

2020

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[10.1080/1359866X.2019.1685645](https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2019.1685645)

Gray, C., & Lambert, K. (2020). Being the adult you needed as a kid: Why the AITSL standards are not the best fit for drama teachers. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 48(5), 555-571. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2019.1685645>

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To cite this article: Christina Gray & Kirsten Lambert (2020) Being the adult you needed as a kid: why the AITSL standards are not the best fit for drama teachers, Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education, 48:5, 555-571, DOI: [10.1080/1359866X.2019.1685645](https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2019.1685645)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2019.1685645>



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Published online: 04 Nov 2019.



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ARTICLE



## Being the adult you needed as a kid: why the AITSL standards are not the best fit for drama teachers

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### ABSTRACT

The Australian Professional Standards for teachers attempts to regulate the profession and improve teacher quality. Yet the standardisation of teachers' work has attracted criticism from researchers who assert that a "one size fits all" model for judging teacher quality fails to recognise the affective, enactive and relational aspects of teaching. Given the interactive and interpersonal nature of teaching drama, this concern has salience. Our research into the experiences of early-career drama teachers reveals the positive influence these teachers have on their students and in their schools. Of particular note, are the strong role models they have become through the development of authentic, professional relationships where students feel supported and empowered to explore their feelings, achieve academically and flourish as human beings. These relationships are co-constructed during extra-curricular activities, namely in production rehearsals, where together they work towards common goals. Our findings suggest a case can be made for re-evaluating the process of judging teachers against a standardised set of criteria that neglects to capture the nuances of drama education and the passion, commitment and relationality of early-career drama teachers.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 30 October 2018

Accepted 10 September 2019

### KEYWORDS

Drama education; beginning teachers; standards; relationality

## Introduction

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2011) were developed to regulate the profession and improve teacher quality, whilst streamlining teacher mobility between states. The Standards claim to contribute to the professionalisation of teaching, emphasising the crucial role teachers' play in student outcomes. Moreover, they posit that improving teacher quality is "an essential reform as part of Australia's efforts to improve student attainment" (AITSL, 2011, p. 3). Yet, "standardising" teachers' work has attracted criticism from researchers, who caution that homogenising strategies of current standards frameworks are ill-equipped to highlight the affective and relational features of teaching (Ball, 2008; Gannon, 2012). This is of particular concern to performing arts teachers, given this highly interactive and relational nature of teaching (Kempe, 2012; Mandell & Wolf, 2003; Wright & Gerber, 2004). Furthermore, the considerable extra-curricular work these teachers carry out in schools evokes exploration of emotions, feelings and identities/

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"becomings" (Gray & Lowe, 2019; Gray, Wright, & Pascoe, 2018b; Lambert, Wright, Currie, & Pascoe, 2017). This research problematises the notion of judging teachers against a standard set of criteria that fail to reflect the nuances of embodied, enactive and relational performing arts education.

Following a review of pertinent literature, the paper introduces the specific context of this research – the work of drama teachers in Australian schools both in and out of the classroom. Details of the methodology and data gathering procedures are provided. Ethnographic semi-structured focus-group interview data from beginning drama teachers, concentrating predominately on their early teaching experiences, are presented. Lastly, we discuss the disconnect between Professional Standards and the distinctive work of drama teachers and suggest ways of overcoming this dichotomy. Specifically, we propose an alternate model for drama teachers with more substantial input from professional associations, not unlike the model outlined by the Australian Literacy Educators' Association and the Australian Association of Teachers of English.

### Literature review: problematising homogeneity

The AITSL Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2011) provides a summary of the responsibilities of a classroom teacher and is organised into four career stages through: graduate, proficient, highly accomplished, to lead teacher. Teacher graduates, having completed their pre-service education, must be able to perform at a graduate standard across the seven standards: 1) Know students and how they learn; 2) Know the content and how to teach it; 3) Plan for an implement effective teaching and learning; 4) Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments; 5) Assess, provide feedback and report on student learning; 6) Engage in professional learning; and, 7) Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community. Each standard contains a number of sub-strands or focus areas. For example, "Standard 1 – Know students and how they learn", has six focus areas:

- 1.1) Physical, social and intellectual development and characteristics of students;
- 1.2) Understand how students learn;
- 1.3) Students with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds;
- 1.4) Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;
- 1.5) Differentiate teaching to meet the specific learning needs of students across the full range of abilities; and,
- 1.6) Strategies to support full participation of students with disability.

For teachers to progress through the profession, they must demonstrate their achievement of all focus areas within each standard (37 focus areas in total) through a portfolio of evidence. However, as Gannon (2012) emphasises, for teachers to successfully progress through the profession, they must be focused on the standards and learn to "perform themselves" across the four career stages. She notes, "teachers must learn to describe their teacher identities through the framework of the standards as they engage in self- and peer- assessment, compile and critique evidence portfolios and participate in the performance management process that dominate schools" (p. 61). Teacher education

courses are organised around the Professional Standards to enable graduates to be cognisant of the criteria.

When graduates enter the profession they are deemed by the standards as “graduate standard” and require documentation, usually within their first year of teaching, to progress to “proficient”. Gannon (2012) warns that “the application of the standards in practice to justify career progression risks creating an excessively atomistic understanding of teacher work” (p. 63). Furthermore, Mulcahy (2011) adds, the “idiom of teaching standards has become so authoritative that it readily eclipses other ways to think and ‘do’ them” (p. 1). As these researchers suggest, homogenous standardised criterion, such as the AITSL Standards, do not adequately reflect the nuanced work of teachers.

Recognising the inherent weakness of utilising a “one size fits all” model to evaluate teachers, the Australian Literacy Educators’ Association (ALEA) and the Australian Association of Teachers of English (AATE) developed a set of professional standards for English teachers called STELLA – Standards for Teachers of English Language and Literacy in Australia (2002). Led by professional associations, the intention was not to impose a regulatory apparatus but to provide a detailed and discipline-specific description of what “accomplished teachers of English and literacy believe, know and are able to do” (AATE/ALEA, 2002, p. 2). In other words, descriptive statements of key words that capture attributes and qualities of good teachers. The STELLA Standards retain the specificity and complexity of various contexts and are intended for an ongoing aspiration for English teachers rather than a set of standards to achieve.

Our research suggests that for drama teachers, their impact is perhaps undervalued and/or unnoticed when judged against the Standards rubric because of their unique and complex work in schools. Teaching in the performing arts requires particular personal, social, intellectual, affective and expressive qualities from teachers (Wright & Gerber, 2004), the impact of which is not evidenced in the Standards (Gannon, 2012). For example, the performative aspects of Arts disciplines require teachers to model a range of performance skills with confidence and precision, skills that are not recognised in AITSL Standards.

While the Arts in Australian schools encompass Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Arts, this research primarily focuses on beginning drama teachers. To gain some understanding of the nuanced work of these teachers involves unpacking the curricular and extra-curricular components of the profession. To begin with, much of the curricular learning experienced in the drama room is enactive and embodied, that is, experienced practically (through the body) and in the moment (D. Lambert et al., 2017; Wright, 2004). For example, whilst learning vocal communication skills in drama, students apply performance theories through manipulating voice in improvisations where their characters move through a variety of emotions. Students may explore this work in groups and will need to think creatively and quickly in order to produce their performance. This task will also involve students’ problem-solving, managing group dynamics and working in an open-space with sound and lighting technologies. While this form of learning can contribute to a student’s personal development, sense of enjoyment, purpose and becoming (Ewing, 2010; Lambert, Wright, Currie, & Pascoe, 2016; Taylor, 1992), it is the drama teacher who is essentially responsible for fostering such transformative learning (Ewing, 2010; Mezirow, 2003). Integral to this work is the ability of teachers to build strong and caring relationships with their students (Cothran & Ennis, 2000; Egeberg & McConney, 2018a, 2018b; Garrett, Barr, & Rothman, 2009; Garza, 2009; Garza, Ryser, & Lee, 2010;

Woolfolk Hoy & Weinstein, 2006). Furthermore, for group work to be effective, drama teachers need to encourage a sense of belonging for their students by fostering a positive class climate where students support and encourage each other. Indeed, McKean (2002) argues, "Belonging and community occurs when teachers purposely set it out as one of the many learning goals" (p. 27). Creating a positive dynamic within the drama class is complex, as it takes time and requires the participants to trust and respect each other's physical, emotional, and intellectual well-being (Nicholson, 2002). Furthermore, creating "safe places" for students to take risks and perform for their peers requires teachers to foster a supportive classroom, build relationships of trust and manage student anxiety (Lambert et al., 2016).

The inclusive and collaborative nature of drama is at the center of a drama teacher's work (Wales, 2009) and requires the drama teacher to have some highly complex pedagogical skills and understandings (Dunn & Stinson, 2011; Kempe, 2012; Norris, McCammon, & Miller, 2000; Wales, 2009; Wright, 2015). According to Wales (2009), teaching an effective drama lesson requires intuition. Drama teachers develop the subtle art of "reading the class" and blending the pedagogical with the aesthetic (Taylor, 1995). A drama teacher's success is predicated upon her ability to understand the different personalities and dynamics of the class so that group work is productive. She must also "perform" her role with confidence, thus mastering the vocal and non-verbal communication skills required to work effectively in an open space.

The complex nature and multi-faceted dimensions of teaching drama were investigated by Wright and Gerber (2004), revealing six experientially based conceptions of competence: 1) being "tuned in and turned on"; 2) risk-taking or experimenting in a creative environment; 3) empowering learners and adding value; 4) sharing skills and networking; 5) being a considerate reflective practitioner; and 6) being an ambassador for drama and the Arts (p. 55). This research into drama teacher competence, although 14 years old, provides a good starting point into understanding the unique and nuanced work of drama teachers. However, it does not capture the relational or extra-curricular components of teaching drama, which suggests a need to revisit and further this research.

Extra-curricular activities are an integral component of teaching in the performing arts and may involve large-scale school productions such as musicals, concerts and a range of performing arts competitions and events (Gray & Lowe, 2019). These tasks are time-intensive (Norris et al., 2000; Wales, 1999), stressful, can lead to burnout (Ballantyne, 2006, 2007; Donelan, 1989; Faust, 1995; Haseman, 1990; Kelly, 1999; Wales, 1999) and in most cases, are in addition to a teacher's regular load (Ballantyne, 2007; Kelly, 1999). The heavy workload of performing arts teachers is well recognised in the research (Anderson, 2002, 2003; Gray & Lowe, 2019; Gray, Wright, & Pascoe, 2018a). Faust (1995) described her 75-hour week carrying out additional tasks for an extra-curricular production:

I spend many hours reading potentially performable scripts; drawing up a budget; inventorying materials and equipment for each show; going through assorted catalogues and ordering supplies; running to fabric shops, second-hand stores, and seasonal yard sales to buy cheap costumes and set supplies; striking and re-storing a set and cleaning the stage and wing areas; arranging for mass washing and dry-cleaning of used costumes after a show; and re-cataloguing all of the above for use again. That's in addition to the hours spent organising student rehearsal schedules' planning the set; lighting and costume designs; and arranging for and overseeing the student and adult work crews and regular acting schedules. (p. 25)

Whilst the substantial workload and stress of managing the extra-curricular components of teaching in the performing arts are evident, so is the rewarding nature of this work (Gray & Lowe, 2019). The willingness of teachers to engage in such activities is largely due to the considerable benefits for the students and wider-school community (Anderson, 2002, 2003; Gray, 2016; Gray, Wright, & Pascoe, 2017; Lierse, 1999).

However, for drama teachers to progress through the profession, they must learn to use the discourse of the AITSL Standards (Gannon, 2012) according to the career stages; whilst in practice, standards language is only a very small part of the subject's dialect. Moreover, given the performative nature of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, teachers must adopt this discourse in order to successfully negotiate performance management targets that are dominated by achievement of AITSL Standards.

## Methodology and methods

This research seeks to understand the work of beginning drama teachers, both in and outside of the classroom. The descriptive nature of this work falls under phenomenology, an interpretive theoretical perspective that generates knowledge about the lived experience of participants (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; van Manen, 2007). The aim of phenomenology is to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of lived experience through asking what the experience is like pre-reflectively, before the individual has attempted to explain it themselves (van Manen, 1990). The value of this approach lies in the way that it privileges participants' experiences, experiences that lie at the heart of meaning-making. Qualitative semi-structured focus-group interviews were conducted with 15 participants focusing on their experiences of beginning teaching in relation to the AITSL standards. The interviews addressed a number of lead questions, with further questioning and prompting if necessary, and lasted approximately one to one and a half hours (see Appendix 1). The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, then analysed utilising procedures described by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). As such, the sequence of activities for the analysis of each interview data was: 1) data was collected through the interview and the transcript of this generated; 2) data was reviewed through a process of selecting, sorting and sifting through the transcriptions which identified similar phrases and ideas; 3) the identified commonalities were grouped to form categories of generalised information. This was represented in a data matrix of categories and their supporting phrases; and, 4) the process was repeated for the remaining interviews and the analysis assisted in identifying emerging themes. Researchers assigned pseudonyms to each participant to protect their identity (Table 1). The pertinent sensitising themes that emerged from the data from beginning drama teachers were: passion, commitment and relationships. These will now be discussed in turn.

## Findings

***A passion for teaching drama-*** *"Knowing that you made an impact keeps the passion alive."*  
(Lucinda, beginning teacher)

It was evident from the participants' stories that they were passionate about teaching drama and were doing some extraordinary work in their schools. These beginning

**Table 1.** Drama teachers' information.

Participant/Age	Teaching Experience	Role	Extracurricular Responsibilities
Lucinda, 26yrs	4 years	Drama and dance Coordinator. Drama teacher.	Director of school productions and performance events.
Stella, 25yrs	3 years	Drama teacher.	Director of school production and performance events. Drama club.
Jack, 32yrs	1 year	Drama and dance teacher.	Director and choreographer of school production and performance events. Dance club.
Brianna, 26yrs	4 years	Drama and dance teacher.	Director and choreographer of school production. Coordination of performing arts events.
Nat, 23yrs	1 year	Drama and English teacher.	Director of school productions and drama club.
Courtney, 28yrs	4 years	Drama teacher.	Director of school production and performance events.
Rachael, 23yrs	1 year	Drama teacher.	Director of school production and performance events.
Freddy, 32yrs	2 years	Drama teacher.	Specialist drama classes. Assistant director of school production. Coordination of performing arts events.
Trinity, 28yrs	3 years	Drama Coordinator. Drama teacher.	Director of school productions and performance events.
Kelly, 28yrs	3 years	Drama teacher.	Director of school production and performance events. Drama club.
Clare, 22yrs	2 years	Drama teacher.	Director school production and performance events.
Angela, 24yrs	2 years	Drama coordinator, drama and dance teacher.	Director and choreographer of school production. Coordination of performing arts events.
Cassie, 22yrs	2 years	Drama teacher.	Director of school production and performance events. Drama club.
Steven, 25yrs	3 years	Drama teacher.	Director school production and performance events.
Peta, 26yrs	3 years	Drama teacher.	Director of school production and coordination of performing arts events.

teachers were directing school productions, running drama clubs, developing work for school functions and ceremonies, participating in performing arts competitions and assisting their colleagues with various projects. The considerable hours they devoted to this extra-curricular work was in addition to the preparation required to create their curricular programmes and daily lessons. Yet despite the challenging workload from the additional extra-curricular components of the profession, participants remained acutely aware of the impact they had on their students. Lucinda explained, "Knowing that you made an impact keeps the passion alive. You do a production and see the kids perform and their excitement and you're like, 'okay, that was worth it'."

Research into teaching and passion has revealed that increasing one's passion for teaching leads to increased work satisfaction and decreased burnout symptoms over time (Carbonneau, Vallerand, Fernet, & Guay, 2008). This is particularly pertinent considering the high rates of beginning teacher attrition. In addition, increased teacher passion predicted increases in positive adaptive student behaviours. As Day (2004) asserts, "Passion is not a luxury, a frill, or a quality possessed by just a few teachers. It is essential to all good teaching" (p. 11). Teacher passion – manifested through student-centered pedagogy and making a difference to students' lives – was a particularly salient theme that emerged from our research data. Participants spoke at length about the feedback they received from their students that affirmed their passion. Jack highlights this theme when he states, "It's the feedback from students that picks up on our passion. They know I'm passionate about this work. I do long hours because I want to be good at my job and I want the kids to thrive." However, participants also believed their passion did not



account for much when judged against AITSL Standards. Brianna notes, "Passion is missing from the seven standards, which is disappointing because my passion is what sets me apart from some of the other teachers in my school."

The beginning teachers in this study believed that drama teachers had a reputation for being passionate and enthusiastic about their subject area. Nat recalled, "I got this job because I was a drama teacher. The staff said, 'We need someone who has passion and energy in our English Department and all the drama teachers we've worked with are all that.'" Furthermore, participants believed that drama teachers needed to retain their passion for the job because as Courtney stated, "A drama teacher without passion? It's the kids that will miss out."

Exploring key life skills with their students through drama work was discussed at length by the beginning drama teachers. For Rachael, providing students with opportunities to ask questions and explore their feelings and emotions through theater forms was particularly rewarding. She believed that her work in the drama room fostered empathy in her students and increased their sensitivity towards others. Freddy agreed and believed that having students enjoy his classes while gaining key life skills is what kept him focused and passionate about his work. Trinity described the disparate groups in her classes and the lack of compassion towards each other. Her work to develop trust and respect within her classes as well as ways to work effectively in groups had resulted in much improved dynamics and class atmosphere. Kelly similarly worked with students who did not "always get on" and she was teaching them skills to "resolve conflict without fists."

Above all, participants believed that being able to differentiate their praxis for a range of abilities whilst also ensuring a safe and supportive environment was integral to being an effective drama teacher. Participants highlighted that through drama, their students were able to learn in embodied, enactive and creative ways. As Rachael said, "Kids learn differently. We can do all sorts of practical work to explore complex ideas." Clare agreed and added, "Witnessing my students excel in drama, the same ones that flunk their other subjects, reminds me of the difference I'm making here. That's enough to keep my passion alive."

While there were obvious frustrations, stressful moments and a heavy workload endured by participants, they believed it was their passion for teaching drama that kept them focused. As Rachael explained, "I love my job. I love going to school every morning and I love teaching drama."

***Drama teaching and commitment*** – "I absolutely enjoy teaching drama so I give everything I have." (Rachael, beginning drama teacher)

It was evident in focus-group interviews that participants maintained a strong commitment and exemplary work ethic towards teaching. For Rachael, her experiences of drama as a student at school, as well as being the daughter of teacher-parents, provided some understanding of the commitment involved. She said, "Although it takes up a lot of my time, I think that's the kind of person I am. I like to commit 100%. I absolutely enjoy teaching drama so I give everything I have."

Participants described observing some of their colleagues leave school "when the kids do", whilst they were working late nights and weekends to provide opportunities for their students to engage in extra-curricular activities. As Jack shared, "I could go home when the bell goes if I wanted to but that's not my work ethic and that's not who I am. Unfortunately that isn't judged in these standards." Angela agreed saying, "All the extra-curricular work we do as

drama teachers is not reflected in these standards.” Moreover, as Peta described, the additional hours and challenge to manage the arduous workload is recognised by participants’ colleagues:

I have friends in primary education and they have different challenges but they say I couldn’t do all those extra things that you have to do in the performing arts. All those extra rehearsals and trying to advocate all the time for why kids should do your subject. We love doing these things but we’re expected to do everything else. We’re trying to juggle so much.

Commitment to the students through extra-curricular rehearsals was a key motivator for the beginning drama teachers in this study. This understanding of motivation is supported by evidence from within the Self-determination Theory (SDT) literature (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Recent research into secondary education points towards a link between satisfaction of the basic needs for autonomy, commitment, and relatedness and increased resilience, goal achievement, and feelings of well-being (Casquejo, 2013). It was evident that for these drama teachers, they viewed their teaching role as important and were committed to the work, despite what they deemed to be an arduous workload with little financial remuneration. Lucinda typifies this view:

We don’t teach for the salary, we don’t teach for an easy workload. We teach for the kids. People ask, “Do you like what you do?” And my husband will laugh and say, “Oh, she loves it. She foams over it.” And I do. I love teaching drama.

For these beginning drama teachers, the personal and professional satisfaction they gained from mounting productions were, in fact, their favourite aspect of the role of the drama teacher. Participants described the process of developing their vision for a production, auditioning their cast and assembling their production team as well as conducting rehearsals, a most enjoyable part of their work. For Rachael, witnessing her students’ engagement, personal development and growing confidence kept her committed and working hard. She said, “I love the process of putting on a show and seeing the kids really being engaged. Seeing them perform and doing their best makes it all worth it.” Freddy elaborates on this idea, “Teaching drama is rewarding. It’s knackerin’, but it’s rewarding. Because it’s a lot of late nights. It’s a lot of your free time unpaid, but it’s so rewarding.”

***Drama teaching and relationality*** – “Knowing that we matter to each other.” (Freddy, beginning drama teacher)

Beginning drama teachers work hard to build strong relationships with their students, understanding this to be an integral component of effective teaching. The idea that the self is formed in dialogue with others is fundamental to a dialogical understanding of ontology. Students are in the process of “becoming” through relationships, as Slife and Wiggins (2009) assert, “things, events, and places are not first self-contained entities that later interact and relate to other things, events, and places. [Rather] all things, events, and places are first relationships – already and always related to one another” (p. 18). The becoming self is constructed concomitantly by responding to others. Thus, from a strong relationality perspective, “who we are is who we are in relation to others” (Galovan & Schramm, 2018, p. 201). Beginning drama teachers Cassie and Steven foreground relationality in their teaching:

Cassie: Relationships with students is what it's all about in drama and without our kids trusting us, then the drama class just doesn't work. Relationships are key and they're what drama teachers do best.

Steven: I agree. The positive relationships in drama are so important otherwise you wouldn't be able to bring the best out of them.

Relationships are assembled through the inconsequential daily interactions people share (Fife, Whiting, Bradford, & Davis, 2014). As Morson (2010) notes, "The most important action people take is ... directing their attention to or away from [someone]. Each time we choose to look ... at someone with care ... we change ... ourselves 'a tiny bit'" (p. 361). Creating a safe learning environment that fosters daily positive interactions, and consequently relationships, is a foundational component of successful drama education (Lambert et al., 2017). This important idea was elucidated by the participants in this study. As Freddy states, he particularly enjoyed, "having jokes and laughs with my students and knowing that we matter to each other." Peta described the relationships developed with her students as "a family culture where everyone gets along, we all communicate, we're supportive. That safe environment is created." Participants unanimously agreed with these sentiments. As Sayre and Kunz (2005) have observed, "The self is most fully human ... when another's need calls the self to put aside concern for its own good and use freedom to help the other reach their good" (p. 230). Brianna amplifies this theme.

In drama, you invest so much more time. Kids are always coming in for rehearsals and they're so much more comfortable with each other and with you that you can just have those normal conversations. Then once they're off in the real world, they're always gonna come back and be like, "Oh, let me tell you about where I've gone with my life."

Much has been written exploring the role of the teacher as a mentor and guide (DeJong, 2014). It is worth noting that for some participants they enjoyed similar strong relationships with their own drama teachers as students themselves and wanted the same kinds of relationships and experiences for their students. Peta recalled, "I adored my drama teacher. At school, I spent all my time in the theater. I want my kids to feel that comfortable and to enjoy their time in school doing something they enjoy."

Moreover, the longevity of relationships built in the drama classroom was a common thread across the focus groups. Lucinda encapsulated this notion when she said, "The longer you teach, the more kids will come back and talk to you. You realise when you talk to them four or five years on, how much of an impact you actually did make without knowing."

Participants also believed that relationality was strengthened through the additional time they spent with their students in extra-curricular activities. Courtney stated, "I feel like we spend so much time with them 'cause they'll come back for rehearsals during lunch and afterhours. You see them probably more than they see their own parents." Indeed, the close relationships formed with students meant that at times students would confide in them. Stella commented, "Sometimes a student will be crying in class or share a story with me that they won't share with other teachers. Because it's a different place. They feel safe." Peta agreed and added, "Kids will come to me with things they won't even tell their parents. I think that's because they feel so safe. My year 12s reckon I'm their school mum."

The time and effort committed by these drama teachers to developing relationships with their students brought about great satisfaction and allowed them to teach more than just content knowledge. Participants believed their work went beyond the classroom and made a real difference to the lives of their students. As Lucinda noted, “For me it’s connecting with students and building professional relationships and seeing them succeed and helping them through their journey.” Jack added, “... helping them through their struggles at a time that is pretty tricky being adolescents and supporting them through that journey day by day is what’s rewarding for me as a teacher.”

The embodiment of the drama teacher as role model and mentor enables students to explore possible selves. It was evident that these drama teachers had become strong role models for their students and took this role seriously. They saw their opportunity to teach and model important values as integral to their work and had far reaching outcomes. Clare said, “It’s very rewarding too because I think that we instil love in them and they leave and they then can pass that onto other people.” Lucinda explained it poignantly when she said:

My mentor during my final prac [teaching practicum] once said to me “You gotta be the adult that you needed as a kid.” I get that. I remember as a kid needing an adult that I could go to and talk about stuff or to get advice. That sometimes wasn’t my mum or wasn’t the councillor or wasn’t my health teacher. Our students come to us because it’s such a safe environment. They might come to me feeling scared or needing a boost ... so I think I try to be that adult I needed as a kid.

The participants’ perception of themselves as mentors and strong role-models was a theme resonating across focus-groups, as was the role of advocate. Drama teachers working in low socio-economic areas particularly found their work important yet at times exhausting. Courtney, who also taught dance, worked with female students experiencing a number of personal challenges. Courtney said, “It’s exhausting at times because we’re fighting for our kids all the time. That’s emotionally exhausting. Girls come to me for personal health issues too. They feel comfortable coming to me. It’s a different relationship.”

The importance of *relational-connectivity* for personal growth and development, is widely recognised in the literature, although not in the AITSL Standards. Summarising the literature on this concept, Galovan and Schramm (2018) note, “relational connectivity a multidimensional construct of connectedness consisting of three key elements: mutual friendship, intimacy, and belongingness” (p. 210). Encapsulated in these elements are several concepts that theorists suggest are intrinsic to strong relationality, including: trust, shared and constitutive goal achievement, mutual caring, mutual knowledge, relational belonging, shared activity or history, relational identity, and emotional intimacy. Whilst participants believed that at the heart of being an effective drama teacher was the level of trust and strong relationality they co-constructed with their students, they questioned whether this relationality was recognised and valued in the AITSL Standards.

## Discussion

In a neoliberal zeitgeist where schools are under fire for falling standards and unsatisfactory teacher quality (Lambert et al., 2016; Pyne, 2014; Thompson & Cook, 2014), this

research provides a timely reminder of the exceptional work teachers do and the profound effect they have on young people's lives. It is not the intention of this research to suggest it is only drama teachers who have such an effect on their students. Indeed, all good teachers understand the interplay between the relationships they build with students and academic outcomes (Brendtro, 2008; Brendtro & Brokenleg, 2005; Brendtro & Larson, 2006; Egeberg & McConney, 2018a, 2018b; Galovan & Schramm, 2018; Osterman, 2000). However, a focus on the work of beginning drama teachers (an under-researched area in the literature) reveals that they are key contributors to the life of their schools and that they bring about effective educational and personal outcomes for their students. They do this through their strong work ethic and a committed approach to their profession, developing authentic and professional relationships with their students so as to engage them in transformative learning experiences developing social-emotional learning and key life skills and values. However, in unpacking this work against the AITSL Standards in which they are measured, there appears to be some significant gaps.

To begin with, a focus for these teachers is on supporting students' social emotional development to bring about personal success and acquisition of key values. Rachael fostered opportunities for students to explore feelings and emotions that she believed developed their empathy and compassion. Trinity focused on developing respect when working in groups and Kelly taught her students' ways to manage conflict. Drama education has been shown to contribute to improved social and emotional health through an array of embodied, enactive and relational processes (Wright & Pascoe, 2014). Moreover, with growing interest in eudaimonic theory, the Arts have been linked – through connection, action, observation, learning and giving – to creativity, flourishing and becoming fully human (Elliot & Silverman, 2014; Eriksen, 2016; Wright & Pascoe, 2014). These skills are an integral part of teaching drama (Wright & Pascoe, 2014) and essential skills for young people to acquire (Finkel, Simpson, & Eastwick, 2017). Indeed the formation of key values is deemed integral to the education of young people and a major responsibility for schools (SCSA, 2016). The Western Australian Values of Schooling states:

Self-acceptance and respect of self – the acceptance and respect of self, resulting in attitudes and actions that develop each student's unique potential – physical, emotional, aesthetic, spiritual, intellectual, moral and social. Encouragement is given to developing initiative, responsibility, ethical discernment, openness to learning and a sense of personal meaning and identity.

Respect and concern for others and their rights – sensitivity to and concern for the wellbeing of other people and respect for life and property. Each student is encouraged to be caring and compassionate, to be respectful of the rights of others and to find constructive ways of managing conflict. This includes the right to learn in a friendly and non-coercive environment. (p. 2)

It is interesting that despite the importance of these values and the assumption that teachers are essential in teaching, modelling and developing these values, this is not reflected in the AITSL Standards Framework. This disconnection between the work of these teachers and the Standards Framework in which they are judged seems unfair given the complexity and impact it has on the lives of students.

The profound effect of the positive relationships these beginning drama teachers had on their students' academic and personal success was evident and this is well regarded in

the research (Egeberg & McConney, 2018a, 2018b; Galovan & Schramm, 2018). Cassie described the building of trust through relationships, while Steven believed strong relationships enabled students to realise their potential. Freddy emphasised the importance of students knowing that they mattered to him and Peta built a community of trust resembling that of a family. While relationships were developed as a matter of priority during curricular drama classes, participants believed these relationships were strengthened given the additional time spent with these students in extra-curricular activities.

Surprisingly, while AITSL Standard 1 – Know students and how they learn (AITSL, 2011) implies a relational component, its six focus areas instead highlight the need for knowledge of “strategies” to support student learning. This includes knowledge of strategies for differentiating teaching for students of different abilities and students from diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds. Clearly these focus areas are essential to being an effective teacher, however, researchers argue the ability to develop caring and quality relationships with students is key (Cothran & Ennis, 2000; Egeberg & McConney, 2018a, 2018b; Garrett et al., 2009; Garza, 2009; Garza et al., 2010; Woolfolk Hoy & Weinstein, 2006). As Kriewaldt (2015) notes, “Standards prioritise knowing over relationships” (p. 83). Given that the relational component of teaching does not feature in this standard despite it being an integral component of “knowing students”, it is reasonable to question whether this omission devalues and discourages the forming of quality relationships between teachers and their students.

A final gap existing between the work of these drama teachers and the skills and practice deemed important in the Standards Framework, is that of “passion”. Through the experiences of these participants we come to understand they dedicate considerable extra-curricular work in schools because of their passion for their discipline and desire to be a positive influence on the lives of their students. Lucinda’s passion came from seeing her students perform on stage and knowing her efforts had made an impact. Jack was passionate about providing opportunities for his students that would bring out their best, and Rachael believed her success in fostering empathy in students kept her passion for teaching drama alive. While participants saw themselves as passionate teachers and advocates for the value of drama education in the lives of students, they were also aware that this was not part of the Standards Framework in which they were measured.

As Gannon (2012) states “Teaching is affectively, relationally and materially contingent, and that the homogenising strategies of current standards frameworks are ill equipped to recognise this contingency” (p. 62). The gaps between the work of these drama teachers and the standards deemed pertinent to the teaching profession is of concern particularly since these standards are how teachers are “assessed”. Is the profession inadvertently telling teachers that their passion, relationality, extra-curricular commitments and ability to develop core values in their students is not deemed of value since they are not reflected in the framework? Any experienced drama teacher, and drama student for that matter, would shudder at the thought of a drama teacher that merely modelled themselves on these standards alone. As Mulcahy (2011) cautions, standardising the work of teachers risks eclipsing other ways of thinking and doing.

The question then is, how can these beginning drama teachers be recognised and rewarded for their achievements (Larsen, 2010)? One such possibility is to involve professional associations, similar to that of our English colleagues, to describe the work of effective drama teachers. This work could then be used as a source of aspiration for drama teachers, reminding

them of the transformative learning they are capable of achieving. Perhaps there is a need to revisit the work of Wright and Gerber (2004) who some 14 years ago set out to identify the key dimensions of drama teaching competence. While Wright and Gerber found six dimensions of competence, there seems to be a case for the inclusion of four further conceptions of competence: 1) fostering social emotional development of students to bring about personal success and acquisition of key values; 2) facilitating strong and authentic relationships of trust; 3) facilitating extra-curricular activities that provide students with opportunities to feel connected and to thrive; and 4) being a passionate advocate for the transformational qualities of drama education in the lives of students.

## Conclusion

This article highlights some of the unique and powerful work carried out by drama teachers, and in doing so, reveals the inadequacy of the current AITSL Standards Framework for Teachers to accurately capture the nuances of embodied, enactive and relational drama education. Through the experiences of these beginning drama teachers, we have seen the passion they bring to their work, their affinity for developing professional and authentic relationships with their students as well as their strong work ethic that sees them conducting extensive extra-curricular activities that benefit students in multitudinous ways.

While our focus is on the experiences of beginning drama teachers in Western Australian schools, we are aware that our research is not only transferable to other Australian states and countries, but it may inform a much broader context. Perhaps all specialist disciplines are equally dissatisfied with a “one size fits all” model that standardises the work of its teachers. Perhaps the same could be said for all teachers who care for their students personally and academically, dedicating time to creating a sense of belonging and developing trusting and respectful relationships with their students. Given that students have well-articulated views about effective teachers (Ainley, 1995, 2004; Egeberg & McConney, 2018a, 2018b), perhaps it is time to enlist their capacities and voices to revise the Professional Standards so as to better reflect the relational aspect of teaching.

Our research problematises the limiting nature of reductionist discourses that inform the AITSL Standards, which subjugate affect and fail to highlight the relationality of drama teaching. Given the substantive recent research on human creativity and flourishing in education, we suggest the need for an expansion of the understanding of teaching expressed in the AITSL Professional Standards to include passion, relationality and commitment. Our research into the experiences of beginning drama teachers reveals the positive influence these teachers have on their students and in their schools through the development of authentic, professional relationships. These relationships, developed through extra-curricular activities, were a powerfully transformative vehicle for students to be creative, achieve academically and flourish as human beings.

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## Appendix 1 Interview Questions

Can you tell me about your current role in this school?

What extra-curricular performing arts activities do you coordinate/assist with?

How do you find the work/life balance of being a performing arts teacher?

What do you do, if anything, to help you manage your physical and mental wellbeing?

Can you tell me about the professional support (mentor/HOLA/line manager) you have access to?

What parts of your pre-service education have been most helpful to you as a beginning performing arts teacher?

How “ready” for teaching did you feel when beginning your teaching position?

In what ways could your pre-service education have better prepared you for the reality of drama teaching?

What has been most challenging about beginning teaching?

What has been rewarding for you as a beginning drama teacher?

Looking at the AITSL standards, which standard/s do you feel most competent in? In what ways?

Which standard/s do you feel least competent in? In what ways?

What feedback do you get on your teaching and performance?

Do you believe you have the necessary support from your leadership team to progress to the next career stage?

What professional development, if any, is available to you to develop your teaching practice?

What professional development, if any, would assist you develop to your next career stage?

Is there anything else you’d like to share about your experiences as a beginning drama teacher?