London Review of Education
Volume 13, Number 1, Spring 2015

"Too many actors and too few jobs": A case for curriculum extension in UK vocational actor training

Ian Wilkie*

UCL Institute of Education, University College London

This article questions the current situation for vocational acting training (VAT) in the UK. It aims to provide an update on the report into burgeoning provision of acting training (and the attempt to address subsequent high rates of actor unemployment) that was originally undertaken by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (CGF, 1975) in their publication entitled *Going on the Stage*. The article will suggest that the continued proliferation of VAT offered at tertiary level, allied to the dearth of career opportunities for graduates, means that the current training offer is not entirely fit for purpose. It will further propose that VAT requires a widening of the curriculum offer in order to provide meaningful vocational workplace readiness for course graduates at a time when, as Malcolm Sinclair, president of the British actors' union, Equity, acknowledges, 'there are too many actors and too few jobs' (in Clark, 2014a: 17). To address the question of VAT and employability in the UK, this article will reconsider the three questions initially posed in *Going on the Stage* (CGF, 1975: 7). These were: why is drama training necessary, to what extent do the present arrangements fall short of the ideal, and what should VAT entail? By re-posing these questions, this article will present the contemporary context of VAT, review the status of progression rates into employment, and propose a case for curriculum extension in light of the findings.

Keywords: actor training; drama training; vocational education; performing arts curriculum

Why is drama training necessary?

Vocational acting training (VAT) prepares new actors for the drama and performance market and has much currency in the contemporaneous UK setting. A recent Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) report noted that the creative industries sector, which includes the film, television, and music business, 'accounted for 1.68 million jobs in 2012, 5.6 per cent of UK jobs … and [is] now worth £71.4 billion per year to the UK economy – generating just over a staggering £8 million an hour' (DCMS, 2014). Moreover, British actors, as part of this economic trade, are considered desirable and internationally viable within the business: 'British actors may be better trained, and the British theatre allows them far greater opportunity to ply their wares' (Wolf and Kemp, 2010). In preparation for the industry, actor training is also deemed to be an important element in obtaining professional status. As the actor Simon Callow notes:

> Actors need a three-year training period to discover their strengths and weaknesses away from the public eye … there are two vital elements to the training; a contained environment and an integrated programme. The objective of the three years must be to increase an actor's expressiveness … in order to discover ways of offering images of the human condition which are as rich and challenging as possible. (in Luckhurst and Veltman, 2001: 9)

---

* Corresponding author – email: i.wilkie@ioe.ac.uk
©Copyright 2014 Wilkie. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Licence, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

VAT enjoys high satisfaction rates among graduates of accredited programmes. In a 2012 Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) league table survey of dance and drama providers, figures available for 88 higher education organizations delivering VAT reveal that the average student satisfaction rate for the respective courses was 77 per cent (*The Guardian*, 2012).

However, in terms of VAT being a wholly vocational form of training, preparation for the acting industry has two particular, associated, problems. First is conversion into work and second is the subsequent dearth of employment opportunities. As Martin Brown, the assistant general secretary of the British actors' union, Equity, recently said, 'There used to be a relatively contained number of specialist drama colleges … but now there are an enormous number of courses, which means that we have more actors than ever. The turnover is massive' (in Duerden, 2014: 39).

Another problem that VAT faces is in how the training prepares students for alternative forms of work once they have qualified. The European Training Foundation's definition of vocational education and training is clear:

> We can say that a vocational qualification should attest the attainment of an individual in a particular field of competence. It can also set the requirements for an individual to enter or progress within an occupation or profession. To be qualified is to be certified competent to pursue an occupation, *several occupations or associated functions of an occupation*. (European Training Foundation, 2014: 8, my italics)

In short, it is these associated functions and broader labour market skills that, although richly embedded in VAT, are not being explicitly foregrounded, measured, or articulated within the current system. Currently, VAT represents another instance of how 'many vocational pathways connect only loosely to the labour market' (Davey and Fuller, 2013: 81). However, the broader interpersonal and process skills that a student acquires in VAT, and which she or he can then offer to the general workplace, should result in making the candidate doubly employable.

These problems of progression into work and the lack of opportunities for actors prompted the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (CGF, 1975) inquiry, with its explicit rationale to investigate 'the recent severe increase in unemployment coupled with the multiplication of training establishments' (ibid.: 5), along with the subsequent progression to an industry in which 'unemployment is endemic' (ibid.: 72). Forty years on, the situation is, if anything, worse. The relative lack of acting work, moreover, is merely a mirror of the situation that is prevalent in the UK for many vocational graduates, irrespective of their discipline:

> Despite the fact that jobs are being created in the economy, as the UKCES explain: 'there remain structural barriers in the labour market that have been compounded by the recession, and young people now have fewer opportunities than ever to find jobs and gain experience'. (Skills Commission, 2013: 12)

VAT in particular, though, enjoys endemic 'structural barriers', falling as it does into the category of 'a sector … where the vocational knowledge being deployed is less codified and the skills tend to be regarded as "soft"' (Fuller and Unwin, 2013: 2). There is, furthermore, a tendency for the pursuit of a career in the arts to be viewed in the broader sociocultural context as belonging to the realms of 'non-work' and the 'recreational'; it is 'assumed to bear no relation to productive activity and to lie outside mainstream curriculum concerns' (Robinson, 1983: 11).

In terms of curricular activity, VAT could be perceived as a relatively unproductive process, with overly individualized and, more generally, commercially irrelevant, outputs. On the face of it, the VAT student undertakes a course comprising a series of process exercises in which she or he learns about presentational techniques through exploratory, kinetic, and, ultimately, expressive procedures. These procedures are technically codified and owe much to 'early' theorist/

practitioners of actor training. Indeed, in the UK, 'drama training today is based to a large degree on the work of Konstantin Stanislavski, whose "system" is still the best reasoned approach to the work of the actor' (Miles-Brown, 2006: 12). Stanislavski's system and its variants provide the blueprint for much western acting training. The system constitutes 'the science of theatre art' (Moore, 1974: 7) in which, 'with the System's terminology – super objective, logic of actions, given circumstances, communion, subtext, images, tempo-rhythm, and so on – a common language has been created' (ibid.: 9), to enable the actor-in-training to be able to find the 'conscious means to the subconscious' (ibid.: 13).

However artistically codified and apparently non-utilitarian the skills gained in VAT might appear, the process skills that students obtain actually have much currency for the wider workplace and for students' overall employability. These wider VAT skills are, essentially, intercommunicative. Students evidence the ability to work in a team and to collaborate in the successful completion of projects through the production of plays, and 'employers strongly value soft skills, such as the ability to work in teams, communication skills and work discipline' (OECD, 2010: 67). These essential, 'soft', 'people', 'presentational', and 'project' skills are built into the training and the 'social uses of drama' (CGF, 1975: 21) within VAT and they remain highly workplace desirable:

> A 2008 study by GRADdirect, part of Reed Consulting, has revealed that employers and graduate recruiters value qualities such as team working, good communication skills and the ability to appreciate others' perspectives above academic qualifications. The most sought after and strongest candidates demonstrate communication and the ability to work in teams; the ability to appreciate others' perspectives; transferable skills such as the ability to grasp complex information and to see problems from different angles (50%). (*Personnel Today*, 2008)

VAT requires all of these qualities in that acting is essentially all about communication, being 'dependent on the *actor* in his role as multi-channelled transmitter in chief' (Elam, 1980: 85, italics in original). Ensemble work on a play presupposes team working, and 'collective creativeness … necessarily demands ensemble' (Stanislavski in Moore, 1974: 18). Mastery of text requires the ability to grasp complex information 'in the plurality of signifying processes generated through the activity of reading/spectating' (Aston and Savonna, 1991: 15). In seeing problems from a different angle, the interpretative requirements in VAT involve the actor's rationalized choice of 'expressions … activated by haptic, visual, tactile … and other non-verbal signs' (Ruthrof, 1997: 7) to enable him or her to convey meaning effectively in performance.

It is to be hoped that VAT will feature as part of the wider vocational education and training (VET) agenda. The National VET Conference, run in partnership with the UK Commission for Employment and Skills in November 2014, aimed to 'harness the ambition of employers, colleges, training providers, leaders, managers, teachers, trainers and learners, trade unions, professional associations and learned societies, to be part of a movement to raise the status and improve the quality and impact of vocational education and training' (Education and Training Foundation, 2014).

However, a caveat exists in that potential employers, who are currently an under-represented body anyway where the promotion of VAT is concerned, can tend to dominate the skills agenda:

> If provision is determined exclusively on the basis of employers' views, some risks emerge. Employer interests are not the same as either student or societal interests. Employers may want very narrow skills in occupational niches, or skills for declining industries and for jobs which are unpleasant and badly paid, or they may want an oversupply of skills to drive down wages in the associated occupations … These employer demands need to be kept in balance with the interests of society at large, including the interests of the student. (OECD, 2010: 52)

Moreover, as the OECD (ibid.: 55) notes, 'at any level, if employers wish to influence the mix of provision, they should be willing to contribute to the training, typically through the provision of workplace training and experience'.

Where VAT is concerned, student 'interests' and preferences are considerable. Demand for VAT is enormous. The Guildhall School of Music and Drama's (2013: 13) prospectus states that there are '2,300 applicants for 26 places' for their BA course in acting alone. VAT has an important role to play in society. Drama and the expressive arts are cultural assets, and undertaking training in these vocational areas can lead to intensely valuable learning experiences for students. As the Association for Drama Educators notes:

> Learning through drama is a natural human process – our brains are 'wired' for it. We recognise it as a powerful pedagogy and a creative process that provides a compelling means of exploration, expression and making meaning. Through it we learn what it is to be a human being. (National Drama, 2014)

Drama training, then, is still as necessary as ever it was. It is vital for continuing the supply of expertly trained actors for the industry. It has much sociocultural relevance and value. It also automatically provides its trainees with highly marketable wider skills that are in demand by employers. Nevertheless, despite strong student appetite for such courses, demand has to be balanced by the increasing need for VAT to provide dual employability prospects for its course graduates. Finally, VAT needs to be kept central within continuing VET debates.

To what extent do the present arrangements fall short of the ideal?

Presently, VAT in the UK mainly occurs at post-school level, although a number of specialist schools, such as the Anna Scher Theatre School and the Brit School, offer an educational experience that is geared towards pupils gaining skills that will enable them to enter the entertainment industry. More generally, at secondary school level, drama enjoys a somewhat ambiguous status on the National Curriculum. While there has long been a recognition that the study of drama plays a beneficial role in pupils' development through its capacity 'to promote social, perceptive, intuitive, aesthetic and creative learning' (Robinson, 1983: 7), it is simultaneously perceived as a luxury or default subject offer, often used as a repository for otherwise difficult-to-place pupils within the schools system. Recently, for example, an all-party parliamentary report stressed the importance of 'soft' or 'non-cognitive' '*extra-curricular activities*' (of which drama is now one) for developing 'character and resilience' (Paterson *et al.*, 2014: 41–2, my italics). While the report accepted that sport and music would be ideal for developing these 'self-management' skills that are 'so valued by employers' (ibid.: 47), it unaccountably failed to include drama as an ideal subject 'for those who exhibit strong employability skills despite not following the traditional "academic" route [and who] may increase the pool of high performing individuals that employers can choose from' (ibid.: 57). There have been reports that drama was one of the 'subjects to be ditched in the exam shake-up' (*The Independent*, 2014: 12). However, Glenys Stacey (2014), the Ofqual chief regulator, admits that:

> In the arts there are a couple of little used GCSEs, one entitled 'Performing Arts' and the other entitled 'Expressive Arts', both of which overlap to a large extent with other more popular GCSEs. It is these subjects that are listed in our consultation document for possible withdrawal.

She further confirms that 'there's a host of creative subjects on the list to be reformed at GCSE and A level, and rightly so' (ibid.). As one commentator who is critical of the proposed reforms notes, drama currently 'sits like a cuckoo in the nest of English' (Baldwin, 2013). More widely, the head of learning at the Royal Opera House has bemoaned the optional nature of drama

studies in schools, claiming it had led to 'appalling cultural deserts … where the arts have been squeezed out of the [school] curriculum in favour of the core subjects' (Barker, 2014). This is a situation that runs in contrast to the subsequent high demand for post-school-age acting courses, suggesting that an imbalance in acting's status within the curriculum remains unresolved.

However, it is at post-school level that vocational acting courses have proliferated. In further education, in particular, there has been a particular explosion of provision. In 1975, according to the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (CGF, 1975: 86–8), there were 15 FE colleges offering some form of actor training. At the time of writing, there are 320 FE and separate sixth form colleges in the UK that offer courses with a core actor training component. This represents over 80 per cent of the total of all such centrally subsidized providers in the UK. Meanwhile, *Contacts* – 'the essential book of contacts for the entertainment industry' – lists a further 402 private providers that advertise therein as offering some form of drama training and preparation for the industry (Spotlight, 2014: 174–203). FE colleges and sixth forms routinely emphasize the vocational 'career'- and 'industry'-progression nature of the acting courses they provide, irrespective of the qualification route or level offered. Providers consciously stress the 'practical' and 'vocational' aspects of their courses in their recruitment material (e.g. Leyton Sixth Form College, 2014: 78–9). Many directly claim that their courses are 'a platform for a career in performing arts' in which students will gain the 'skills you need for a career in drama and the theatre' (e.g. Edinburgh College, 2014: 32 and 42). This is a problematic claim for colleges to make, in that progression to subject-specific work routes is far from guaranteed in such programmes 'that are designed for direct labour market entry, that contain much occupation-specific content and that rarely lead to further studies, [as] employability should be a major factor' (OECD, 2010: 55).

Meanwhile, at higher education level, 'in the UK … there are numerous drama schools which include one or more acting options among their portfolio of courses … these are usually three year acting courses leading to a diploma, or when the institution is associated with a university … a BA in acting' (Meyer-Dinkgräfe, 2001: 165). According to UCAS (2014), drama courses with some component of acting will be offered in 2015 by 77 HE providers in England alone. In 1975 the total number of such providers was seven (CGF, 1975: 86). As Brannen (2004: 206) notes, 'we have now reached a point where the majority of British universities offer Theatre courses; either as Single honors *[sic]* subject or Joint/Combined honors, usually with one other subject'.

Although validated acting training takes place in these settings, the vocational outcomes – their success in offering entry to employment on exit – remain severely limited. The result of the mismatch between preparation for the sector and subsequent progression into work within the creative and cultural (C&C) sector is becoming evident:

> Nevertheless, despite universities [*sic*] close links with this sector, studying for a C&C-related degree rarely provides an expectation or understanding of what is required in vocational contexts … Hence many graduates with C&C degrees have a post-graduation 'vocational need': to acquire the 'vocational practice', that is the mix of knowledge, skill and judgement, employers are looking for, via a mix of unpaid internships and work placements. (Guile, 2009: 11)

The real specialist vocational acting training takes place in bespoke drama schools or conservatories. In 1975 there were 14 drama schools in the conference of drama schools (CGF, 1975: 10). Today, according to Drama UK, the conservatoire and drama schools' own representative body, there are 18 accredited member schools [that] provide vocational courses that offer a direct route into the profession (Drama UK, 2014a) and 'approximately twenty applications received for each available place' (Drama UK, 2014b: 4).

The curriculum offer, even at this advanced level, is vocational in its mixture of practical exercises underpinned with the study of subject-specific theory 'since all institutions aim to train actors for successful careers in the entertainment industry … [through] … professional

preparation … audition practice and showcases' (Meyer-Dinkgräfe, 2001: 166). In this emphasis on building practical and vocational skills, the curriculum offer remains essentially the same as at levels 1 to 4. It is similar, too, to the approach instigated in Herbert Beerbohm Tree's Academy in 1904 – the first UK drama school – which comprised 'elocution, dancing, fencing and some knowledge of periods' (Pearson, 1988: 165). In 1975, it was reported that 'the curriculum of drama falls under three main headings: movement, voice, and acting' (CGF, 1975: 47). More recently, the conservatoire curriculum remains similarly practical:

> The majority of training institutions focus on the classical canon and related techniques. After an introduction to acting, students are subjected to textual analysis and interpretation … students of acting focus on the three areas of characterization, voice work and body training … characterization: Creating a Character, the Objective, Method Acting, Acting Shakespeare, Epic Forms and Contemporary Plays. (Meyer-Dinkgräfe, 2001: 165)

So resolutely practical is the curriculum ethos, indeed, that Thomasina Unsworth (2012: 115) notes in her guide to would-be drama school candidates that 'you may be called upon to do some writing as an element of your training'.

However, still, as in the 1975 report, 'there exists an abundance of actors, many of whom are seriously underemployed' (CGF, 1975: 12). A recent survey of actors by Casting Call Pro revealed that three-quarters of professional actors earned less than £5,000 in 2013, 46 per cent earned less than £1,000 from acting work while one in five failed to get a paid acting job at all (Clark, 2014a: 17). Significantly, perhaps, to strengthen the case for introducing curriculum extension in VAT to make students more widely employable, this report also noted that 'two thirds were trained in another industry' (ibid.). The Equity journal, moreover, reported that '46.1% of Equity members worked for no pay in the previous year … [while] 45.4% [of the 3,800 respondents] worked for ten weeks or less in performing … 86.4% earned less than £20,000' (Equity, 2014: 4). This still correlates poorly in relation to all self-employed workers in the UK economy, in which '83% of self-employed reported incomes of less than £20,000 in 2010–11, with 14% earning zero or negative' (Murphy, 2013: 19).

Given, then, the prevalent circumstances in VAT, there are arguments to be made for the extension of the curriculum offer. First, it should be taken into account that 'labour market conditions in the C&C sector do not reflect the prevailing conventional wisdom that qualifications are the "magic bullet" … for securing employment' (Guile, 2009: 2). This is even more acute in VAT where, despite the proliferation of VAT qualifications available today, it is still the case that 'there is no compulsion for a would-be actor to seek professional training' (CGF, 1975: 17). Finally, 'the soaring costs of going to university means students from modest backgrounds have been priced out of prestigious dance and drama conservatoires' (Barker, 2014). This leads, for potential VAT students, to the need to carefully weigh up the value of undertaking acting training, especially given the 'concern that the tripling of tuition fees to £9,000 per year for Bachelor degrees will deter many young people from modest backgrounds from participating' (Deissinger *et al*., 2013: 259). As a result of these concerns, some hand-wringing has been evident about participation in VAT, with high-profile actors such as Helen Mirren suggesting that 'acting [is] becoming the prerogative only of kids who have money' (in Jury and Foster, 2014). This may also lead, as the head of Arts Council England states, to 'the dominance of privately educated actors on our screens' (in Clark, 2014b: 24). Other industry insiders, such as Paul Roseby, head of the National Youth Theatre, are reported as 'com[ing] under fire for suggesting that "the majority of actors" don't need formal training, but should instead focus on marketing skills that enable them to get work' (in Trueman, 2013).

The present arrangements, then, as in 1975, 'fall short of the ideal'. What, then, might VAT curriculum extension entail?

What should VAT entail?

As stated, the VAT curriculum remains a mixture of practical procedures to develop performance ability along with more implicit, wider skills enhancement. Drama school courses tend to consist of exercises and techniques in year 1, with text and theorists covered in year 2, allied with input on self-marketing (Unsworth, 2012: 127). Meanwhile, embedded wider skills contained in VAT are, broadly, critical thinking and project management development, along with business skills in terms of self-promotion.

A proposal to extend the VAT curriculum, then, while still 'finding a balance between training and education' (McGill Peterson, 2012: 20), hinges on the case for making graduates 'dually' employable as both industry-ready professional performers and as viable candidates for the wider workplace. Given that 'curricula may be considered to be a composite of three domains – disciplines, work and generic skills' (Barnett and Coate, 2005: 56), it is, arguably, a case of bringing to the fore the highly transferrable generic work skills that VAT students also acquire as part of their training. Employability skills that VAT students engage in should be made more prominent in the execution of the training, and made more explicit for subsequent, post-qualifying practice. Brannen (2004: 207–11), for example, notes the need for 'reflection' and 'questioning' in the development of the VAT student and these are fundamental employability skills whatever the workplace destination:

> Education must be reinvented to meet the needs of our ever-changing twenty-first century world. Students have to be able to function, create, and communicate personally, socially, economically, and politically in local, national, and global venues. Schools must develop an interdisciplinary culture of inquiry where students work independently and collaboratively, employing critical thinking and multiple intelligences for imaginative problem solving. (Wheetley in Lazarus, 2012: 29)

Making these intercommunicative and critical skills more explicit to the central syllabi of VAT courses could only assist trainees to position themselves within 'the explosion of knowledge, global competition, and the rapidity of change demands a prescient mind that is educated to understand larger issues and trends' (McGill Peterson, 2012: 19). What is clear is that along with 'new styles of behaviour (leadership, innovation, etc.) … knowing how to think in the twenty-first century will be of little use without knowing how to use … the whole panoply of IT' (Corrigan *et al.*: 1995: 37). Increasing the use of technology within VAT training, where, currently, IT facilities may not commonly feature in performance classrooms or studios, is one immediate and urgent area for potential curricular extension.

The twenty-first century actor, indeed, requires 'orientation towards the world of work' (Barnett and Coate, 2005: 45) in all its facets and potentiality. There are obvious core presentational and time-management skills that are mappable to the wider workplace that feature in the VAT curriculum. Other examples of workplace assets that are embedded elements in the pursuit and execution of acting and performance, are 'cause and effect analysis, conflict and problem management, data gathering, negotiation skills, process analysis, vision setting, creative thinking and coaching, mentoring and managing groups' (Wash, 2007: 7–8). As Simon Callow (1984: 150) states, apropos of the process skills gained in VAT, 'performance … the very act of acting … is exploratory: trying out, trying on, investigating … the written or spoken text adds to the testing out of ideas, the symbolic enactment of philosophies and psychologies'. Moreover, a greater awareness of the 'market dimension' (Barnett and Coate, 2005: 72), both in the performance sector and more widely beyond, could only benefit trainees:

> A study from Finland … found that workplace training taught students entrepreneurship, promoted maturity and supported the development of practical soft skills like initiative, problem-solving skills and the use of information sources … Other skills, such as entrepreneurship,

> are highly relevant to many occupations to which VET leads, but have been often neglected in traditional vocational programmes. (OECD, 2010: 67)

Bringing 'entrepreneurship' more squarely into the frame of VAT training would mean that students could build awareness of 'invigorating economic, technological and social progress' (Westhead and Wright, 2013: 2). To date, VAT has failed to adapt to an apprenticeship model – something proposed in the 1975 inquiry (CGF, 1975: 59) – perhaps 'because the government's "blueprint" for apprenticeship … has failed to encourage employers … to participate' (Guile, 2009: 12). This is despite VAT's strong transferrable skills base and employability possibilities, shown in existing examples of apprenticeship, where 'skill formation and transfer … developed distinctive forms of occupationally-specific knowledge and skills which are in short supply' (ibid.: 23).

Along with the skills specific to the field of study, and the explicit foregrounding of the existing embedded transferable skills in VAT (communication, team working, problem solving, creative thinking, project work, increased use of IT and technologies), there are further employability skills that could feature more centrally in the extended curriculum. Such skills already feature in curricula proposed by, for example, the Humber Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning, and the University of Guelph, both in Ontario, Canada. These curricula contain such integrated features as:

> … personal skills (including responsibility and problem solving), resource management; communication skills (including use of evolving media); mathematical and computing skills; teamwork and leadership skills (including conflict management and decision making); thinking skills including research and creative thinking; values (including citizenship, sense of historical development and global understanding); moral and aesthetic maturity; lifelong learning; and independence of thought. (in Evers and Wolstenholme, 2007: 85–6)

The extension of the VAT curriculum could contain these elements, explicitly featured as part of the course offers, to promote students' 'understanding of the application of knowledge in different contexts' and 'the development of a global perspective' (Aleverno College Liberal Studies curriculum, in Barnett and Coate, 2005: 39). Such an approach would lead to an 'effort to reflective education in terms of abilities needed for effectiveness in the world of work, family and civic community' (ibid.).

Conclusion

In summary, VAT training remains vital, albeit massively oversubscribed. In order to properly train VAT students for dual professional roles, the already myriad wider, transferable skills that are evident in VAT should be foregrounded, categorized, taught, and measured as part of the curriculum offer. VAT in the wider context of VET needs to be refocused, as all 'VET graduates need a good mix of occupation-specific skills and more generic transferable skills' (OECD, 2010: 68).

As Kim Wheetley (in Lazarus, 2012: 29) explains, if schools are to provide the twenty-first century education needed for our 'increasingly complex, diverse, globalized and media-saturated society … [they] must develop an interdisciplinary culture of inquiry where students work independently and collaboratively, employing critical thinking and multiple intelligences for imaginative problem solving'. Extending the already rich 'inquiry' culture of the VAT curriculum could help deliver these objectives.

The analysis presented in this article employed a report from 40 years ago as a critical framework. However, it is possible to refer back even further to see an argument being made for

the kind of curriculum extension that would see VAT graduates being more widely prepared for employability. In 1612 the playwright and actor Thomas Heywood wrote:

> Do not the Universities, the fountain and well springs of all good arts, learning, and documents, admit the [value of plays and performances] in their colleges? and they (I assure myself) are not ignorant of their true use. In the time of my residence in Cambridge, I have seen tragedies, comedies, histories, pastorals, and shows, publicly acted, in which the graduate of good place and reputation have been specially parted. This is held necessary for the emboldening of their junior scholars to arm them with audacity again they come to be employed in any public exercise, as in the reading of the dialectic, rhetoric, ethic, mathematic, the physic, or metaphysic lectures. It teaches audacity to the bashful grammarian … and makes him a bold sophister to argue *pro et contra*, to compose his syllogism, cathegoric, or hypothetic (simple or compound), to reason and frame a sufficient argument to prove his questions or to defend any *axioma,* to distinguish any dilemma, and be able to moderate in any argumentation whatsoever. (in Cole and Chinoy, 1970: 86–7)

Today, there remains a need to review the acting curriculum to enable the inclusion of both wider skills and critical-thinking development, and to ensure that these are accounted for within course prospectuses, syllabi, schemes of work, and lessons. Many of these wider skills are already embedded – albeit largely covertly – in the types of kinetic, haptic, affective, and experiential activities that constitute the elements of an acting curriculum. Educators must, therefore, make explicit where dual goals are realizable through emphasizing the 'extra' skills development that coexist alongside the normal expectations of an acting syllabus. For instance, in the drafting of curricula, outcomes need to be written as dual achievements. Currently, in a typical acting curriculum students might, for example:

> … explore style, form, character, subtext and context … build skills in voice, diction and movement in order to realize the specifics of character and situation … [gain] knowledge of the performance process … and … understand the key principles of the acting process according to Stanislavski, Brecht or Edward Gordon Craig. (LAMDA, 2009)

Parallel outcomes could be expressed within an expanded framework to include the development of 'a wider spectrum of skills' such as, for example, 'social development and professional development … employee technique … [the development of] innovative thinkers, problem solving, excellent collaborators and team players … group work and other "soft skills" … collaboration and sharing of ideas … debating skills, appreciation of fact and tolerance of opinion' (Teis and Wilkie: 2014: 47). Curriculum review should enable the adoption of methods that highlight student reflection on the parallel literacy, language, numeracy, and IT processes that they undertake when studying as practitioners for both the world of performance and for general employability. Such skills include problem solving, finding solutions, forming relationships, logical thinking, choosing appropriate tools, interpreting results, drawing conclusions, evaluating data, and analysing opinions and instructions. A revised curriculum should express explicit awareness, by students, of their undertaking of the types of project work that potential employers recognize as being valuable assets.

Assessment, too, needs to take into account the mechanics of the embedding and measurement of both subject domain and wider skills, and how these can be accounted for within acting programmes. Teachers of acting need to develop awareness that the study of acting as a subject has a duality of purpose and their continuing professional development could, accordingly, usefully feature the embedding and foregrounding of wider employability skills within lessons.

Finally, this article recognizes the limitations of adopting a UK focus, particularly in a time of recession and funding cuts to the arts. It is to be hoped that some of the themes will prove

relevant within a wider context and reflect the challenges faced by educational institutions and the cultural industry internationally. Recommendations for future, related research would include the adoption of the views of industry employers, both within theatre and beyond, and a review of the effectiveness of more inclusive curricula that operate successfully elsewhere.

Notes on the contributor

Ian Wilkie is pathway leader in the Department for Lifelong and Comparative Education at the UCL Institute of Education where he works in the field of post-compulsory education and initial teacher education. With a background in performance, drama, theatre, television, and comedy, his research interests are in arts education, and in teaching and learning in performance, drama, and theatre studies. He has written journal articles on adult–child interaction, error-induced learning in science teaching, Scottish comedy, and comedy in art, and has forthcoming book contributions on TV genre and acting due out later this year.

References

Aston, E., and Savonna, G. (1991) *Theatre as Sign-system: A semiotics of text and performance*. London: Routledge.

Baldwin, P. (2013) 'Drama is a subject, despite what the government thinks'. *The Guardian*, 7 January. Online. www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/teacher-blog/2013/jan/07/drama-subject-government-education (accessed 18 September 2014).

Barker, J. (2014) 'Poorer students priced out of the creative arts'. *The Independent*, 23 May, 14.

Barnett, R., and Coate, K. (2005) *Engaging the Curriculum in Higher Education*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Brannen, R. (2004) *Balancing Acts: Teaching theatre in British higher education today*. In Fliotsos, A., and Medford, G. (eds) (2004) *Teaching Theatre Today: Pedagogical views of theatre in higher education*. Basingtoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 205–17.

Callow, S. (1984) *Being an Actor*. London: Methuen.

CGF (1975) *Going on the Stage*. London: CGF.

Clark, N. (2014a) 'Don't put your daughter on the stage – she'll probably earn a pittance'. *The Independent*, 29 May, 17.

— (2014b) 'Bazalgette: Top schools too dominant in acting'. *The Independent on Sunday*, 14 June, 24.

Cole, T., and Chinoy, H.K. (1970) *Actors On Acting: The theories, techniques, and practices of the world's greatest actors told in their own words*. New York: Crown Publishers, Inc.

Corrigan, P., Hayes, M., and Joyce, P. (1995) 'A modernist perspective on changes in the higher education curriculum'. In Assiter, A. (ed.) *Transferable Skills in Higher Education*. London: Kogan Page, 29–38.

Davey, G., and Fuller, A. (2013) 'Transcending the academic–vocational binary in England? An exploration of the promise of hybrid qualifications'. In Deissinger, T., Aff, J., Fuller, A., and Jorgensen, C.H. (eds) *Hybrid Qualifications: Structures and problems in the context of European VET policy*. Vol. 10 of *Studies in Vocational and Continuing Education*. Bern: Peter Lang, 79–109.

DCMS (2014) 'Creative industries worth £8million an hour to UK economy'. Press release. Online. www.gov.uk/government/news/creative-industries-worth-8million-an-hour-to-uk-economy (accessed 18 September 2014).

Deissinger, T., Aff, J., Fuller, A., and Jorgensen, C.H. (2013) 'Policy implications and recommendations: When do hybrid qualifications work and what benefits can be expected from them?' In Deissinger, T., Aff, J., Fuller, A., and Jorgensen, C.H. (eds) *Hybrid Qualifications: Structures and problems in the context of European VET policy*. Vol. 10 of *Studies in Vocational and Continuing Education*. Bern: Peter Lang, 243–76.

Drama UK (2014a) Web page accessed at: www.dramauk.co.uk/

— (2014b) *Guide to Professional Training in Drama and Technical Theatre*. London: Spotlight Publications.

Duerden, N. (2014) 'Sitting room only'. *The Independent*, 18 July, 38–9.

Edinburgh College (2014) *Prospectus*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh College.

Elam, K. (1980) *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*. London: Routledge.

Equity (2014) 'Survey: Stark results on pay. *Equity Magazine*, Spring. London: Equity.

Education and Training Foundation (2014) 'Vocational education and training'. Online. www.et-foundation.co.uk/our-priorities/vocational-education-training/ (accessed 17 February 2015).

European Training Foundation (2014) *Making Better Vocational Qualifications: Vocational qualifications system reforms in ETF partner countries*. Torino: European Training Foundation, December. Online. www.etf.europa.eu/webatt.nsf/0/3AE7DF5686200FCEC1257CA00047FD58/$file/Making%20better%20vocational%20qualifications.pdf (accessed 18 September 2014).

Evers F., and Wolstenholme, J. (2007) 'Integrating knowledge, skills, and values into the curriculum development process at the University of Guelph-Humber'. In Wolf, P., and Christensen Hughes, J. (eds) *Curriculum Development in Higher Education: Faculty-driven processes and practices*. No. 112 of *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 83–91.

Fuller, A., and Unwin, L. (2013) 'Introduction: International perspectives on apprenticeship'. In Fuller, A., and Unwin, L. (eds) *Contemporary Apprenticeship: International perspectives on an evolving model of learning*. London: Routledge, 1–8.

The Guardian (2012) 'University Guide 2013: League table for drama and dance'. Online. www.theguardian.com/education/table/2012/may/22/university-guide-drama-dance (accessed 18 September 2014).

Guildhall School (2013) *Guide for Prospective Students*. London: City University.

Guile, D. (2009) *Questioning the Simplistic Link between Qualifications and Labour Market Entry: New forms of expertise and learning in the creative and cultural sector*. London: Centre for Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies and Societies, Institute of Education.

The Independent (2014) 'More subjects to be ditched in exam shake-up'. News in brief, 4 June, 12.

Jury, L., and Foster, A. (2014) 'Don't let acting becoming [sic] the preserve of rich kids, warns Helen Mirren'. *London Evening Standard*, 17 February. Online. www.standard.co.uk/showbiz/celebrity-news/dont-let-acting-becoming-the-preserve-of-rich-kids-warns-helen-mirren-9133958.html (accessed 18 September 2014).

Lazarus, J. (2012) *Signs of Change: New directions in theatre direction*. Bristol: Intellect.

Leyton Sixth Form College (2014) *Prospectus, 2014–2015*. London: LSC.

LAMDA (London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art) (2009) *The LAMDA Graded Examinations in Performance: Acting*. Online at: www.littlevoices.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/L.A.M.D.A.-Performance-Acting-Examinations-from-Sept-20091.pdf (accessed 26 November 2014).

Luckhurst, M., and Veltman, C. (2001) *On Acting: Interviews with actors*. London: Faber and Faber Ltd.

McGill Peterson, P. (2012) 'A Global Framework: Liberal education in the undergraduate curriculum'. In McGill Peterson, P. (ed.) *Confronting Challenges to the Liberal Arts Curriculum: Perspectives on developing and transitional countries*. Abingdon: Routledge, 1–23.

Meyer-Dinkgräfe, D. (2001) *Approaches to Acting: Past and present*. London: Continuum.

Miles-Brown, J. (2006) *Acting: A drama studio source book*. London: Peter Owen Ltd.

Moore, S. (1974) *The Stanislavski System: The professional training of an actor*. New York: The Viking Press.

Murphy, R. (2013) *Disappearing Fast: The falling income of the UK's self-employed people.* Norfolk: Tax Research LLP, November.

National Drama (2014) 'Welcome to National Drama'. Online. www.nationaldrama.org.uk/ (accessed 2 December 2014).

OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) (2010) 'Meeting labour market needs'. In *Learning for Jobs*, OECD Publishing, 47–73. Online. http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264087460-4-en (accessed 18 September 2014).

Paterson, C., Tyler, C., and Lexmond, J. (2014) *Character and Resilience Manifesto: The all-party parliamentary group on Social Mobility*. London: House of Commons. Online. www.appg-socialmobility.org/ (accessed 18 September 2014).

Pearson, H. (1988) *Beerbohm Tree: His life and laughter*. London: Columbus Books Ltd.

Personnel Today (2008) 'GRADdirect study reveals graduate recruiters want soft skills above academic qualifications'. Online. www.personneltoday.com/hr/graddirect-study-reveals-graduate-recruiters-want-soft-skills-above-academic-qualifications/ (accessed 18 September 2014).

Robinson, K. (1983) 'The status of drama in schools'. In Day, C., and Norman, J.L. (eds) *Issues in Educational Drama*. London: The Falmer Press, 7–23.

Ruthrof, H. (1997) *Semantics and the Body: Meaning from Frege to the postmodern*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press Incorporated.

Skills Commission (2013) *One System, Many Pathways: Forging consensus on 14–19 education and training*. London: Skills Commission.

Spotlight (2014) *Contacts: The essential book of contacts for the entertainment industry*. London: Spotlight.

Stacey, G. (2014) 'Creative subjects do have a place in education'. Ofqual, 11 June. Online. http://ofqual.gov.uk/blog/creative-subjects-place-education/ (accessed 18 September 2014).

Teis, A., and Wilkie, I. (2014) 'The science of getting it … wrong: Comic principles in error-induced learning' *Comedy Studies*, 5 (1), 41–51.

Trueman, P. (2013) 'Drama schools are a waste of money, says National Youth Theatre Director'. *The Guardian*, 24 October. Online. www.theguardian.com/stage/2013/oct/24/drama-schools-waste-of-money-national-youth-theatre (accessed 18 September 2014).

UCAS (2014) Drama providers in England. Online. http://search.ucas.com/search/providers?CountryCode=1&RegionCode=&Lat=&Lng=&Feather=&Vac=1&AvailableIn=2015&Query=drama&ProviderQuery=all&AcpId=&Location=england&SubjectCode= (accessed 18 September 2014).

Unsworth, T. (2012) *Becoming an Actor.* London: Nick Hern Books.

Wash, M. (2007) *54 Tools and Techniques for Business Excellence*. Kemble, Cirencester: Management Books.

Westhead, P., and Wright, M. (2013) *Entrepreneurship: A very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wolf, M., and Kemp, E. (2010) 'Are British actors the best in the world?' *The Observer*, 20 June. Online. www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2010/jun/20/british-actors-broadway-best-in-world (accessed 18 September 2014).