechie!!!. ODE TO DRAMA.***

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