

# Research backs educational theatre



Image courtesy of Alpha Shows

By Rosie Clarke, Editor

## As an educational tool, theatre works.

A review of evidence surrounding the use of theatre in education by Edith Cowan University and the Child Health Promotion Research Centre found that an overwhelming majority of students not only “demonstrate enjoyment and enthusiasm through watching educational theatre”, but “listen attentively, and can correctly identify the educational messages being portrayed”.

Whether students are watching a production staged for them as part of an incursion or performing in a show themselves as part of a drama or other school production, they learn a slew of valuable lessons and develop empathy for others.

Incursions are an effective choice for schools wanting to engage theatre directly as a vehicle for socially conscious personal development. They are an especially valuable tool for schools lacking the resources or community support to stage their own school production.

Whether a school is hosting their own performance or inviting another company to perform, plenty of preparation is required. Engaged, enthusiastic staff provide fuel for the process and the performance itself, and benefits to staff can also be huge. As well as being a creative outlet, production time offers staff many leadership opportunities, requires excellent organisation, communication, and an ability to motivate and inspire.

Confidence is king, or queen, for performers and the courage it takes to grace the stage for some can be a huge barrier to overcome. The self-belief, sense of pride and joy that can come from this can impact students for life. Teamwork is promoted, memories and friendships made.

## Using theatre to teach students about their emotions

### School News spoke with Alpha Shows Founder and CEO, Ben Jackson about what it's like to work with schools on the stage.

For teachers, he acknowledged: “It’s an eternal struggle in the classroom as well as the playground to guide students to treat each other with more respect, dignity, and even love.”

Sometimes, dysregulated emotions can cause children, just as adults, to make choices and pursue actions that lead to conflict and discontent.

“This is not conducive to a great learning environment, to say the least,” Ben noted. “Rather than talk down to students or drill into them a set of rules that they are forced to obey, I believe in

theatre and performance as a way to model conflict resolution and frame emotional regulation.”

He added: “It’s not a new idea for schools to use a dramatic performance to tackle bullying, for example, but Alpha’s immersive theatre takes this to a new level.”

For example, Ben said: “At all our shows, the actors take students on a roller coaster ride with state-of-the-art costumes, lighting, sound, creating a ‘rock-concert’ like atmosphere”.

“When students are entertained, they enjoy engaging with educational content, personal development, or even more complex subject matter like bullying and social justice. They just don’t want to be talked down to; if you get them laughing, you can lead them

to a new place emotionally.

“We usually perform one of our ten shows sequentially every year at a school and then cycle around again. The results stack from year to year and evolve over that time to respond to student needs so they have maximum impact,” Ben told us.

“We know from experience that if you put on the right show and keep it fast and loud and funny, as well as profound and powerful, they’ll stay with you on the journey to new understandings about themselves and the world.”

A final piece of advice from Ben: Finish the show with some question time to drive home central themes and messaging—it also gives students a chance to engage with the performers. ▲



Images courtesy of Alpha Shows

Backstage, too, there are many opportunities for students of varied talents and interests to get involved. Tech-minded pupils may enjoy working on sound and lighting, hard tech students might get on board with set construction and design students may wish to work on set and costume design.

The school show represents a chance for the whole school – and wider – community to come together. Parents may get involved in costume creation, prop sourcing and ticket promotion, while the wider local

community is invited to along to support the school and enjoy some local theatre. Guests may include local dignitaries and school alumni, representing an opportunity for renewed engagement and support.

Music scores and scripts must be obtained by licence to avoid copyright infringement. For some schools, performance art and theatre departments are well resourced treasure troves of treasures and technology. For others, equipment, costumes, and sets must be sourced externally. ■



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