



# 4 PRINCIPLES

By Peter Hussey

**Youth work and youth theatre have many similar aims, and they share similar working practices. Youth Theatre Ireland ([youththeatre.ie/youth-theatre/what/](http://youththeatre.ie/youth-theatre/what/)) defines youth drama as:**

Youth Drama is also a unique youth work practice that engages young people as active participants in theatre by using group or ensemble drama approaches. Contributing to the artistic, personal and social development of young people through their commitment and voluntary participation, a youth theatre:

- ◆ is a drama group for young people that offers a year round programme of activities, including a regular programme of drama workshops and the staging of at least one theatre production each year
- ◆ takes place outside of school and requires voluntary participation
- ◆ draws its adult leaders from the voluntary and/or professional sectors
- ◆ is open to all young people regardless of their gender, background, race, sexuality, religion, ability or economic situation
- ◆ is not-for-profit. Participation in youth theatre is not determined by financial contributions from the young people
- ◆ is a safe and supportive space. The welfare and protection of young people is a priority for youth theatres
- ◆ has its own identity forged by its members and its interaction with the wider community.

Inclusion, ownership, respect, and independent learning are core principles of youth theatre. They are also core principles of youth work. In Ireland, as is common across Europe, governments define youth work in a similar way to youth theatre. The Irish Government's Youth Work Act 2001 explains youth work as:

A planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young people through their voluntary involvement and is (1) complementary to their formal, academic or vocational education and training. (2) provided primarily by voluntary youth work organisations. ([youth.ie/wpcontent/uploads/2018/11/Youth\\_Work\\_Leaflet\\_2010.pdf](http://youth.ie/wpcontent/uploads/2018/11/Youth_Work_Leaflet_2010.pdf))

Both youth theatre and youth work are planned programmes, often exploring the same themes but using different means. While youth work may use a lot of discussion and reflection, youth theatre uses embodied learning and feedback. Where youth work teaches project planning, teamwork and co-operation, youth theatre teaches collaborative creative performance and ensemble-making. Youth work has strict boundaries around managing emotion, physical contact and body expression, while youth theatre practice encourages and regulates the safe expression and experimentation of emotion, physical contact and body expression.

Each sector shares common political and social perspectives, usually rooted in a liberal agenda with social justice and equality as guiding principles of organization.

The themes explored by each sector are often similar. Youth theatre explores these themes to build the capacity of the young person – usually as a performer – while

youth work explores the themes to enhance the personal skills and citizenship of the young person.

We look at theatre-makers who work with young people as cultural youth workers. They use cultural tools (such a theatre) to help young people create meaning, develop as people, and become active citizens.

It is in this context that the Digital Drama Workshops is located. The project is underpinned by 4 key principles:

## COLLABORATION

**Collaboration and creativity.** The partners believe that all people have the right to be creative and to practice their creativity together. The project highlights the role collaboration serves in human growth and development. The online activities therefore will enhance this feature and not become a space in which individuals merely do ,individual;' things passively while being together. The workshop plans and resource material focuses on participants being engaged collaboratively, working actively to create meaning together using an online platform to do so.

## EXTROSPECTION

**Being social – moving towards community.** The project acknowledges that social isolation is a major problem across Europe, and that many young people cannot take part in group creative activity due to distance, travel restrictions, mobility issues, health, detention, and a host of other reasons. Therefore, the workshop plans encourage participants to work in groups or in pairs, and to focus their attention onto the social more so than onto the personal. In addition, the project appeals to young people from anywhere with Wi-Fi to take part in a group activity without having to travel.

## FREE

**Open access, Free, Available to all.** Culture, and access to it, is a human right. The materials in this project make access to theatre-making easier. And therefore, they are free and readily available.

## PARTICIPATORY

**Participation and not consumption.** The project spotlights 'learning by doing' or embodied learning in its materials. The risk with online drama is that it becomes passive (participants watch videos, listen to speeches, and read material). This project focuses on active participation, moving, writing, sharing, engaging, and collaborating in so far as it is possible to do in a digital arena. The goal is to help young people create meaning rather than consume opinion.

There are other principles at work in supporting this project. We deeply believe in the positive effects of the drama method for youth work as it impacts on five of the eight Lisbon Key Competences for lifelong learning. This was researched and evaluated in the DICE ("Drama Improves Lisbon Key Competences in Education") study from 2008-2010 which was funded by the European Union ([dramanetwork.eu](http://dramanetwork.eu)).

## CULTURAL EXPRESSION

The best way to learn about culture is to make culture yourself. When young people participate in drama projects they can express themselves in any creative way they can think of. Youth workers will regularly present to the young people a base for new, innovative and contemporary forms of cultural expression. In theatre all forms of art come together, young people can speak, dance, sing, rhyme, move, write, paint or even be a still image themselves; anything is possible. Therefore, it is no surprise that young people who do youth theatre are also more enticed by other forms of culture. The DICE study stated that these young people who involved themselves in Youth Theatre are 13.17% more likely to be in an orchestra and to go on craft or film courses. Also, they are 15.34% more likely to be in a dance group and 16.44% more likely to write short stories, novels, poems or plays.

## COMMUNICATION IN NATIVE LANGUAGES

When doing drama young people train to express and interpret thoughts, feelings and facts in both oral and written form. Firstly, they start to improvise a scene where they have to talk about a certain topic from scratch with a minimum amount of preparation time. Secondly, after rehearsing a bit they write down their own words. This lets them reflect on how they express themselves by using language. However, they do not only talk for their own self-interest, but always interact with others in a theatrical scene. This way the young people improve their ability to interact linguistically in an appropriate way with the full range of societal and cultural contexts.

The DICE study found out that the young people who participate in youth theatre courses are 4.21% more likely to enjoy reading, to understand school text-books and be confident about reading newspapers than the others. On top of that, they are 4.86% more confident about speaking out and expressing their point of view.

## LEARNING TO LEARN

According to the DICE study, young people who are regularly involved in drama projects, when compared to those who do not, are 6.9% more likely to feel that being creative is important to them. Furthermore, their enjoyment of school is 2.5% higher and they feel 6% better at school.

Anyone who would like to hear and see more about these ideas can visit the videos section of our website and choose from amongst the theories and practice showcased there. Visit [digitaldramaworkshops.eu](https://digitaldramaworkshops.eu) for further information.