

## **Mask Usage and Drama Teacher Understanding in Australia**

*By David Roy\**

This paper presents the research and findings of how some Australian teachers of Drama engage with masks in the classroom. It is part of a larger research project looking at the potential impacts for masks and education in the Australian curriculum. With masks both synonymous with Drama, and multiple resources available for teachers to engage with masks in the classroom, there was no empirical data on if and how teachers in Australia engaged with masks in the classroom. This research asked teachers to self-report on both their skill level in mask usage and to the extent that they engaged with masks in the teaching of Drama in the classroom. Findings note that whilst the majority of teachers did engage with masks; some quite extensively; many staff indicated their own limitations in training and in foundational theory. In addition, many staff used their own time and resources to upskill themselves, placing an importance of the potential for mask usage with children. This has implications for university education courses, as well opportunities for systems and professional development providers in supporting teachers of Drama in their skill base.

*Keywords:* masks, drama, education, teachers

### **Introduction**

Whilst there is a plethora of material regarding the purpose and role of masks in history, performance, and performance pedagogy, there remains little information pertaining to the role of masks in schools. This research study was designed to ascertain how teachers use masks in their practice.

In education, masks have been applied using the theories of a multitude of practitioners, such as Meyerhold, Brecht, Grotowski, Lecoq, and Brook (Mackey & Cooper, 2000). They are mentioned as potential learning topics in the formal school system curricula (Board of Studies NSW, 2003, 2008, 2009; Queensland Studies Authority, 2013; Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2016, 2017b). Many of the major drama teaching texts used in Australia (for example, Baines & O'Brien, 2005; Bird & Sallis, 2014; Burton, 2004, 2005; Clausen, 2016; Roy, 2009) have sections referenceing mask usage in the classroom, offering suggestions as to forms of teaching and engagement.

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## Context

### The Australian Curriculum

Australian curriculum documents, both state and the new national Australian curriculum, are the basis from which teachers and schools plan their curriculum implementation. Therefore, any curriculum document statements in relation to masks will have an influence upon mask usage. There is limited requirement in Australia (ACARA, 2015b; Board of Studies NSW, 2003), or internationally (Ministry of Education Ontario, 2010; Scottish Qualifications Authority, 2015), for masks to be used either as a pedagogy or a knowledge form. The absence of a curriculum mandate on the use of masks in schools' contrasts with the frequent use of masks by twentieth/twenty-first century theatre practitioners as a training tool for performance (Gordon, 2006; Hodge, 2010). Based on this expert usage, it follows that masks could and feasibly should be embedded in drama curricula, but more research is needed to make this case. As it stands, too little is known about how and why individual teachers implement the use of masks in their classrooms. More also needs to be known about how mask work impacts on student achievement; and broader educational and personal outcomes have also yet to be fully researched. The concepts of 'how' to apply masks are examined through theoretical, historical knowledge or specific contextual application of 'mask' units of work (Moreland & Cowie, 2007; Roy, 2015), but the impact or reasoning of 'why' masks might be used appears to be too often absent. Thus school-based research into the pedagogical use of masks is required.

The Arts in the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2015a) makes one single reference in Drama to masks in the Years 7 and 8 outcomes, and this is only a mention in the context of a design element (ACARA, 2015a, p. 80). In the New South Wales Board of Studies Drama Years 7-10 syllabus, there is little reference to masks, however, for Outcome Stage 5 one of the areas for potential learning in play building is *Commedia dell'Arte*. Elsewhere, there is also reference to Greek theatre as a source of tradition and history with which students can engage, but there is no reference to masks in this context (Board of Studies NSW, 2003, p. 21). The Queensland Studies Authority offers mask as one of several examples of engaging with drama (Queensland Studies Authority, 2007, p. 18).

In Victoria, the curriculum applicable to this study is *The Arts: Drama F-10*. Like the other syllabi, such references are very scant and are not directed areas of study or learning. What is different is that the Levels 7-8 example offered for Indicative Progress uses masks for the exemplar. There is no other specific reference to masks in *The Arts: Drama F-10* curriculum document. Interestingly the Victorian Languages Curriculum document has four references to using masks as a tool for students to support language development (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2017a & 2017b).

It is important to re-iterate that in all four curricula examples given, from ACARA, NSW, Queensland and Victoria, mask usage (however limited) is suggested as an exemplar of practice, but is never required. In addition, the fifth example lists masks as a stagecraft rather than a performance tool or skill, similar

to ACARA. However, it appears that many secondary school teachers do engage with the 'recommended' curricula suggestions as most of the Drama teacher's associations, such as Drama Victoria and Drama NSW, publish articles on teaching mask activities (Murphy, 2007). Additionally, they regularly offer mask workshops, particularly with a focus upon *Commedia dell'Arte*.

The two dominant mask areas referred to in secondary education curricula are *Commedia dell'Arte* and Greek theatre. Although there are many mask chapters, sections and references in the main text books on drama, as used in Australian secondary schools, it is unknown as to which of these texts have influence, if any, across which systemic education bodies in Australia. Most of these texts offer activities for students to undertake, but they contain no detail on actual current teaching practices in Australian secondary schools (Baines & O'Brien, 2005; Burton, 2004, 2005, 2011; Clausen, 2016; Gauntlett & O'Connor, 1995; Roy, 2009; Stinson & Wall, 2003; 2005; Tourelle & McNamara, 1998). It is clear that secondary school education recognises the potentiality in learning through mask work for Drama and Theatre Studies students in the classroom. However, it cannot be assumed that teachers of drama actually engage in mask work as a form of teaching, whether in a practical or a theoretical sense.

## The Arts

Although masks fall into the domain of drama, it in turn is part of a wider arts umbrella, such that masks cross the boundaries of arts based education. As a central part of human existence, the arts are a natural part of children's worlds, and they enjoy and value the arts in their daily lives (Barrett & Smigiel, 2003). In addition to cultivating many important dispositions that are of value in life and in other areas of learning (Bryce et al., 2004; Deasy, 2002; Ewing, 2010), the arts are central to the development of children, because they occur through the senses, rather than linguistically or mathematically. 'We make sense through our senses, and thus we give meaning to our reality' (Sinclair, Jeanneret, & O'Toole, 2009, p. 7).

The arts sustain confident and creative individuals, nurturing and challenging active and informed citizens. Children must first think and act through their senses as artists in order for them to value and engage meaningfully with the arts in their lives and learning. The vision, based on this premise, is that secondary school contexts provide children with an education in the arts that gives them a sense of agency: that is inclusive of all five art forms (dance, drama, media arts, music and visual arts), that is culturally situated, and that is sustained over time and supports their developing identities.

Therefore, for masks and arts education in general to have an impact, this research seeks to address this through the usage of masks, allowing for a 'praxial' vision for the arts in education. According to Bernstein (Bernstein, 1999) the Greek term 'praxis' has an ordinary meaning that roughly corresponds to the ways in which we now commonly speak of 'action' or 'doing'. It is frequently translated into English as 'practice' and corresponds to 'a form of truly human activity'. The use of the term praxis may be traced back to the ancient Greeks and Aristotle, and

questions surrounding praxis have been considered by philosophers including Hegel, Marx and Dewey (Bernstein, 1999). Praxis has most recently been associated specifically with education through the work of Freire (Freire, 2017), who originated from the Frankfurt School and Critical Theory tradition, in the context of education as a means of human transformation and liberation, and refers to 'action' or 'practice' in an area of human activity. Praxis refers to 'doing' a human activity and all that this involves. In the arts this means understanding the arts as a particular form of human endeavour in all of its different contexts, meanings and practices.

Alperson (1991) relates praxis to art, and maintains that it is an attempt 'to understand art in terms of the variety of meaning and values evidenced in actual practice in particular cultures' (Alperson, 1991, p. 233). For Alperson, cultural context relates to the actual 'practice' of art in specific cultures. Elliott (1995), when writing about music education, maintains that music as praxis revolves around music as particular kinds of human doing-and-making that are purposeful, contextual and socially-embedded. For these authors, praxis refers to 'action' in the sense that the action is an intentional, conscious and culturally determined human activity. Thus, in the embodied learning experience, adolescent children can explore identity whilst understanding the world and accessing the curriculum (Roy, Baker, & Hamilton, 2019).

Praxis is also defined in educational terms by Kolb as a process of cyclical learning using reflection (Woolfolk, 2013) Freire takes this further and discusses praxis and reflection being a politically empowering tool in education (Freire, 2017). However, in this research, the focus of praxis is derived from a theatrical/arts-based perspective originating from the Greek definition.

## **Drama Education**

Given that drama may contribute to social development and educational impacts, as shown by the work of Geese Theatre (Baim, Brookes, & Mountford, 2002), it is surprising that empirical examination of the implementation of drama as a pedagogical tool still remains underdeveloped. A key exemplar of this is the methodologies of using drama with offenders who have been institutionalised, and the impact it has upon those individuals and their sense of identity and place in society (Baim, Brookes, & Mountford, 2002; Smith, 1984; Wilsher, 2007).

A meta-analysis of arts research was published in a special edition of the *Journal of Aesthetic Education* (Winner & Hetland, 2000). This explored many of the academic assumptions of art's impact on learning and, whilst it revealed correlations to learning achievement in different domains, in the majority of cases empirical research was only able to ascertain limited or no causal relationships.

Correlation is not Causality. First, it is important to distinguish between correlations from causal claims. Many studies demonstrate that students who choose to study the arts are higher academic achievers than those who do not choose to study the arts. However, we can conclude nothing from this finding about whether or how arts education **causes** improved academic performance (Winner & Hetland, 2000, p. 5).

Wright and Pascoe have written further on the wider mental and social benefits that drama and arts learning bring to the individual (Wright & Pascoe, 2015).

The Arts offer both tools for inquiry as well as expression; they offer both depth through linking cognition, affect and somatic ways of knowing, and breadth through multi-modal forms for sharing and engaging with diversity of viewpoints, experience, ideas and visions. In this way, participants are linked through sharing what is life affirming and what has meaning (Wright & Pascoe, 2015, p. 296).

When coupled with the ideas of masks as a social anthropological or ethnographic study, the possible role of the mask, and their power in delivering the arts to students, is apparent. Adding the sociological influence of the mask, and its potential in education and the arts, there is a clear correlation between identity exploration and mask exploration in the classroom.

Masking allows the individual to act on the wish or need to express “I am not myself”, and by the communal endorsement of the larger deception that “we are not ourselves”, humans could bridge the gap with nature ... Play allows for the improvisational, the unexpected, leaving the spirits of people open to new and sometimes very useful discoveries. Through the deception of the masquerade, people could act without being emotionally driven by the direct and sometimes terrifying experience of nature. Establishing a second nature – a virtual reality – allowed people to confront culture/nature and reinvent identity as mutable nature, and masked humanity continued to dance (Nunley & McCarthy, 1999, pp. 38-39).

One of the core learning processes in all drama curricula in Australia is improvisation leading to play building (Schneider, Crumpler, & Rogers, 2006). At the same time, many practitioners from Europe in the twentieth century developed an interest in applying knowledge and techniques from *Commedia dell'Arte*, particularly improvisation and play building. It is of no surprise, therefore, that whilst not mandating a study of *Commedia dell'Arte*, the written curricula actively ‘encourage’ the serious study of *Commedia* and mask work, but it is not mandated (Board of Studies NSW, 2003; Queensland Studies Authority, 2007; Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2017a; 2017b). It is therefore possible for a teacher of drama or theatre studies in Australian secondary schools to never be required to teach any element of mask. This is still the case with the new Australian Curriculum, The Arts (ACARA, 2015b), where no area of mask work is prescribed.

### **Masks and Education**

Whilst there is a growing variety of reading on performance-based masks work, academic education texts on teaching in the arts make scant, if any, reference to masks (McCaslin, 2006; Morgan & Saxton, 1987; Neelands & Dobson, 2000; Posten-Anderson, 2008; Sinclair, Jeanneret, O'Toole, 2009; Somers, 1994; Wright, 2003); and masks are often focused more upon in relation to their creation as an artefact rather than a performative object. Educational drama texts from both the

United States and the United Kingdom have at times chosen to minimise the use of masks in the classroom.

The mask, though less versatile, is closely related, serving many of the same purposes (as puppets) (McCaslin, N., 2006, p. 140).

It is unlikely that all the masks made by a class will ‘work’ (Somers, 1994, p. 44).

The relationship to the arts and drama of non-academic outcomes is clear, though the separation of the two, academic and non-academic, is open to question (Batdi & Batdi, 2015; Özbek, 2014; Podlozny, 2000). What is clear is that self-esteem, life satisfaction and a sense of purpose and meaning are supported through engagement with the arts and with drama (Rose-Krasnor Busseri, Willoughby, & Heather Chal, 2006; Shanahan & Flaherty, 2001).

There is a visible impact of creative activity on the development of an individual’s self-creation. The ability to experience oneself as an object of creativity is the condition for a creative attitude. It is assumed that as a result of creativity and through creativity a child may enrich knowledge of themselves, gather positive experiences from their own actions which in turn enhances their positive self-esteem (Galaska, & Krason, 2011, p. 5).

Drama, as applied through a constructivism perspective, can also be used as a pedagogical tool through the self-discrepancy theory (Cole, 1996). Self-discrepancy theory is an aspect of self-concept or identity. It is an understanding of the relationship and differences between:

- How I see myself.
- How I ideally like to be.
- How I think I should be.

This is important as it recognises and validates the sense of self whilst opening up the potential for other’s sense of self-identity (Austin, 2005; Woolfolk, 2013). It forces the individual to not only recognise the possibilities but, if applied with the two cognitive dimensions of the theory, domains and standpoints, then the individual can explore alternatives and make informed choices. Drama is recognised as having a significant impact on an individual’s self-discrepancy, through its use of making (Wright, 2006).

The domains of the self are the foundational basis of Self-Discrepancy Theory – actual, ideal and ought self (Wright, 2006). Standpoints or self-representations of the self are positional aspects of who we are and who others are being. When we link this to the theories of mask as representing the ‘other’ and tie this to drama pedagogies, such as invisible theatre (Boal, 1998) or other role-playing techniques, the potential for harnessing the self-actualisation of students in the classroom is apparent.

The question of whether actors should work on a role from the inside (through emphatic identification with the character's psychology) or from the outside (by manifesting character through physical imitation of observable social behaviour) was rendered irrelevant in Saint-Denis's work with neutral masks. Such an inner/outer dichotomy often troubles actors who train in Strasberg's Method but spend most of their working life having to act to order as a consequence of the technical requirements of stage, television, or film. Mask was to teach the student actor an improvisational process that integrated the consciousness of aesthetic form with the experience of subjective impulse in performance. By developing a corporeal economy appropriate to expressing the personality of the mask, the student would acquire a physical discipline that prepared him for the performance of a wide range of dramatic styles (Gordon, 2006, p. 163).

Anthropologically, the mask has been used as one method to support an understanding of identity and our place in society, and, to quite an extent, it still is (Alexander, 2015). With identity formation and development having a considerable impact on adolescents (Erikson, 1980), coupled with theatre practitioners' application of masks in actor training and performance development throughout the ages (Hartnoll, 1998), it is apparent that masks have the potential to be valuable 'found' objects to use within the classroom (Roy, 2016a). Textual evidence of both curriculum application (McCaslin, 2006) and supporting students with recognised needs (Bundy, Land, & Murray, 2002) also indicate that masks can be used within educational contexts and thus potentially benefit students. To what extent this is the case in Australia is the question.

Drama offers the potential to create successful students and productive citizens. If society wants to harness all their students' potentials and improve their results beyond the limitations of standardised testing, it needs to consider how the curriculum can support not only academic success but also the wider health and emotional outcomes required for students to become successful participants in society, not marginalised. It is interesting to note that, in the most successful education systems in the Northern Hemisphere, drama is an integral part of the curriculum (Cziboly, 2010).

Theatrical practice is distinct from educational practice, though theatrical practice helps to inform the rationale and possible impacts and resonances of drama in education. Masks have been shown to develop a performer's physicality and control (Grotowski, 2002; Leiter, 1991; Saint-Denis, 1982). Through analysing drama in classroom contexts, it is possible to delve into the impact of mask usage on the psychology and developmental learning of adolescents (Roy & Ladwig, 2015). The part that the physicality of mask usage plays in learning and development is of special interest in general classroom contexts. One specific area of focus in the current study that has developed through the research is to investigate the implications of mask usage for students with a specific learning difficulty linked to fine and gross motor skill challenges (Rawal, 2010; Roy & Dock, 2014), in particular dyspraxia, given the physical coordination challenges it presents without intellectual disability (despite it being classified as a neurological 'disorder'). It has been shown that drama potentially has a positive effect on those with such a disorder, whether it be dyspraxia, and/or on those with a comorbidity

such as dyslexia, a developmental language disorder and, indeed, some autism diagnoses, due to the physical praxis focus involved (Roy, 2020).

Masks demonstrate that they can have an embedded place within education in its widest form in society to advance the concepts of humanity. It is not known whether masks are being used within the curriculum which therefore leads to the key question of this research: what methods of mask usage (if any) do teachers teach and use in the teaching of Drama and Theatre Studies in Australian secondary schools?

### **Methodology**

Adopting a Constructivism lens, the research asked teachers to self-report any usages and engagement with masks and their students. That is not to discount the role of curriculum documents. Directives, and potentially more importantly, suggested implementations of requirements (though not mandated), may well influence pedagogical practices in secondary drama.

It is important to note that educational research, and indeed humanities research (this study is easily encompassing both) have specific challenges of recognition in the wider research and academic community. The challenge of the research to have predictive power is as important in education as it is in science research (Weiman, 2014).

Applying this standard does not mean it is necessary to accurately control and predict how every specific student will behave or learn, any more than we can control and predict how every single atom will behave in a physics or chemistry experiment. It means only that one should be able to predict some meaningful measurable outcomes (Weiman, 2014, p. 13).

For the initial data collection, the researcher decided to use a survey research method in the form of a mixed method survey that contained numerical based questions (quantitative) and open ended questions (qualitative). The purpose of the questionnaire was to provide a snapshot of the population study at one particular time. There were several challenges in selecting the respondents.

Australia is a large country with six states and two territories. As it is a federally based nation, each state and territory currently have different curricula. To enhance the study's feasibility the researcher decided to focus on the three most populated states, where 75% of the population exists, namely Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. With a combined population of 17.7 million, there are 1,187,000 young people aged 15-19 in this combined region (ACARA, 2016). This age group is critical to the study as, whilst drama is taught across all age groups, at certificate level learning, there is a requirement for teachers to have specific knowledge content qualifications. Whilst there is in place a national curriculum that is still to be implemented fully by any state or territory, these three states (New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland) arguably have the more dominant education bodies and curriculum authorities, again due to the large proportion of the population of Australia concentrated in these areas.



With Australia having a large geographical setting and a variety of school systems to engage with, attempting to develop a random, representative sample was not feasible and would never be achievable in the time frame allotted for the study. Instead, the decision was made to ask for volunteer responses through the professional state bodies for drama teaching, namely Drama NSW, Drama Victoria and Drama Queensland. These three state bodies are part of the wider umbrella organisation Drama Australia. Individuals need to actively choose and pay to become a member of their state body (which offers automatic membership) of the national umbrella body. It was assumed that any response from participants chosen from these bodies may offer more engaged and positive applications for pedagogical practices due to the fact that they have actively chosen to engage in wider professional development through opting to join their state professional body of peers. The purpose of these professional bodies is to promote and develop drama teaching within schools, and all members benefit from access to resources and training. Therefore, to be a member it must be assumed that such teachers wish to actively develop their professional practices.

An email requesting volunteer participation was sent through the email/web pages of each of the three state drama associations. The associations (not the research group) sent the email to ensure privacy. The email included a link to an online questionnaire that was hosted by *SurveyMonkey* ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)). Participants could access the survey only once.

The use of this process offered both benefits and challenges. Cross-sectional studies are useful in measuring the specific actions, attitudes and behaviours of a given group of people (Aveyard, 2010), such as teachers of drama. The use of electronic forms of surveys are beneficial in that they allow immediate access for participants who can link from the initial email contact to the survey, and the data is available immediately on completion. The participants need to exert no additional effort to return the survey if the web address is included within the response request (Shih & Fan, 2007). The use of a mixed mode of a postal mail and web-based systems must be balanced against the cost and resource requirements of implementation. In the mixed-mode surveys, where respondents were offered both of the response options (i.e., Web or mail survey response modes) at the same time, there was no statistically significant difference between mail and Web survey response rates (Shih & Fan, 2007).

Professional bodies for drama teachers provide support for staff in what are usually small departments of one or two staff. This survey achieved a response of 48 participants (9.6%) for the surveys, with 29 reporting they had been trained in the use of masks. This is acknowledged to be a small sample, but is considered acceptable given that the small size of the curriculum area (with only 500 members across the three states chosen) narrowed the focus down to the specialised content area of masks, and the purely voluntary nature of participation would have inevitable impacts. The positive aspect is that even this small sample has the potential to make important inroads as the first study of mask usage in classrooms in Australia with the potential to support wider-based analysis if the findings indicate benefits for student and learning progression through the use of masks.

This survey included both objective (closed response) and subjective (open-ended) response formats from a total of 32 questions. The objective questions sought details concerning qualifications and general teacher background; professional experience; courses and programs taught, and the resources used. The open-ended question typically followed an objective stem question. For example, the objectively framed question 16 asked, ‘Would you choose to attend further courses?’ (Yes/No) was followed with an open-ended question, ‘Please briefly state reasons for your answer to question 16’ (followed by three blank lines). Both formats were self-reporting and subject to respondent interpretation (Stenhouse, 1975).

The initial survey sought specific quantitative data in relation to teacher knowledge of masks from higher education training as well as professional development. Respondents were also asked to offer qualitative responses in relation to their confidence in using and understanding mask work. The purpose was to understand teacher perceptions of masks as a form of knowledge, including from the historical and performance viewpoints, and their understanding of the use of masks as a pedagogical tool. Mnouchkine and many other theatrical practitioners (Hodge, 2010) demonstrate that masks can be used in training as a process, not only as an end result. None of this intends to diminish the need for teachers to have a depth of knowledge to support pedagogy (Ladwig, 2008). Teacher knowledge in itself, whilst important, is not seen as the major factor in teacher impact upon student engagement and achievement (Bransford et al., 2005). It is the ability of the teacher to adapt pedagogical approaches to meet the students’ needs, rather than just provide knowledge, that has impact (Hattie, 2008).

The questions from the survey were derived from the gaps in the literature, as well as an analysis of mask connections to the various Australian curriculum based on the researchers’ two decades plus of international experience in Drama Education. The questions were peer reviewed.

### **Descriptive Analysis**

The responses regarding the distribution of genders were eight male and 40 female respondents from a total of 48. No respondent self-identified as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island descent, although one respondent did not answer this question. Twenty-two respondents stated that their initial teaching qualification was as part of an undergraduate degree, and eight of these teachers were those who identified as primary specialists. Thirty-one respondents stated that they had a diploma or Masters qualification in teaching and 26 of these were initial teaching qualifications, with five having undertaken further diploma work (Table 1).

*Table 1. Qualifications*

|   |        |    |
|---|--------|----|
| Accelerated teacher training qualification      | 0.00%  | 0  |
| 2 or 3 year teacher qualification               | 4.17%  | 2  |
| 4 year education/teaching qualification         | 41.67% | 20 |
| Bachelor degree other than education            | 41.67% | 20 |
| Diploma in Education                            | 22.92% | 11 |
| Postgraduate certificate or postgraduate degree | 35.42% | 17 |
| Masters in Teaching                             | 4.17%  | 2  |

In addition, 10 respondents had completed a Masters in Education or another subject area, with eight specifically in Education (Table 2).

Table 2. Additional Qualifications

|                                       |        |   |
|---------------------------------------|--------|---|
| Masters in Education                  | 16.67% | 8 |
| Masters in another academic subject   | 4.17%  | 2 |
| Doctorate in Education                | 0.00%  | 0 |
| Doctorate in another academic subject | 0.00%  | 0 |
| Other degree                          | 2.08%  | 1 |

With most respondents teaching in the secondary sector, it is interesting to note that of the 41 respondents teaching secondary, only 17 (35%) had taught all Years 9-12. This raises questions as to the provision of drama across the continuum of learning in Australian schools in regard to which further research may be of use.

In terms of mask usage, five of the nine primary respondents (55.6%) used masks in their teaching practice. One primary teacher did not respond to this question. Twenty-nine of the 39 secondary respondents (74.4%) used masks. Seven secondary teachers did not respond to this question.

Of the 48 respondents, 29 (60.5%) stated they had undertaken mask training in their teacher training courses. In addition, 26 respondents (53.5%) had undertaken additional mask training, the majority of which was not provided explicitly by their education body but through conference attendance. Nineteen (39.5%) had undertaken no training in masks whatsoever and, of those, five (10%) engaged with masks in the classroom but had no specific training in their usage.

Table 3. Teacher Confidence in Mask Usage

| Response               | Percentage | Number    |
|------------------------|------------|-----------|
| Yes                    | 65.85%     | 27        |
| Not sure               | 14.63%     | 6         |
| No                     | 17.07%     | 7         |
| n/a                    | 2.44%      | 1         |
| <b>Total responses</b> |            | <b>41</b> |

Teacher survey respondent comments to Q16, 'Would you choose to attend further courses (specialist courses/workshops in mask usage/work outside of your qualification)?' were as follows:

*PD helps you to know certain traits of movement associated with the mask or background information.*

*Too long ago and not enough time in workshop.*

*The works briefly completed at university were practical workshops that enabled me to realise how the mask can assist in character development.*

*Clarified method for engaging with mask and creating character.*

*I generally bring in an expert to teach masks when needed for a production. I would like to have more knowledge to enable me to teach mask work.*

There was a direct association in participants responses between confidence in using masks (Table 3) and the uptake of using masks; with those that had training either during their pre-service course work or through in-service/workshop attendance. Respondents who had mask training also noted confidence in mask usage. In addition, of the 30 extended responses, three specifically connected the specialist courses/workshops to general drama teaching.

*Mask is a fantastic way for students to view drama and the world through the eyes of 'the other'.*

*The works briefly completed at university were practical workshops that enabled me to realise how the mask can assist in character development.*

*Clarified method for engaging with mask and creating character.*

An additional teacher survey respondent comment to Q23, 'Are there any additional comments you would like to make in relation to this topic?' was:

*I think that if I had more mask training, I'd use them more frequently in my classroom to teach drama/theatre skills and theory.*

## Mask Usage

Of the 41 respondents who reported they use masks as part of their teaching, only 32 (78%) reported using physical masks in their classrooms. From this, it can be assumed that, for nine (22%) of the respondents' students, mask work is studied at a purely theoretical level.

The resourcing of masks and text usage is varied for those who use actual masks within their teaching. Three (4.9%) respondents only use masks created by their students as part of their classroom activities. However, 25 (51.2%) of those who bought masks also engaged in mask making activities with their classes. The sourcing of purchased masks varied. The largest source is from specialist mask makers (47.4%). Specialist party/costume shops were used by 14 (29%) respondents, and low-cost, general goods stores were used by 10 respondents (21%).

*It's not sourcing the masks - it is the COST of the masks. Plain white masks are very cheap; Commedia dell'Arte masks are very expensive. Teacher Survey Respondent*  
*I had very little knowledge of mask use in a class room and have had minimal resources and even less storage for them. Teacher Survey Respondent*

With regards to texts, 34 (70%) respondents use 'Living Drama' (Burton, 2011), with Centre Stage (Clausen, 2016) and Acting Smart (Bird & Sallis, 2014) also being used widely, but this is specific to different states in the sample (Living Drama – QLD; Centre Stage – NSW; and, Acting Smart – Victoria). The authors of these texts have strong connections with those specific states and their professional bodies representing drama teachers. For staff that had no formal or informal training with masks use, there is on average five pages of content related to mask

usage, which is a meagre 2% of the total text content. Of the five most used texts with a collected number of 1033 pages, there is a total of only 33 pages dealing with mask content, nineteen of which are found in Centre Stage alone.

Of the respondents who stated that they used physical masks in the classroom (as opposed to only theoretical/abstract engagement with mask knowledge), the majority were in secondary classes, Years 9-12 (31 of the 32). Only one respondent out of nine primary teacher respondents reported that they used physical masks in the primary context. There was no answer provided by seven respondents.

### Drama Learning Topics

Masks are used in a variety of learning topics with the teaching of Drama. One point of interest in the data was the disconnected nature of different mask topics, with some teachers touching on some mask topics but ignoring others. This suggests that, for some teachers, knowledge and the use of mask is partial or siloed. As an experienced drama teacher, I looked at those multiple topic areas in the Curriculum F-12 that had the potential for mask usage in teaching and developed a tale of topics (Table 4), whilst crosschecking with curriculum document content suggestions and Australian drama teaching text books.

Table 4. Mask Usage in Drama Learning Topics

| Drama Learning Topic                             | Percentage of 35 respondents | Response no. |
|--|------------------------------|--------------|
| Improvisation                                    | 54.29%                       | 19           |
| Playbuilding                                     | 48.57%                       | 17           |
| Characterisation                                 | 42.86%                       | 15           |
| Commedia dell'Arte                               | 88.57%                       | 31           |
| Greek Theatre                                    | 68.57%                       | 24           |
| Physical Theatre                                 | 51.43%                       | 15           |
| Voice  | 14.29%                       | 5            |
| Movement   | 60.00%                       | 21           |
| Stanislavski                                     | 2.86%                        | 1            |
| Meyerhold  | 0.00%                        | 0            |
| Brecht   | 31.43%                       | 11           |
| Boal   | 2.88%                        | 1            |
| Brook  | 0.00%                        | 0            |
| Lecoq  | 17.14%                       | 8            |
| Suzuki   | 11.43%                       | 4            |
| Street Theatre                                   | 14.29%                       | 6            |
| Verbatim Theatre                                 | 5.71%                        | 2            |
| Tragedy  | 14.29%                       | 5            |
| Comedy   | 17.14%                       | 6            |
| European Theatre                                 | 5.71%                        | 2            |
| American Theatre                                 | 2.88%                        | 1            |
| Australian Theatre - traditional or Contemporary | 0.00%                        | 0            |
| Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Theatre    | 0.00%                        | 0            |
| World Theatre                                    | 17.14%                       | 8            |
| Asian Theatre                                    | 28.57%                       | 10           |

Masks as a tool are used in Greek theatre and Commedia dell'Arte, and the responses reflected this in that 33 (69%) engaged with masks and Greek theatre and 43 (89%) with masks and Commedia dell'Arte. Generally speaking, masks were not used within the teaching of either comedy (17% of respondents) or tragedy (14% of respondents). This is despite the importance of Commedia dell'Arte, which literally means the Art of Comedy, and is the basis of many comic precepts that is still widely used today (Griffiths, 2004), and the fact that Greek theatre, as the basis of tragedy theory as well as comedy (Kitto, 1961), use masks. At no point in the responses did staff link these separate knowledge areas in their responses. This is particularly significant, because in New South Wales, when studying tragedy, students have to study Greek play texts from a performance point of view as required by the course prescriptions (Board of Studies 2008). A series of question responses used a Likert scale of one to six to elicit more nuanced responses, with the opportunity for respondents to add in additional qualitative comments. The data collected had ordinal value in that the order mattered though not the specific difference within the Likert scale.

The respondents made the following comments in relation to mask usage with specific learning topics:

*Practice in the use of Commedia and Basel Masks has meant that I have been able to confidently teach using these resources. Extended to movement units - mask units - history, productions etc.*

*Great understanding of 'neutral mask' and commedia.  
More confident in Commedia dell'Arte; more knowledgeable in mask making; More knowledgeable in teaching history of Mardi Gras.*

*I've explored a wide range Commedia, neutral, character, Balinese.  
Commedia is all about using the mask to create the character. PD helps you to know certain traits of movement associated with the mask or background information.*

*Explored different styles (Commedia, Noh).*

An exploratory factor analysis was undertaken in IBM, SPSS Version 23 using a Varimax rotation with Kaiser Normalization that converged in seven iterations (Figure 1). There were three key areas of mask found through disposition and application: pro-mask usage dispositions, negative mask usage dispositions and general mask usage topics. Negative mask usage correlations were reversed to positive, to allow for comparison.

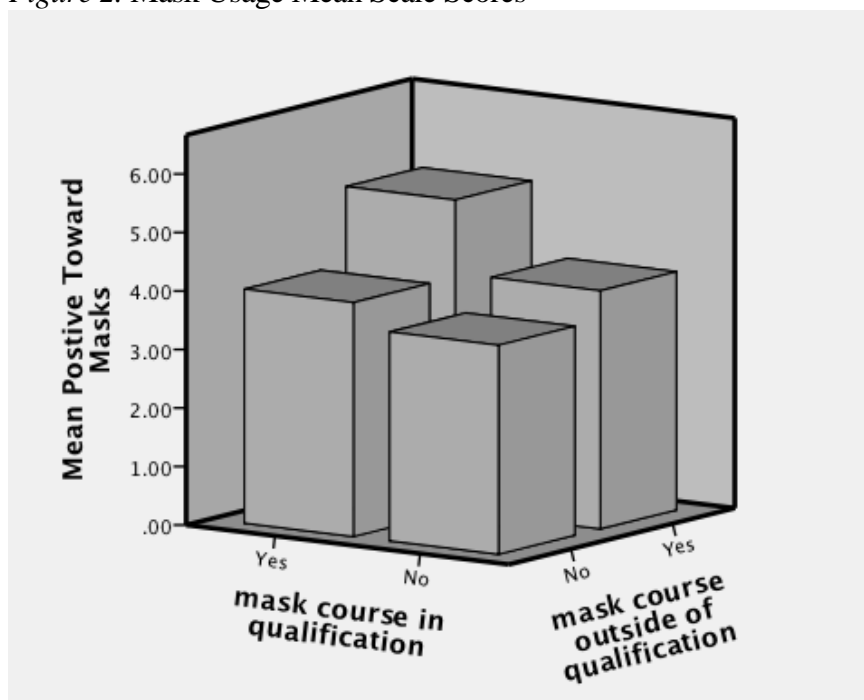
There was a positive correlation between those teachers that had positive views towards masks in the classroom, the amount of training in masks received and their engagement with them, and those who interpreted more negative aspects of mask usage in the classroom and who had less mask training and usage.

Figure 1. Teacher Responses to Mask Usage (Rotated Component Matrix)

|   |  | Rotated Component Matrix <sup>a</sup> |       |       |       |       |
|---|--|---------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|   |  | Component                             |       |       |       |       |
|   |  | 1                                     | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5     |
| promask   | I feel I have strong skills in teaching with masks.                  | .915                                  | .059  | -.277 | -.081 | .064  |
|   | I enjoy teaching practical mask work.                                | .889                                  | .209  | .229  | .317  | .055  |
|   | I enjoy teaching with masks.   | .861                                  | .199  | .188  | .323  | .173  |
|   | I teach Commedia dell'Arte with masks.                               | .847                                  | .249  | .063  | .330  | -.219 |
| Negmask   | I use masks to teach many different topics.                          | .814                                  | .310  | .083  | .021  | .325  |
|   | Masks are irrelevant in Drama teaching.                              | -.103                                 | -.942 | -.011 | -.120 | -.093 |
|   | Mask work is of historical interest only                             | -.135                                 | -.863 | -.296 | .090  | -.251 |
|   | Mask work is useful in teaching Drama.                               | .173                                  | .856  | .339  | -.091 | .107  |
| Maskuse   | Mask work is a distraction for students.                             | -.319                                 | -.788 | -.207 | -.249 | .094  |
|   | It is difficult to source masks to buy for use within the classroom. | -.162                                 | .078  | .909  | .118  | .057  |
|   | Mask work is optional in teaching Drama.                             | -.214                                 | -.345 | -.847 | .055  | -.245 |
|   | I would like to use masks more in teaching.                          | -.048                                 | .256  | .788  | -.332 | -.073 |
|   | Mask work is engaging for students                                   | .343                                  | .453  | .659  | -.131 | .202  |
|   | Mask work is a required part of teaching Drama.                      | .415                                  | .025  | .565  | -.284 | .392  |
|   | I enjoy teaching theory of masks.                                    | .086                                  | .154  | -.071 | .855  | -.031 |
|   | I teach topics in Year 12 with masks.                                | .268                                  | .153  | -.010 | .661  | .630  |
| I teach Greek Theatre with masks.                   | .545   | -.162                                 | -.057 | .640  | .370  |       |
| I feel using masks in be classroom a challenge.     | -.238  | .095                                  | .350  | -.577 | -.197 |       |
| Mask work is useful in teaching Drama at all times. | -.177  | .253                                  | .142  | .139  | .883  |       |
| I teach Asian Theatre with masks.                   | .433   | .029                                  | .180  | .109  | .808  |       |

These correlations were also linked to the training of individuals in mask usage (Figure 2). The more training undertaken, the more positive were the attitudes towards mask usage and thus engagement with masks.

Figure 2. Mask Usage Mean Scale Scores



*I think that if I had more mask training, I'd use them more frequently in my classroom to teach drama/theatre skills and theory.* Teacher Survey Respondent

The respondents indicated that masks are used in the classroom but similar to the literature review, used in manners as exemplified by curriculum documents more than in an intersectional way across multiple dram forms. This is separate to the wider anthropological and theatrical engagement with masks.

### Conclusions

There is still limited evidence that schools and Drama courses are using masks other than as a tool for skill development, which may well be limited, or for specific knowledge requirements for specific curriculum. Teacher responses demonstrate a desire to use masks further in their teaching practice and indeed to relate this to wider knowledge and whole school learning but lack the training and experience to do this. The questionnaire responses are a useful starting point to understand the practice of teachers in the drama classroom and their engagement with masks. A limitation to the research was whilst over 300 teaching staff being contacted, only 48 responded. A further potential of study would be to not only have a wider response from teaching staff but have extended interviews or respondents 'unpacking' their mask usage choices. From the data received, it was possible to observe several respondent classes using masks and elucidate student interactions to mask work through observation and group interviews (Roy, 2020; Roy, 2021).



*As long as there is support for teachers and they are taught about mask and have time to practice and learn the techniques and have fun mask work should be included in the curriculum.* Teacher Survey Respondent

*Mask work is great for allowing all students to explore body language and gesture and basic human communication of which language is only a small part.* Teacher Survey Respondent

*Theatre is also about stagecraft and masks are the core of many styles.* Teacher Survey Respondent

From the questionnaire data presented, it is clear that drama teachers are engaged with practical learning, and it is in this aspect that nearly four out of five secondary respondents use masks in the classroom (78%). However, there seems to be a disconnection between teacher training in drama and specialist mask training for drama teachers, despite a majority of teachers stating that they felt mask work was engaging and important for curriculum development.

There was also a belief expressed that mask is a specialised area, not necessarily a generalist tool for teaching drama. In their open-ended responses, most of the respondents contextualised their use of masks in relation to specific units of mask work rather than within generalist drama training.

Masks have been widely researched in anthropology and psychology. There is a multitude of historical data relating to the usage of masks in a theatrical context, through such practitioners as Meyerhold, Brecht, Lecoq and Mnouchkine (Roy, 2016b); all of whom there are opportunities to focus on in the Senior curriculum. This is in addition to studying Greek theatre or Commedia dell'Arte in Drama, English or History curricula. Furthermore, is the role that masks have played in the Asia Pacific region, and continue to do so today. Recognising these cultural perspectives can create a greater depth to the learning opportunities available. There is though, a disconnect between the knowledges of mask, their potential for academic and well-being outcomes, and teacher reported usage. Through further training made available system wide and building upon the recognized success of mask application in classrooms, learning experiences using masks could support the academic, social and inclusive outcomes for all students engaged in Drama learning.

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