

## **The Benefits of Using Theatre in PSHE**

Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education is an important part of any child or young person's development. It is vital for all students regardless of their background or academic ability and makes a major contribution to schools' statutory responsibilities to promote children and young people's wellbeing. Theatre in Education (TIE) can be a powerful addition to any PSHE programme and provide a relevant, accessible and memorable way to learn about real life issues.

Theatre in Education (TIE) uses performance, drama workshops and traditional teaching methods to educate around PSHE issues. Good quality TIE safely allows students to consider, learn and prepare for issues they may face in their lives. TIE is designed to enable young people to raise questions and discuss sensitive issues that they may otherwise avoid. It can allow them to practise communication, negotiation and decision-making skills; to consider issues relating to self-esteem and peer pressure. In fact for many students these can be the most important lessons of their school careers and provide essential skills and knowledge for later life.

Now given the passionate stand above, you probably won't be surprised to hear that I work in theatre in education. I have been a supporter of Theatre in Education for nearly 40 years. I first experienced TIE as a child and the memories of those lessons have stayed with me long after most have faded. My company Loudmouth Education and Training is based in Birmingham and I was one of the founders of Loudmouth back in 1994. We have since worked with over a quarter of a million children and young people all over the UK and Europe and have helped hundreds of primary and secondary schools to develop their PSHE programmes.

There are many theatre companies who can support your school's PSHE programme ranging from local student groups to those linked with the major national theatres. Each will have their own approach however there are some elements that are worth considering when booking a theatre company so that the PSHE element remains as the focus. I have listed below five top tips to use when choosing a TIE company to help get the maximum benefit for the school.

### **TIP 1 – Use a reputable company**

Sort of an obvious one but this it is really worth checking the history and credentials of any theatre company you are planning to use. Companies should be able to supply references and testimonies so you know you will be buying a full and quality service. It also means that issues such as CRB checks, child protection and safeguarding policies, public liability etc. will be covered and that staff will be trained in classroom management skills so you can feel secure in the fact that you are bringing in a reputable partner organisation into school.

### **TIP 2 – Check what you are going to get for your money**

At the very least the theatre company should provide you with the performance and an interactive workshop. The workshop element should ideally work with a class size group as this part is more like a lesson than a presentation and so the quality of interaction is really important. Most schools don't try to teach Maths to 300 students at a time and PSHE should be the same!

The workshop should be focussed on the learning objectives (which the company should be able to supply easily for you) and use the fictional characters as a way to explore the issues and find subtle ways to include important information. Companies that just offer a performance or only offer a 'drama skills' workshop are unlikely to benefit your PSHE programme.

You should also expect to get pre and post session materials so you can prepare and follow up the drama and workshop. A reputable company can help you to integrate the different elements of the drama, workshop and lesson plans into your PSHE programme. You should also expect companies to signpost to relevant local or national services. This enables students to have access to further appropriate support or information on the issues. Companies may also supply training or presentations for staff and / or parents.

### **TIP 3 – Ask about research and evaluation**

A good TIE company should know their facts, understand the issue and have ensured that the approach works for the age group you want to target.

All of Loudmouth's work is developed through consultation with teachers, students, parents and other relevant professionals as well as focus groups and interviews with people who have been directly affected by the issue we are addressing. I believe that the investment in research is incredibly important as this is what helps to make the work both honest and real and ensure that any information, characters or situations presented accurate.

Ask for copies of recent evaluation reports. It is important to know that the company have a strong track record and so they should have statistical as well as anecdotal data they can provide.

### **TIP 4 – Flexibility**

Theatre companies should be able to adapt the workshop or performance to help meet your needs. This could be in the needs or make up of the group or logistical or financial constraints. Often this may only involve slight tweaks but it could mean offering different formats of the work to find a way that works for you.

Good TIE companies will offer a range of formats or variations for schools without compromising on the quality and should also offer slightly different versions to suit special schools, catholic schools or Pupil Referral Units. A good, experienced TIE company should be able to provide a flexible approach to the delivery that helps you to make the most of the visit and the addition to you PSHE programme.

### **TIP 5 – Remember that there will be a cost! (But it is an investment)**

Theatre in PSHE provides some great benefits but there will be some financial cost to the school. The last few years have been hard for theatre in education companies and many have closed down. Traditionally Primary Care Trusts or Local Authorities have borne most of the cost however increasingly money for health education has been cut or the money given directly to schools. Theatre companies do need to charge for the service they provide and this does mean that to get the benefits for the students there will need to be some investment from the school. Some companies offer discount periods or for larger secondary schools can deliver programmes from around £6 per student. If there is any funding still around then grab it quickly as it may be your last chance to get support in funding TIE work.

**Loudmouth do currently have some funding to work with Dudley primary and secondary schools to drastically reduce the costs for this academic year. If you would like to know more about accessing this funding from Loudmouth or as a governor would like to come and see how one of our TIE programmes work then call us on 0121 4464880 or have a look at our website at [www.loudmouth.co.uk](http://www.loudmouth.co.uk).**

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