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ANTIDOTE



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Editor: Dr John Nicholas Saunders
Associate Editor: Dr Danielle Hradsky
Copy-editing: Pauline Cain, Nicole Dalby,
Dr Tracey Sanders, Catherine Saunders, and
Marion Welsh
Design and Layout: Lead Based Ink

To subscribe to Drama Australia publications

Drama Australia Administrator
PO Box 1205, Milton, QLD 4064. AUSTRALIA
Ph: +61 7 3009 0664
email: admin@dramaaustralia.org.au
web: www.dramaaustralia.org.au

Want to become a member of Drama Australia?

Contact State and Territory Drama Associations
for membership information:

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www.dramansw.org.au

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admin@dramaqueensland.org.au
www.dramaqueensland.org.au

Drama South Australia
dramasouthaustralia@gmail.com
<https://dramasa.org>

Drama Tasmania
admin@dramaaustralia.org.au
www.dramatas.org.au

Drama Territory
admin@dramaaustralia.org.au
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ANTIⁱDOTE: Drama as a remedy for challenging times

ADEM 2023

ADEM's 2023 theme of ANTiⁱDOTE echoes the 2023 Drama Australia National Conference. ANTiⁱDOTE, as a conference and as a themed edition of ADEM, aims to open space for sharing innovative drama practice and research that acts as a creative remedy for contemporary challenges.

Within our conference and publication, we hope that considering drama as an antidote can help us to:

- explore how drama education crafts hope, remedies and collective insights into challenges of living in times of crisis, inequity and change.
- celebrate the radical creative praxis that underpins drama education.
- examine new directions and effective methods that meet the challenges we face in our pasts, presents and possible futures.
- hold space for each other, our students and our communities, to tell and stage stories that matter.

The contributors to this edition of ADEM ask questions like: How does drama activate transformative (he)artful experiences that are vital to helping us live and learn on a damaged planet? How do we build creative agency, compassion and critical understanding? In what ways does our work strengthen the capacities and ethical imaginations of the people we work with and for? These articles show how drama education can connect and empower students, counteract racism and colonisation, and provide hope and inspiration in uncertain times.

This edition opens with the inaugural Dr Oliver Fiala Memorial Lecture, delivered by Robert Love AM at the ANTiⁱDOTE conference. Robert, a former student of Dr Fiala who has had an extraordinary life himself in professional theatre and drama education, has kindly shared his address paying tribute to Dr Fiala. Dr Fiala's life as an actor in war-torn Czechoslovakia and later as a refugee and drama education leader in Italy, Germany, and Australia speaks to the tremendous power of drama as an antidote to the most challenging of times. Renee Adele Anton then offers a wonderful exploration of how playbuilding can support imagination, connection, restoration, and empowerment in primary classrooms. Rachael Jacobs takes a powerful deep dive into The Arts as an antidote to racism. Helen Sandercoe invites teachers to revive political theatre in their classrooms through Agit Prop. Collaboration is central to drama practice, and Katy Walsh shares her 'recipe' for successful collaboration in devising processes. Natasha Beaumont offers practical tips for using videomaking to unleash drama students' creativity

and sense of purpose. Mathew Clausen takes readers from concept to performance, exploring cognitive and creative demands on students who are writing, directing and staging their own ideas. From across the seas in Aotearoa New Zealand, Annette Thomson and Kimberley Fridd share stories of hope, inspiration and working together in drama communities. Drawing on their experiences working with older adults in Greece, Elena Viseri and Niki Nikonanou invite drama educators to re-imagine cultural heritage through drama. Matthew Stewart argues that Forum Theatre should be considered as the ultimate antidote for these times. We finish with Bina Bhattacharya's thoughtful insights into decolonising arts practices, and invite our readers to take on Bina's challenge of moving away from the Eurocentric hierarchy within our subject.

In the second section of ADEM, we present the State and Territory Associations' Year Reflections for 2023. These reports reflect the extraordinary work carried out by our state and territory member associations as they serve drama teachers across Australia. Amidst diminishing subject numbers and changing curriculums, these reports share wonderful recounts of how each association is being an antidote for their communities.

We extend a heartfelt appreciation to all our authors for their valuable contributions. Your willingness to share your thoughts and perspectives in writing for ADEM significantly enriches the professional discourse. We deeply value your input.

We would also like to offer an enthusiastic welcome to any new writers who would like to contribute to future editions of ADEM. The ADEM editors are committed to providing a supportive editorial journey and are eager to engage with your ideas, assisting you in refining and preparing them for publication. Keep an eye out for the upcoming call for contributions for next year's edition of ADEM.

We also acknowledge the copy editors who supported this edition going to publication. Pauline Cain, Nicole Dalby, Tracey Sanders, Catherine Saunders, and Marion Welsh, thank you for giving so freely of your time to support ADEM and Drama Australia.

We hope you enjoy this edition of ADEM as much as we have enjoyed preparing it for you.

Dr John Nicholas Saunders
Editor

Dr Danielle Hradsky
Associate Editor

Articles

Dr Oliver Fiala: A Man of the Theatre and Drama in Education Pioneer

Robert Love AM

Originally an address given as the inaugural Dr Oliver Fiala Memorial Lecture
Drama Australia – “Antidote” National Conference – Newcastle
Friday 2nd June 2023

I acknowledge the First Nation peoples of Australia and pay respect to elders, past, present and those yet to come. I thank them for their culture and care of country and acknowledge First Nations storytelling through dance, music and the arts.

It was a great honour and privilege to be invited by Drama Australia to deliver the Inaugural ‘Dr Oliver Fiala Memorial Lecture’ at the Antidote Conference in June 2023. Oliver would have enthusiastically embraced its theme, ‘Drama as Antidote’ – how drama in education through story, creativity and connection can “craft hope, remedy and collective insight to relieve, prevent and counteract the challenges of living in times of unprecedented crisis, inequity and change” (Antidote Program).

Many current teachers and theatre practitioners may not know of Oliver Fiala. His educational and artistic influence was keenly felt in NSW, nationally and internationally for over thirty years from the 1950s. He led a long and remarkable life firstly in what was then Czechoslovakia, and subsequently in Australia where his warm and generous connections to others, his intelligence, adventurous and fearless personality, his creativity, imagination, courage, good will and his lively effervescence were affirming antidotes to the tumultuous and often harsh times of his early Czechoslovakian upbringing and to the challenges of his new life as an immigrant to Australia.

He fled his beloved homeland in 1948 following the turbulent years between the world wars, the Nazi terror of Adolf Hitler and the subsequent rise of the Communist Party and the creeping and dominant influence of Russia. After a year in various refugee camps in Germany and Italy,



Dr Oliver Fiala

Oliver set sail for a new life in Australia where his optimism, hard work and dedication to the development of theatre in Sydney and drama in schools would recalibrate the shattering and formative events of his early years.

Oliver's early years growing up are captured in his book *Oliver's Story – a personal account of growing up in a faraway country 1923-1948*. Self-published in 2014, it is both a forensic history of the times and a fascinating family story. It fulfilled a promise to his mother Františka that he would write her story and that of his growing up in a faraway country, Czechoslovakia. Oliver grew up in the Bohemian Moravian highlands, the southern areas of what is now the Czech Republic, which had become previously a short-lived democratic republic in 1918 at the end of the war with Germany and upon the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Economically successful and culturally advanced, post WW1 life in Czechoslovakia was relatively good, although the multi-ethnic and religious makeup of the population contained a simmering and underlying societal and political tension.

Today it seems much is unchanged in Europe. Russia still imposes itself on a free democratic Ukraine. Lives are upturned, people die, Putin oppresses and threatens annihilation while a previous actor/comedian turned President, Volodymyr Zelensky, leads his people on the way back to a free and restored country. And during this war, like for so many before, the restorative and healing capacity of performance and the arts plays its critical part in galvanizing and comforting a population. Oliver would have followed all this with an intense personal interest and concern.

Oliver's mother Františka attested she met his father Hynek at a local Kino (cinema) where audiences could leave behind the realities of the outside world while being transported to a world of melodrama, love, adventure, wealth, foreign places and optimistic dreams. His father Hynek, initially a baker by trade, was conscripted at the beginning of WW1. He remained in the military his whole life working in various administrative roles while simultaneously pursuing his talents as an actor and musician. Although his father was a strict disciplinarian and his mother sometimes emotionally distanced, Oliver and his brother were loved by both parents who introduced them to puppet shows, musical cabarets, the cinema and theatre. His father played the mandolin and Oliver and his brother learned to play the violin. They spoke Czech, German and some French.

Each year the family celebrated the Christmas season in December. One of the highlights of the celebrations was the traditional visit of St Nicolas (a European Father Christmas dressed in bishop's robes). It was a dramatic and often scary event for the young Fiala children, often bringing them to tears. By the age of six Oliver's suspension of disbelief in this traditional story was wavering, but from Oliver's following account, you will see how engaging and dramatic these annual visits by St Nicolas were:

“Behind them, or on the left hand side of St Nicholas was a Devil, dressed in black outfit (usually a chimney sweep’s uniform) with horns, blackened face long red tongue ... incorporated into a paper mâché masque... carrying on his back a big wickerwork basket, big enough to carry a couple of children ‘to hell’ and, attached to his big belt was a bag of potatoes and pieces of coal. These he carried to be given to ‘bad’ children instead of presents.... The Devil was unruly, jumped around continuously and screeched and shouted a lot. Even before the procession entered, the noise in the corridor was very loud, and the children absolutely terrified, dropped to their knees.....”

Performance eliciting a deeply felt emotional response was already being embedded in Oliver’s psyche. While robust, extrovert, noisy, self-confident and talkative as a child, Oliver also inhabited a private and reflective domain where he regularly confided his fears with an imaginary friend he had created.

His father regularly performed in puppet plays as part of his military responsibilities, so it was unsurprising that Oliver received a set of puppets one Christmas followed the next year with a gift of a full puppet theatre. These early family theatre experiences set the scene and the foundation for Oliver’s first steps at professional acting in his twenties.

From 1939 to 1945 normal life was disrupted in Czechoslovakia. Germany occupied its new Protectorate and a period of harsh oppression commenced as war broke out. Many leading Czech patriots, army officers, public figures, intellectuals, socialists, artists and Jewish citizens began to disappear into concentration camps. His mother took risks to support Jewish and military friends and cleverly bartered goods purchased before the invasion in exchange for the necessities of life. During the German occupation, Oliver continued his education (now only in German) in very difficult circumstances. In his book he remembers fondly several of his teachers who showed him warm encouragement in the classroom, eventually reconnecting and regularly corresponding with them 50 years later from Australia. For Oliver, teacher-mentors were the key to a young person’s future curiosity and enquiry.

During the war, Oliver’s romantic relationships began to blossom. He wrote poetry – joining a literary circle of young people. A circle member’s father was the Principal of the Dramatic Section at the Conservatorium of Music and Dramatic Arts, which had been closed at that time by the Germans. Oliver was invited to audition at the Professor’s home. He gave Oliver two monologues to learn by heart and he was then to come back a week later. With little knowledge of Shakespeare at this point, one of Oliver’s pieces was the “To be or not to be” soliloquy from *Hamlet*. Oliver, who had struggled with many depressive moods may have found an affinity with the tragedy of another young man’s existential despair – perhaps illustrating how a character in a play can help make sense of personal circumstances. The Professor considered Oliver had natural talent and indicated he would tutor him without payment until the Conservatorium reopened.

The liberation by the Russians in 1945 was a mixed blessing for Oliver as he experienced many chaotic, dangerous, life-threatening moments on the streets as the Germans departed and the liberating Russians arrived. It quickly became evident that the power of government would now pass into the hands of Moscow trained members of the Communist Party.

Although offered a full-time job in the taxation office, Oliver decided that a career as a full-time actor was preferable. Graduating from the Conservatorium of Music and Dramatic Arts in 1947, he was recruited by a professional theatre, initially appearing in smaller parts. In a short time, he was cast in his first major role in K Capek's *Mother* which successfully toured to Vienna. He acted in many more productions including regular appearances on Saturday and Sunday afternoons in a Children's Theatre.

Oliver soon came under increasing pressure at the theatre to join the Communist Party as there was a fervent belief amongst many of his colleagues that bourgeois theatre needed to be replaced by a political theatre for the proletariat. At the Congress of Theatre Workers, the Minister of Education and Culture promised to raise the social and professional standing of theatre employees in exchange for their absolute support and collaboration with the new Communist regime. The die was set! Oliver was the odd man out. Forsaking his own principled beliefs by joining the Party was impossible. As the persecution of many prominent people increased, Oliver decided he would have to leave, not only his employment at the theatre but also his country. He did so in a dramatic and dangerous escape through forested countryside and a tense almost failed border crossing – seemingly material for an action film or TV series, but in fact a very dangerous reality.

As a refugee in Germany and then Italy, Oliver became seriously concerned about the younger people residing in the camps. In Germany, he established educational activities that included tuition in various languages and lectures in sociology and theatre arts. He believed that the mushrooming of cultural and educational activities would enrich the quality of youthful lives.

In the camp in Italy he established a kindergarten for about fifteen children of several nationalities aged between 5 to 7 years. Communication was in a mixture of Czech and German, basic Italian and a smattering of Serbian, Polish and Russian. Activities consisted of playing



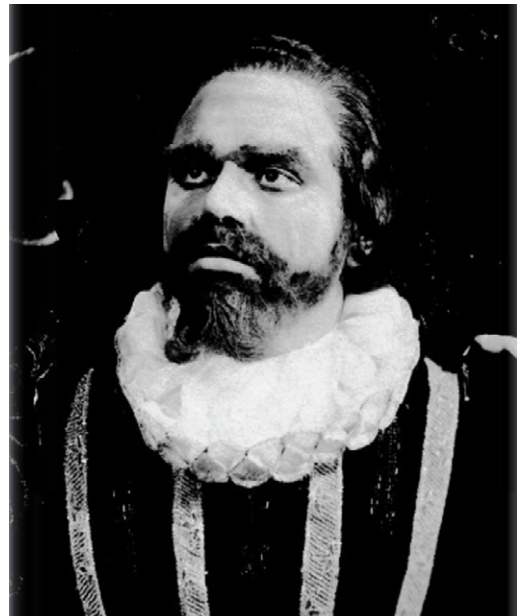
Oliver Fiala as 'King Zigmund' in his Conservatorium (Brno, Czechoslovakia) graduation play 'Jan Hus' by Josef Kajetán Tyl.

games, physical exercises and telling stories, accompanied by drawing, painting, singing and miming. A New Year celebration included a Czech choir, a jazz group, Russian folksongs and dances. With the new experience of freedom in the refugee camps, there was also regular political and moral debate with disunity on most issues, given the provincial thinking of the majority and the many ethnicities represented. But at least the argument could now be had in these enclaves without fear of repression. At the time Oliver wrote prophetically in his diary: "A new war about ethnicity will completely fragment Europe. Europe can be saved only by becoming an economic and military union composed of multi-ethnic groups of various sizes on the principle of equity. Perhaps something on the USA model but adapted to its particular (European) conditions". Through his poetry he also explored how (in his words): "Perhaps from

the rubble of perished civilizations marked by technological, racial, ethnic and religious dissensions there could evolve a global synergy of cooperation, tolerance and equity among all peoples who shared planet earth." He believed the realization of that dream would begin with new generations learning to live in harmony and with compassion. Oliver idealistically believed this dream was achievable and perhaps in Australia as a future home.

Oliver's application to emigrate was first refused by an Australian official in Italy as he had cited his background as an actor. Pivoting, he rapidly gained a 'tractor license'. When this was presented, the necessary permission was eventually granted. As his father had said to Oliver many years before with what had become a family saying: "Be glad to be glad." And Oliver was glad as his new life in a far-away southern hemisphere loomed.

Arriving in Australia in August 1949, he was welcomed to a migrant camp near Bathurst, working initially as a laborer, including a period as a railway fireman while at the same time directing plays for the Bathurst Society of Music and Arts. In 1954, after his academic qualifications were recognised, he was awarded a scholarship to Sydney University. He graduated BA (1958), Dip. Ed (1959), M.Ed (1965). Using his past Czech theatre background and his Australian qualifications and experience to enhance his teaching, he was soon recognised for promoting drama as an educational tool while teaching at Port Hacking High School in Sydney. In 1962 he was appointed a lecturer at Bathurst Teachers' College where he taught Drama in Education and directed plays including *Tiger at the Gates*, *Green Pastures*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Shakes versus Shav* and *Under Milk Wood*.



Oliver Fiala in the principal role of 'Rudolf II' in Emmanuel Bozděch's tragedy 'Dobroduzi' (The Adventurers) – his last role before escape from Czechoslovakia in 1948.

In 1965 after receiving a Fulbright travel grant, and later a Fellowship, he completed a PhD in Communication and Theatre Pedagogy at the University of Colorado in Boulder, USA. Following his return from the University of Colorado, he was appointed to Sydney Teachers' College and subsequently to the School of Drama at the University of New South Wales.

I first met Oliver Fiala (or Dr Fiala as I knew him then) in 1970 when I enrolled at the University of NSW to undertake a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in drama. Theatre played an important part in my secondary schooling in Brisbane. Studying drama at university was inevitable. The staff at the Drama Department were a unique group of extraordinary people of diverse backgrounds and extensive theatre expertise with Professor Robert Quentin heading up the department. In a galaxy of academic stars that included Philip Parsons, Jean Wilhelm, Victor Emeljanov, John Golder, Marlise Thiersh and Margaret Williams, Oliver stood out immediately – energetic, passionate and at times wonderfully eccentric. Always with a twinkle in his eyes and a sparkle in his demeanor, he focused all his attention on you and communicated directly and passionately. He seemed to perform his lectures with the focus and commitment of an actor, making eye contact with everyone in his audience of students. On one occasion he stood in for another lecturer to introduce Japanese Theatre. No dry, aloof academic delivery for Oliver. He embodied a Japanese actor, took the posture of one, and with his strong Czech accent, delivered snippets of Kabuki or Noh performance. Kabuki and Noh are known for their stylised physical presentation. Even in day-to-day conversation, Oliver often adopted a Kabuki-like style of heightened vocalization and movement to press a point or to attract attention. He had always been extroverted and exuberant from childhood and, in adulthood, the child was always lurking ready to surprise.

Oliver introduced us to the political ambition of European theatre. The plays we read were informed by Oliver's commentary, drawing on his personal experience and knowledge of the decline of democracy and the rise of censorship as Communism spread through many parts of Europe. The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, crushing a brief period of liberalization known as the Prague Spring, had occurred only a few years before and Australia was already grappling with Vietnam and its response to the perceived communist threat in Asia. In November 1989, the Czech Velvet Revolution caused the non-violent transition of power from the Communist Party to an elected parliament. Vaclav Havel, the celebrated playwright, intellectual and a hero of Oliver's, was elected President of the Czech Republic.

Oliver did return to visit the land of his birth following its return to democracy. Following an emotional crossing at the border he visited the then Director of the Theatre he had worked in upon his graduation 43 years earlier. Many years had passed but Oliver's Czech heritage burned brightly once more.

During the heady and turbulent 1970s, I knew something of Oliver's theatre activity in Sydney with his direction of Capek's *The Insect Play* at the Independent Theatre, *Professor Tarrane* at

the Old Tote, his performance *In the matter of J Robert Oppenheimer* at the Ensemble and his production as director of Brecht's *Herr Puntila and His Man Matti* at the New Theatre. New to Sydney audiences, these plays conveyed ideas and concepts and contemporary theatre styles from worlds far from Australia. Oliver employed new and inventive scenic effects in his productions using patterned light designs produced by classroom overhead projectors. All this well before digital projection and computerised lighting boards.

Oliver introduced me to the work of Richard Courtney, Gavin Bolton and most significantly Dorothy Heathcote from Yorkshire who, like Oliver, pioneered educational drama in the classroom. Oliver and Dorothy were kindred spirits, both believing that drama could be a powerful medium for learning across the curriculum. Oliver was instrumental in Dorothy visiting Australia. During her time in Sydney teachers were given access to advanced drama methods and role play. By assuming identity cloaked in "the mantle of expert", imagined worlds and situations could be explored in the safety of fiction and metaphor. Students were at the centre of the activity navigating challenging scenarios, partly pre-devised, partly improvised, while exploring the responsibility that comes with leadership and decision making.

At a workshop I attended at Sydney Teachers College, Oliver in the role of Othello (fully costumed and in makeup) took questions from teachers at an imagined press conference as to why he had murdered Desdemona. The questions were considered and answered with Oliver's typical intense physicality and focus, providing teachers with unexpected and improvised insights into the jealousy and suspicion that motivated the Moor.

Over his life Oliver retained an active interest in the careers of his students. I was fortunate to be one of those. My work in schools and with young people at the Australian Theatre for Young People, and then at the theatre-in-education company Toe Truck Theatre, were inevitably influenced and shaped by Oliver's teachings in educational drama. I spent many weeks running residential teacher in-service workshops made possible by the Whitlam government and its Schools Commission initiatives. These workshops introduced aspiring teachers to role play, improvisation and theatre games first taught to me as an undergraduate at UNSW. Teachers collected many practical classroom tools, but equally gained the personal self-confidence to imaginatively create for themselves. A sense of purpose and presence was manifest.

In 1975 Oliver was elected the inaugural President of the NSW Educational Drama Association (the EDA as it was known at the time) and later was made a life member. He was also involved in the foundation of the National Association of Drama in Education.

This was a time when there was an increasing awareness of the potential benefits of drama were it to be eventually recognised in the curriculum. The committee (with drama pioneers such as Ray Goodlass, Pam and Keith Heckenberg, Carol Stannard, Peter Gough, Lorraine Phelan and Kerry McRae) often met for long nights of fervent and passionate discussion and debate about the role of arts in education and the steps to be taken to accredit drama

as an HSC subject. In low-lit lounge rooms and kitchens (some with fashionable lava lights and always with plentiful supplies of red wine) there was a sense that we were all making a difference, breaking new ground as educational visionaries and that our generation and the next generation would be the beneficiaries. The Association's publication "DO IT" let teachers and interested persons know the state of play of drama in NSW and informed members of available workshops and in-service training.

Many dedicated educators and artists over the succeeding decades have continued to advocate and progress the case for theatre and drama in schools. Drama is now valued in the arts curriculum since those very early days when we experimented and often fumbled with new ideas and techniques. Today the making, performance and appreciation of drama are well embedded in curricula and in school classroom activity. Always prescient and with his eye on the prize it is worth quoting from Oliver's third and final President's Report at the EDA's 1977 AGM:

"A great deal too will depend on the outcome of the present educational controversy about literacy, numeracy, back to basic, accountability etc. The weather ahead does not augur well for unconsolidated areas like educational drama. It doesn't augur well because of the educational climate of crisis, with its tendency to swing the pendulum away from 'progressive' and experimental practices to the study of restricted subject areas (and the time might yet come we will be looking back at the late sixties and early seventies as the 'Golden Age' of drama experimentation). Secondly, it does not augur well because of lack of training, lack of professionalism and lack of expertise in our own ranks. There are very few people who are willing, qualified and able to contribute meaningfully to the cause of Drama in each state. These few must be able to speak out through the state and national publications and at meetings and conferences and keep the fires going until such time when adequately trained teachers in Drama and Theatre enter the service in greater numbers."



Annie Byron and Robert Love with Oliver Fiala (left), both former students of Oliver's, Riverside Theatres 2013.

During the time I was Director of Riverside Theatres, Oliver and his wife Heather travelled from Bowral to attend a performance in Parramatta in 2013 to see and support another of his past students, Annie Byron, acting in her own newly written play *RU4Me*. Oliver, now well into his eighties, came bowling into the theatre, ever enthusiastic, ever curious and full of life. You sensed he had run all the way from Bowral to Parramatta eager to enter a darkened, sacred theatre, to distil the underlying truth from the story unfolding. And to see a past student shine as actor.

Oliver wrote several books and many professional articles, and lectured at universities in Australia, the UK and the USA. He acted in and produced plays at Sydney, Macquarie and Newcastle Universities. He helped to establish the first Youth Community Theatre at Port Hacking High School and later the NSW Theatre of the Deaf. From 1968 he took an active part in the Czechoslovak community in Sydney and was a founding member and later President of the Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences in Sydney.

Oliver lived his retirement years in the NSW Southern Highlands where for most of that time he ran his small farm. He died in 2018 at age 95.

Oliver's life achievements were many and diverse. In the arts he was an actor, a director, an educator, a visual artist, a poet, a writer and a musician (still playing viola in his local community orchestra till the week before he died.)

Drama in the classroom and performance in schools and theatres remain today opportunities to be embraced, celebrated, supported and promoted. We know that they produce trust, greater understanding, self-discovery and well-being in an increasingly changing, challenging and unpredictable world.

Oliver has been seen as an 'enabler' of others to spread the potency of drama and theatre. He was his own person with a unique, independent voice that remained clear and strong throughout his life, always there to critique, advise and encourage.

Oliver's legacy lives on in schools, theatres and in the many people he taught and worked with over the years. We all could profitably emulate his twinkle, his sparkle, his effervescence, his galvanizing energy, his dedication and commitment and the caring generosity that defined him.

In a life after death, I am sure Oliver will be there on the heavenly stage directing and encouraging an angel or two, or perhaps organizing full productions with his inimitable style and enthusiasm.

I salute Oliver Fiala.

About the author

Robert Love AM graduated with a Bachelor of Arts from the University of NSW. He first worked professionally at the Old Tote and Australian Theatre for Young People. He founded Toe Truck Theatre, administered the Seymour Group and lectured at James Cook University.

Senior management/leadership roles include the Seymour Centre, the New Nimrod Theatre, State Theatre Company of SA, Sydney Theatre Company and Fox Studios. He joined Riverside Theatres Parramatta as Director in late 2000 adding the National Theatre of Parramatta in 2015. In August 2021 after 20 years at Riverside he stepped down to undertake projects through Love Stages continuing to promote the importance of performance and education in our community.

Reference

Fiala, O. *Oliver's Story – A personal account of growing up in 'a faraway country' 1923-1948.*
ISBN 978-0-9925323-0-7

Playbuilding: *To imagine, connect, restore and empower...*

Renee Adele Anton

From the Drama Australia National Conference 2023 *ANTIDOTE*

Why do we playbuild?

Playbuilding is not just play! What better way to engage your students than to invite them into the process of creation? The Playbuilding (method) of devising work provides an open platform for student contributions at the same time as giving them the supportive scaffolds they need to build a drama piece that has meaning, and depth.

Engaging students in the playbuilding process teaches them powerful skills in decision-making and compromise. It allows them to feel a sense of agency in the world both as individuals and as a whole group working together. Experimenting with this drama form opens up opportunities for student expression in a range of ways, allowing for different styles of thinking, learning, and resolving conflict. The construct of a playbuilt drama piece facilitates big-picture thinking whilst aligning smaller parts into a clear whole, and it is impossible to move forward without teamwork. These aspects make Playbuilding the perfect educational antidote for our times.

Playbuilding around a theme

At this year's Drama Australia National Conference, Antidote, at the University of Newcastle in a workshop designed for Primary teachers, we explored Playbuilding techniques using a central theme. We looked at the theme of togetherness, examining simple representations of societies' ideas and expectations at a child's level. We considered paths to problem solving and the impact of our choices, small and big. Together we explored how being united makes us powerful while at the same time seeing the importance of listening to each and every person's thoughts and point of view. We also considered ideas about togetherness and being apart that have grown from our recent collective experiences. We engaged in various methods of creating a non-scripted drama piece as outlined below and invite you to use these ideas with your own students as an extended workshop or to support your own professional learning.

Warm up

Any good drama lesson involves warm up activities but they can be particularly valuable when playbuilding, since we are asking students to work together in new and different ways as well as engaging in a lot of improvisation. We started with an area walk using clap sticks to indicate when to walk and freeze, responding to changes in pace and simple instructions. Following directly on from this, participants clumped into various shapes with those around them and created tableaux of the Mona Lisa, a bowl of spaghetti, a comfortable chair and the very interesting Nuspase building in which our conference took place.

Drama square

As a vocal warm up a 'drama square' was created and participants on each side of the square were asked to stand and perform a single line in unison, such as:

- You didn't
- Well, I didn't see that coming!
- I hope you learnt your lesson!
- (gasp/ sigh)
- Please can I have a turn?
- I would never do such a thing
- You're my best friend

This is a great warm up for voices but the idea can be extended in various ways for example:

- All four sides get the same line but a different emotion
- Each side has to get louder and softer than the last
- 2 sides perform for each other, then swap words or tone of voice
- Go around the square forwards and backwards with a different line, creating a dialogue
- Provide 2 minutes preparation time
- Ask each person in your row to present differently
- Change or add words
- Add facial expression
- Add body language
- Create your own phrase
- Join together with another side / group
- Create an entire sequence

Brainstorm

The theme of ‘togetherness’ was introduced and participants contributed their personal thoughts around what the word meant to them. After some discussion we shared key words and came up with a word cloud image encompassing the main ideas in the theme. I posed the question, “Could togetherness mean different things to different people?” I wanted us as teachers to keep in mind that with a theme like this one, some students may feel differently. They may be overwhelmed or even threatened by the idea of being around lots of people. It may even cause them to feel alone. We realised that there were many layers of meaning and juxtaposition for us ‘post-covid’ adults to consider. What may be endless delight for some, might be really hard work for others! We wanted to consider these contrasting ideas in our process.

Small group scenes

For our first set of small segments or scenes, groups were formed and provided with a stimulus:

1. A basketball
2. Matching hats
3. Mixed scarves
4. Toy ukulele
5. Hand held mirror
6. Book of fairy tales

There was some discussion around sports, families, friendships and team environments which children could relate to. Participants then created a short scene using mime, movement or spoken word, incorporating their chosen prop and relating to the overall theme of togetherness. They tried to show a beginning, middle and end. We viewed, shared and unpacked the ideas presented. Participants were able to provide one another with feedback and ask questions. We discussed the ways in which a change in level or direction could alter meaning. Interestingly, many of these groups contained both ideas of togetherness and being alone or shut out. Most groups found room to explore contrast and they very organically brought this into their storytelling.

The mirror was an effective prop and showed connection with oneself as well as the audience. The set of hats was a great stimulus that allowed the group to express a search for belonging, conformity and non-conformity as well as a sense of the absurd, ironically silhouetted in photographs from the day. The group with the scarves intertwined them in a gentle and moving piece.



Participants contributed their ideas to a Wordcloud, created on wordclouds.com (online by Zygomatic).

Wordscape

In this activity participants assembled in a long shape from one side of the performance space to the other and then spontaneously called out a single word either from the original brainstorm or something that had come to mind during the workshop. We rehearsed this idea to form a sort of Mexican wave of words. After a few practices with a little discussion and direction we developed the vocal intonation, emotion, projection and general expression of the wordscape which built up and changed rhythm as it moved across the ensemble group. It was important to use a range of words including the uncomfortable ones. We also experimented with standing, sitting and some embodiment of the words themselves.

Music as stimulus

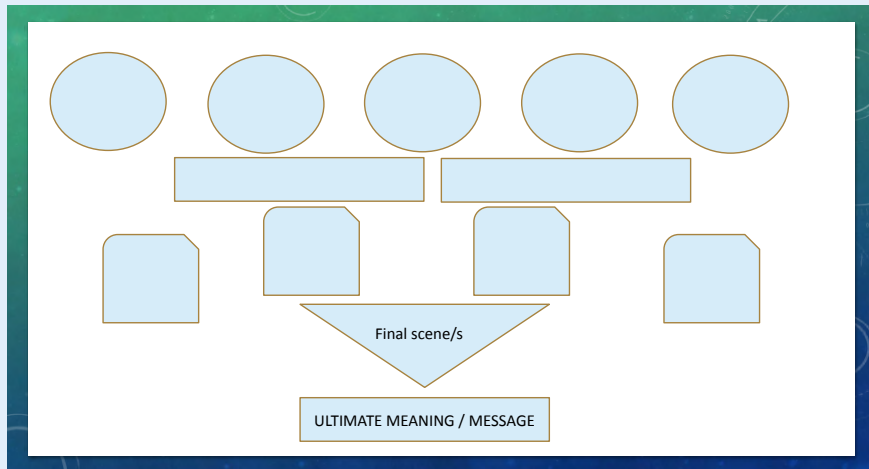
With the class divided into two halves, each of these larger groups was now to incorporate one large fabric prop into a movement piece which would be performed to two completely different pieces of music. Again, the groups had to express some idea of togetherness (or its opposite) within their piece. The results of this activity were quite striking and participants showed ensemble skills, offering and accepting ideas, listening and collaboration. They had a short amount of planning time and worked quickly. After performing twice, all were in agreement that each piece of music suited one group better than the other and they selected their accompaniment.

Mind mapping and putting it all together

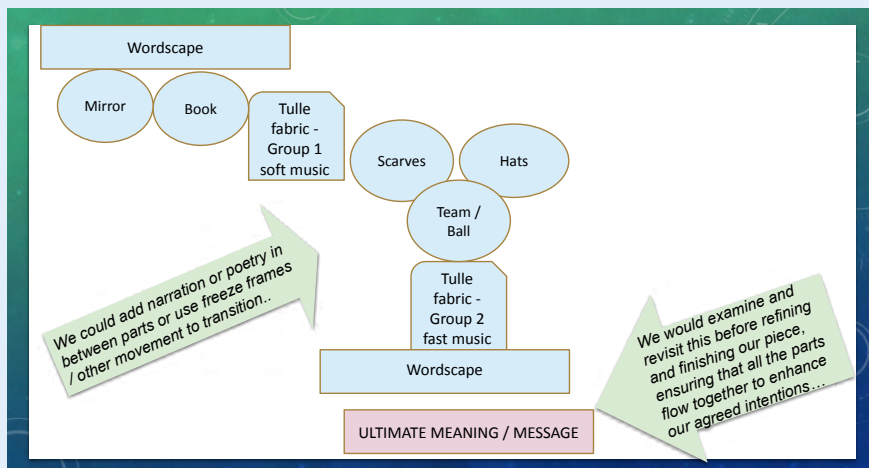
After completing all of these activities we had the building blocks of a drama piece. I proposed to the workshop group that we could at any point introduce a mind map. This could be something that we worked on as a class throughout a longer process lasting up to a term, regularly checking in, or it could be a helpful tool in the final stages of organising the piece. Some playbuilt items may follow a narrative structure or provide unfolding detail around a theme with a logical sequence. Others, like ours in this instance, could be performed in various combinations. We could order and reorder segments continually to change and enhance meaning, all based on our agreed intentions as a group. The mind map also serves as a visual reference and can be displayed throughout the process. I showed the teachers a template I developed with moving parts – a blank flowchart of sorts. After the workshop, I reworked the mind map to fit our final performance piece.

Our goal was to get all the moving parts to fit together in a finished drama piece. Given time I would ask students to dive deep into the shaping of the piece in order that our ultimate message to the audience be delivered. One strategy could be to film the segments, separately or together, and then look at how they flow when watched back. We would also need to consider connecting the parts smoothly with transitions. We could perform the piece in its entirety and

then look back and make further changes. For our togetherness piece, we decided to repeat the wordscape, performing it at the beginning and the end, each time in a different formation.



Blank mind map showing possible pieces of the drama early in the process (created on Microsoft Powerpoint).



Finished mind map with parts arranged to form a representation of our piece at the end of the workshop (created on Microsoft Powerpoint).

Guiding students

Throughout the process of playbuilding with students, I:

- Have some key ideas preplanned but then wait and see where it goes
- Facilitate and guide discussion
- Choose and select ideas to provide balance
- Inject fun and colour, light and shade
- Highlight and utilise elements of drama

- Direct, redirect, arrange and rearrange
- Prompt, prompt again
- Decide when to move on
- Keep within time constraints
- Help bring us to a meaningful conclusion or performance
- Trust! Allowing students the space to invest in their ideas a little can sometimes lead to surprising results. As observed by Ewing and Simons, “sometimes it is the students who contribute most to the learning”! (2004, p. 65)

Reflection

Our experience as a group of passionate like-minded teachers in a supportive and enthusiastic environment seemed very positive to me. We joined together to create something with intention and purpose and felt a sense of togetherness in our workshop and certainly throughout the conference. I believe that with all the choice and possibility involved in playbuilding this could be achieved with any group of students too. As Jennifer Simons said back in 2004, playbuilding is “making up bits of drama” (p.2) that might be put together as a whole play later. You can design the learning experiences to fit your student cohort, community demographic and individual needs. This process, drama, and of course arts itself as a vital learning area could be the antidote for our times, an invaluable tool for engagement and inclusion.



Discussing what togetherness means to us in different ways and how this can play out for students in dynamic improvisation activities.



Small groups scenes using props as stimulus.



Showing connection using a set of mixed scarves and fabric which participants wound together.

In time I would allow my students to extend their thoughts and feelings on the theme and our drama piece with follow up writing, poetry, song, dance, or artwork. Most importantly, I would want to know whether they felt heard, that their ideas had been included and they felt a sense of ownership in the process, satisfied they had expressed themselves meaningfully during the shared experience.

As teachers, a key component of our daily work is in the making of choices that fit gently and lovingly in the moment and quite often in drama it's about going where the story takes us. If we can apply these philosophies both in the classroom and in the outside world, we will go a long way towards providing some resolution to life within a fast-changing landscape on a quickly turning planet.

About the author

Renee Adele Anton has been a Primary arts educator for the past 25 years. She has held roles in Arts Education throughout Public Schools in NSW, in regional offices for the Department of Education, within The Arts Unit, and in curriculum project work for NESA. She has provided teacher mentoring and professional learning in programs such as Primary Play Day, the Create program and Statewide Staffroom. Renee currently teaches Drama at Leichhardt Public School, tutors teachers casually in Creative Arts at Western Sydney University, takes the Year 5 State Drama Ensemble at The Arts Unit and is enrolled in her Master Of Education postgraduate degree to be completed in 2025.

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The Arts as an Antidote to Racism

Rachael Jacobs

Drama educators have always argued that Drama creates empathy and is a site for social justice. But can we do more in the fight against structural and casual racism? The world is currently experiencing a racial justice reckoning where power, representation, colonial legacies, and the insidiousness of white supremacy are being examined. It is no longer enough to not be racist. We must be anti-racist in our teaching and our roles as models for young people. This article argues that the arts, and particularly Drama, can create brave spaces for difficult conversations around racism, as well as create sites of healing and optimism.

Content and trigger warning: this article contains descriptions of discrimination and racism. Reader discretion is advised.

Conversations about racism are challenging, particularly if you have lived experience of racial discrimination. But, the hard work of anti-racist education can't be avoided. Racial justice work has to, by nature, be challenging for all of us.

For those of us in the arts, there are particular challenges associated with racial justice work. One of the reasons is that we have all bought into the rhetoric that the arts are inherently good for the community, a healer of hurts, a site of reconciliation and justice, a creator of empathy, a place for self-expression, and a weapon to fight discrimination. We are all here because we know this to be true, and most likely have seen it in action.

But there's another side to the arts that we rarely talk about. The modern conception of 'the arts' was conceived in a Eurocentric context in the Renaissance (1400-1700 CE), then grew in the Enlightenment era (late 1600s-early 1800s) and beyond. The Renaissance also produced contemporary conceptions of race, including the concept of racial ordering, that was used as the main justification for the colonial project (Herman & Kraehe, 2018). Colonisation and the arts grew together. Colonised countries were plundered for both material goods and artistic inspiration, while the indigenous populations who produced them were slaughtered, enslaved, and despised as lesser beings. Meanwhile, European civilisation was posed as the epitome of human cultural evolution (Herman & Kraehe 2018). These ideas of what the arts are, and what makes an artist, continue to shape the way arts education functions today.

Today in Oceania we stand on Aboriginal lands, on the edge of Asia. While things are changing, our schools largely have a Eurocentric literature and arts curriculum. In our own world of drama and theatre, people of colour are minorities, given stereotypical roles, and with their

art forced into the margins. I speak from my own experience as an Indian-Australian artist. I've written extensively about my own experience as an actor being told to 'go back to SBS', or not being offered roles because people would be confused by my accent. When racial minorities are allowed to participate in the arts, it's usually a performance of our migrant or refugee stories, which can become a strange version of survival porn. And it implies that this is the only story we have. If we manage to break the barrier of the white arts establishment, we're often accused of being diversity hires.

Even after breaking through, our stories and roles in the white establishment are often tokenistic or inauthentic.

In this gentle critique, I cannot ignore the field of research, which still sends teams of white facilitators to work with communities of racial minorities. I see book launches full of white writers and editors, where the only people of colour are those being researched. It's been established in research that even when people of colour or people from the global majority are included in the research team, they are more likely to have their role confined to data collection or roles with less power or prestige. I see entirely white panels discuss their arts projects where the only people of colour are participants, as if we're allowed to participate but not experience any real power. Would we do this in other situations? Fortunately, it has become unthinkable to have a group of cisgendered men doing a panel on women's rights or arts projects with women. But somehow we accept this practice with race. I pause here to add that a similar experience is shared in many other marginalised groups, including people with disabilities, disadvantages, neurodivergence, and we must do better on all these fronts. This is further demonstration that the emancipation of one marginalised group doesn't equate to progress on all fronts.

One of the issues I've raised in research and public conversations is that arts education, and in particular, drama education, is overwhelmingly white, and therefore home to white blindness. While things are changing slowly, this is an area that requires our attention and action. That begins by acknowledging that we as a community don't reflect the language and cultural diversity of the classrooms we stand in front of.



Cultural Diversity in the Teacher Workforce: Why is it Important?

This problem is not confined to the arts. I'm currently in a research team with Dr Rachael Dwyer (University of Sunshine Coast), Prof Daniel X. Harris (RMIT), Jiao Tuxworth (University of Sunshine Coast), Dr Jing Qi (RMIT) and Prof Catherine Manathunga (University of Sunshine Coast) investigating the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity in the teacher workforce in Australia. Australia's population is ethnically, racially and linguistically diverse. In 2021, 29.1% of the population was born overseas, with 7.5 million migrants living in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022). In Australian schools, 21.8% of students speak a language other than English at home (Australian Government, 2022). In contrast, only 17% of teachers in Australian schools were born overseas, with approximately 10% of school teachers speaking a language other than English at home (Australian Government, 2022; Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2021). Sadly, these statistics don't look to be changing over time (McKenzie et al., 2014).

While there are barriers to teachers from diverse backgrounds gaining entry to the teaching profession in Australia, there is a wide acceptance that a diverse teaching workforce has benefits for students and school communities (Gist, 2018; Kohli, 2009; Santoro, 2015). We know that organisations with greater levels of diversity have better performance. Diversifying the workforce has a positive effect on talent recruitment, decision-making processes, customer orientation and employee satisfaction (Hunt et al., 2015). Research has also shown that diversity in the teaching workforce can better serve the learning needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students (Buckskin, 2016; Santoro, 2015). Students are more likely to thrive in the classroom when teachers share their demographic characteristics (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Students perceive schools as more inclusive and welcoming environments when they see teachers who have similar racial and ethnic backgrounds (Boser, 2014). Additionally, the significance of diversifying the teaching workforce for all students cannot be underestimated (Gist, 2018; Howard, 2010). Culturally and linguistically diverse teachers tend to possess greater multicultural awareness compared to their white counterparts, and the higher level of multicultural awareness can lead to a more favourable classroom environment (Cherng & Davis, 2019). Culturally and linguistically diverse educators can be cross-cultural mentors for their 'mainstream' colleagues and students (Santoro, 2015). They are valuable assets to education due to their distinct experiences and their ability to offer students a different worldview.

Despite this, our pilot study has found that teachers from racial minorities feel isolated in schools and experience racism, xenophobia and exclusion. These findings will be reported in academic articles and conference papers to come, but for now, what is important to note is that this is everyone's problem to solve. Teachers of colour and racially marginalised colleagues cannot overcome this problem alone.

The arts as a site of hope and healing

This article is intended to map some pathways towards building greater understanding of anti-racist practice through the arts. The affective and embodied nature of drama make it a particularly effective site for healing and hope. My research finds that teaching students to broaden their worldview and the promotion of tolerance and understanding can happen in many ways. Process dramas, story drama and role play are commonly used as tools to facilitate these transformations. However, these can only go so far. As Ibram X. Kendi argues, it is no longer enough to simply not be racist. Education must be explicitly anti-racist. To educate for anti-racism, we must explicitly name the behaviours we are trying to eradicate and demonstrate strategies that end racism. I created *Deep Harmony*, a 6 week anti-racism program taught through drama and dance which has been piloted in NSW schools. *Deep Harmony* was designed to be taught in the lead-up to Harmony Day (March 21st) which is known overseas as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. The program works with students to ensure Harmony Day is a meaningful event, rather than a celebration without the hard work that needs to precede it.



As drama educators we know the body is a site of knowing and a site of learning. The body stores trauma and it can also be a site for addressing trauma. Through embodying concepts we can unpack and interrogate power relationships, privilege and inequality and create new understandings of the kind of communities we'd like to see. Underpinned by critical race theory (Crenshaw, Peller & Kendall, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 1993), intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2021), post-colonial theory (Spivak, 2009; Gilbert & Tompkins, 1996) and anti-racist education (Kendi, 2022; Dei, 1996), *Deep Harmony* aims to address the causes of racism and find positive pathways forward. The program begins with First Nations justice. Every program includes participation of Elders from the local Land Council, as well as emerging leaders from local communities. The program covers:

- Politics and policies of the past and present
- Migrant and refugee experiences
- Assimilation vs integration

- Media influence and leadership in Australia
- Power and privilege
- Ways to live as an anti-racist and an ally
- Working together to combat racism
- Culture, heritage, and communication through drama and dance

Some argue that these topics are too heavy, particularly for children (*Deep Harmony* can be adapted with age appropriate pedagogies for Years 3 – 12). But we know from research that it's never too early to talk about racism. Researchers have found that ideas about race and even racism can be formed at age 2 or 3 (Dunham et al., 2013; Hirschfeld, 2008; Sullivan et al., 2020). Marcelo & Yates (2019) documented 7 year olds' experience of racial discrimination in research.

Some traditional anti-racism programs can leave participants feeling guilty, confused or upset and while anti-racist work should be challenging, these emotions are not helpful. This is why *Deep Harmony* uses the transformative pedagogies of the arts as a portal through which students walk towards greater understandings of racial justice. Readers of this article would be familiar with the strategies used. We play a range of drama games that explore status, power and privilege. We use freeze frames, proximity exercises and other process drama techniques to unpack the complexity of these power relationships. But it is important that we don't stop with the metaphors; we name white privilege, cultural appropriation and white supremacy. We have deep discussions about all types of racism and how to address them. We practice speaking out, being upstanders, not bystanders. There's an opportunity to ask honest questions and even debate. And at the end of each session, we do something very important.

Dances of hope, healing and joy

I'm an Indian Bollywood dancer and in my life I have used this magical medium to demonstrate positive ways to engage in cultural appreciation. Bollywood is a joyful panacea to the darkness of racism. But rather than acting as a whitewash, we examine issues of colonisation, colourism and cultural appropriation while respectfully learning Bollywood dancing. The students leave each session feeling uplifted, hopeful and more bonded with their community and strong in the face of the challenges of addressing racism.

The students' feedback has been astounding. Here are some comments from students at the conclusion of the program:

I had thought that racism was a bad thing that bad people did. Now I can see that I'm in like a whole system that keeps racism alive. (Age 13)

I really loved the Bollywood dancing, but I also learned to be respectful not just of the dance but of what people went through to do that dance. (Age 10)



Honestly, I thought this was like another ‘don’t be racist’ thing. But when I saw the freeze frames it was the first time I had felt what it might feel like to be an outsider, or be discriminated against or judged because of race. I am now really aware of that all the time. I get that I have privilege and that means I can easily abuse it even when I don’t mean to. (Age 16)

I won’t ask people where they are from anymore. (Age 12)

The dancing made me feel nice at the end. (Age 8)

This was, like, really hard. As a migrant I thought that we were victims not creators of racism. But when we played that racing game, I understood that I still have more power than other people who are, like, not as white privileged. And at times I thought I was better than other people because, remember, like that proximity to power game? I guess I can do better and also work to make my community less racist too. (Age 15)

At one school, at the conclusion of the program, a group of students went to the principal and asked if they could fly the Aboriginal flag in the school. It is clear that the work is challenging. But through hard work we have been able to emerge with something more beautiful, meaningful and sustainable. I argue that these positive changes can’t be achieved without the hard work.

Where to next?

After a successful pilot *Deep Harmony* is currently seeking support to continue from philanthropists, government agencies and other partners. There is also much that can be implemented by all teachers without the need for the full program, and an online resource is being developed in the hope of creating accessible tools for all teachers. There is so much to do but I’m increasingly finding that the most important ingredient is a willingness to try. We are at a turning point in history with regards to racial justice. Through the hard work of many

trailblazers, our communities and our students are demanding better of us every day. Drama and the arts are a critical part of the response. As Maya Angelou (1990) says:

“In today’s climate in our country, which is sickened with the pollution of pollution, riddled with burgeoning racism, rife with growing huddles of the homeless, we need art and we need art in all forms. We need all methods of art to be present, everywhere present, and all the time present.”

Deep Harmony has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts, its arts funding and advisory body.

About the author

Rachael Jacobs lectures in creativity and the arts at Western Sydney University. She is researcher in anti-racism, as well as a community activist, aerial artist, South Asian choreographer and she runs an intercultural dance company. As a community artist, Rachael facilitates projects in community settings, mostly working with migrant and refugee communities.

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It's time for Agit Prop Theatre! Reviving Political Theatre

Helen Sandercoe



Bread and Puppet Theater performs during a protest in New York in June 1982. AP

This article is an enhanced version of a workshop plan presented at Drama Australia's Conference in Newcastle, June, 2023. My recent research into Agit Prop Theatre is inspired by the young people who have recently marched over the issues of climate change. It seems to me that it is time to revive political theatre. In the 1960's and 70's, Agit Prop theatre had its hayday with the Vietnam protests. With so many issues from Climate Change to Black Lives Matter to Protests over Police Violence, the time is right to unpack the Agit Prop's past to see what is relevant to today's issues.

The practical workshop had two parts to it. The first part was a short, historical 'show and tell' of the origins of Agit Prop Theatre, which began in Russia in 1920's with the Blue Blouse Movement and including today's political theatres, such as the long running 'Bread and Puppet Theatre' in the USA and 'Red Ladder' in UK which both began in 1963.

The second part was designed for the group to create a piece of 'Agit Prop Theatre'. A simple structure will be shared and the group will decide on topic for protest for the theatre piece. The structure is suitable for Yr 9/10 Drama class and the work could form a unit of work.

I will also include short descriptions of what happened in the workshop.

Short History of Agit Prop Theatre

What is Agitprop Theatre?

Here is a concise description from Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism, Agitprop Theatre by Alan Filewood.

Now widely used as a catchall term to describe politically combative or oppositional art, "agitprop" originated from the early Soviet conjunction of propaganda (raising awareness of an issue) and agitation (exciting an emotional response to the issue), as theorised by Lenin in *What Is To Be Done* (1902) and institutionalised in the many departments and commissions of Agitation and Propaganda in the USSR and the Comintern after the Russian Revolution. The portmanteau term conveys the terse telegraphic efficiencies of Bolshevik bureaucratic rhetoric. Considered both as a mode of artistic production and a set of formal characteristics, agitprop had an immense impact on modernist cultural practice, particularly in graphic design, visual art, and theater.

In the theater, agitprop developed in Russia and Germany as a mobile form of exhortative revolutionary theater designed for quick outdoor performance. It was adaptive to location, audience, and cast, and suited the sightlines and acoustics of outdoor performance in found spaces. Short phrases, heavy cadence, and repetition allowed performance to project through noisy and unruly audiences. The form achieved widespread popularity in the brief period between the mid-1920s and the coalescence of the Popular Front in 1934, when artistic and political radicalisms aligned in a vision of an artistic practice mobilised by international proletarian modernity; in this, agitprop was theorised as the theatricalization of modernity.

Agit Prop Techniques

The following techniques were sourced from an article, titled '*Techniques of agitprop theatre*' in *Champion Drama*.

1. Mass Recitation

Mass recitation is choral speaking, a theatrical technique that goes right back to the roots of western theatre in Ancient Greece. Agitprop actors would directly address the audience and call for social action. Mass recitation was often used as a morale booster, a call to action or a crowd warm up.

Emphasis could be added by dividing questions and answers between the group and the individual as this extract from *'Theatre – Our Weapon'* shows:

Chorus: Workers of the World Unite!

1st: What have we got to lose?

Chorus: Our chains!

5th: What have we got to win?

Chorus: The whole world!

In order to be effective this type of mass recitation requires variety in vocal delivery and simple but strong stage movements. No special costumes, setting or props are required.

If the questions represent private doubts and worries then the answers from the whole chorus represent strength and unity of the group. In this way mass recitation was a powerful metaphor for the collective power of the group in calling for social action.

2. Agitprop Sketch

This is a short play that could use a variety of techniques in order to get the message across simply and effectively. Don't forget that audiences were often working class people unused to theatre; the locations were varied and sometimes, as on marches and demonstrations, there might be a time constriction. So keeping it simple and clear was vital. Some methods used in agitprop sketches were:

- Stereo types and caricatures – for instance the evil capitalist and the honest worker. Characters were sometimes named after a concept or group of people, for instance 'Capitalism', 'Boss', or 'Farmer'.
- A simple costume worn by each actor (one agitprop group: *The Blue Blouses* even took their name from their costume) was enhanced by the addition of skirts, scarves, hats or masks in order to portray the different characters
- Simple props such as boxes, tables and chairs would serve a *variety* of purposes.
- Performing outdoors and to large public audiences meant that performances had to be larger than life
- Content would be about a social or political issue and call on the audience to take action.

Workshop Outline

Physical and Vocal Warm-Up

1. Follow the Leader

One person leads the group with any movement that travel through the space. As soon as the group have the movement, then change the leader. This is a very quick way to warm-up and work as a group.

2. Vocal Warm-Up

Zen Hoeing (from Frankie Armstrong, Singing and Voice Teacher for Natural Voice)

Using nonsense or gibberish sounds, the leader makes a Call and the rest of the group Repeats the phrase. This happens around a circle as everyone 'Zen Hoes', which has one foot in front, stepping on the spot from one foot to the other and the hands make a large infinity sign. Change feet when tired.

3. Image Making

Using Ten Second Constructions drama game, make in groups very quick, instant images that express some of the following slogans. (This is a list for adult participants. For students, the list may need to adjusted).

- Some well known slogans are, such as 'Male Chauvinist Pig', 'Reds Under the bed', Climate Change Denier', 'NIMBY', (Not In my Back Yard').
- Eat the Rich – A leftist slogan originally traced back to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who is reputed to have said, "When the people shall have nothing more to eat, they will *eat the rich*."
- Drill, baby, drill – slogan used by the U.S. Republican Party to call for increasing domestic oil and gas production.
- For the many, not the few – Jeremy Corbyn's famous slogan for the Labour Party (UK) in the UK 2017.
- It's Time – Used by the Australian Labor Party in 1972; they had been out of government since 1949.
- Keep the Bastards Honest – slogan used by the Australian Democrats since the 1980 Australian federal election.
- Make love, not war – anti-war slogan began during the War in Vietnam.
- Stop the boats – Tony Abbott, during his time as Leader of the Liberal Party.

- Slavery is a social, moral, and political wrong – Used by Abraham Lincoln and the Republican Party during the 1860 presidential election.
- Workers of the world, unite! – one of the most famous rallying cries of the socialist, communist and labor movements.
- Here are a couple of sources for topical, political slogans.
 - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_political_slogans
 - <https://www.dw.com/en/climate-crisis-slogans-with-punch/g-49373576>

4. Practice the Mass Recitation

See above.

5. Brainstorm and Plan the Theatre Piece

The group decide on topic for Agit Prop Theatre.

Brainstorm images, slogans, use of story, montage of short scenes, such as a political version of 'Three Little Pigs'.

Other possibilities are rewriting songs like the 'Saints come marching in', make posters, digital or physical, use of masks, and rewrite Mass Recitation.

6. Performances

Participants perform their pieces.

The four groups chose the topics of 'The Housing Crisis', 'The Effects of AI', 'Lack of Arts Funding' and 'The War in the Ukraine'. The groups used posters, banners, short scenes and slogans. Each represented the chosen theme very powerfully.

Personally, it was fantastic to see this work come to life. Agitprop Theatre definitely has a place now and the future.

About the author

Helen Sandercoe has been a Drama teacher much of her life. She has taught in a diverse range of schools, here in Melbourne and in England. She now teaches Primary and Secondary Pre-Service teachers the art and craft of Drama teaching. For her, there is nothing more exciting than when a whole class is involved in the creative process. She also enjoys very much researching and gaining a deeper understanding of an aspect of the art form of Drama and Performance making.

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Bread and Puppet Theater performs during a protest in New York in June 1982. AP

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Ways to Collaborate – a snapshot!

Katy Walsh

This 'Snapshot' was presented as part of a longer paper at the 2023 Drama Australia Conference – *Antidote* – in which NSW drama teacher, Katy Walsh, explores the art of collaboration as an integral component of theatrical group devising. The following recipe presents the recipe for group-devising that Katy employed in a workshop with a year 11 drama students. Here, the classroom is like the kitchen, complete with chefs, ingredients and directions.

Make your own Theatre Company A Recipe

Ingredients

list of contemporary ensemble-style theatre companies
15 drama students/chefs (or more/less, to taste)
log books
a laboratory (stage/rehearsal space)
a shared group language of collaboration (*secret ingredient*)
an audience

Directions

divide whole class evenly into 3 – or more – groups
introduce list and research ensemble theatre companies (in groups)
establish group ethos, group modus operandi
establish group protocols and collaborative techniques
establish a shared language for collaboration
engage in a group thought-shower and write down your biggest wildest ideas.
create a working process and attach a time-frame
include time for brain-breaks and reflection
establish roles and responsibilities

Company Profiles – The groups construct their own ‘company profile’ based on their research into professional theatre companies. In creating their profiles, they draw upon their own individual and collective skills and interests. Three examples of company profiles are provided to demonstrate how these may be conceived.

Company Profiles

Who are we?

Company A – Our company has an appointed ‘charismatic leader’ – she is our chosen ‘artistic director’, though her role is of a facilitator. All company A members share an ethos of egalitarianism and equal status when it comes to all theatrical decisions. We are all permanent members of the company; however, at times we employ extra cast members to change the dynamic and add a fresh perspective to our work. We are interested in creating new works and employ a dramaturg to work with us as part of the devising team. Our work is script based and we have all contributed to the final script in some way. This is treated as a ‘blueprint’ for performance.

Company B – We are a physical theatre/movement-based ensemble who seek to create innovative and experimental works that reflect our sense of unity and collaborative creativity in our approach to the theatre making process. We are focused on the experiment and exploration of contemporary issues using body and movement as our language throughout our process. Our performances appeal to a broad audience, as we perform across multiple-sites and over longer periods of time (sometimes over the course of a day) in honour of our commitment to exploring performance through immersive and durational events. Previous works have been characterised by the term ‘insta-theatre’ – taking the reference from short bursts of theatre performed in work sites and tram stops, and reflecting current youth fascination with social media platforms – e.g., Instagram and Tik-Tok.

Company C – Having built a strong bond as theatre-makers over the past two years in our drama training with our community youth arts ‘Re-Connect’ program, we are now evolving as a unique, contemporary theatre group. A company of designers, artists, performers and musicians, we seek to push the boundaries of theatrical possibility. Our work focuses on providing provocative and entertaining performances for our target audience, disadvantaged and homeless youth, whose experiences often echo that of some of the members of our company. Our rehearsal base is in the disused community access rooms in the council chambers. We are a committed ‘no-frills’ theatre and build our costumes and sets from recycled materials. Gold for Gold is our motto. Therefore, entry to all shows is by gold coin donation.

The reflection – like a restaurant review – draws upon comments made by students and their teachers following the task and highlights the relevance of collaborative devising in the post-Covid Drama classroom for high school students. This section is an example of a class response to this task. It involved year 11 drama students at ASC in May 2023.

Reflecting on the recipe

To Taste or not to taste – That was the question!

The Companies performed their work in the sixth week. Log books along with a de-brief, or reflection session gave students the opportunity to discuss what they felt had worked and what was problematic during the process.

Unlike previous experiences of group devising, the focus was on the process of collaboration and theatrical creation. Students were able to spend the first week (four classes of 1 hour each) developing the Company performance style, the ‘brand’ as they liked to call it, and establishing mechanisms for negotiation, how they would approach the devising process – with respect to their chosen performance style – and how they would endeavour to build a sense of unity. They set markers for what this unity would look like, so that they could reflect on its success along the way. Concepts such as meta-cognitive awareness (whereby students are aware of the impact of their own behaviours in the process and make adjustments for the good of the project and group harmony), were introduced. Students were encouraged to develop a ‘shared language’, and a ‘shared ethos’. Students were able to explore what this might mean to them in the devising process. Significant concepts, such as meta-cognitive awareness, were explained. While engaged in the act of collaborating they were also aware of themselves as participants in this process. Students found great joy in developing the Company ‘brand’ (as they called it), and married their preferred performance style to their skills. They expressed enthusiasm for developing their own ethos and way of working, saying that this allowed them freedom to take responsibility for their work. Students could identify moments when they became disengaged from the task and negotiate the appropriate ways to re-engage. Tensions within the group were recognised to be important to the creative process rather than being viewed as an interruption. Asking each other ‘why’ an individual or the whole group had lost focus became integral to reflection.

One of the more interesting reflections, however, was the enthusiasm for the task and the sense of connection they had experienced throughout the devising process. They had not realised how much they missed being in the company of other students; this reflects the social state, into which students were inevitably forced during the time of COVID and which has, since then, had a lasting impact. This devising task highlighted,

for them, the sense of social disconnection that was now common amongst their peers, and the degree to which social media and other similar platforms had come to dominate their social lives. To build a play in the company of each other, they said, had been a profound experience.

Accoutrements

The author wishes to acknowledge the support of drama teachers, Penelope McCue and Camille Dunsford, for their insightful contributions to the presentation, and Penelope McCue for her participation in the task and providing a summary of student reflections.

This workshop, the conference paper and this article for ADEM were conceived, conducted and prepared on the lands of the Anaiwan, Kamilaroi, Dhungatti and Gumbayngirr people on the Northern tablelands of NSW.

About the author

Katy Walsh is a drama teacher in northern NSW, where she lives and bakes with co-collaborators Penelope McCue and Camille Dunsford. Katy is currently exploring the nexus between professional theatre and drama education in group devising processes towards her PhD at the University of Newcastle. Katy's professional theatre background, coupled with 25 years in the drama classroom and her passion for ensemble theatre-making comes together in this snapshot, where she incorporates methods for collaboration as a central ingredient.

Unleash Your Inner Scorsese! Videomaking as Classroom Learning

Natasha Beaumont

Filmmaking was something of a family pastime in my childhood. My father had been a cameraman in World War II and was later involved in the early days of Australian television. Looking for ways to engage us as young children, he would often draw on these skills to make short comic 'movies' which I vividly remember as being great fun to perform in. In 2020, during Covid lockdowns, I became inspired by the creative possibilities of videomaking as a digital learning tool. Curious about its usefulness and eager to experiment, I approached the team I work with at Captivate, a performing arts unit within Catholic Schools Parramatta Diocese (CSPD), to see if they would be open to a pilot program involving videomaking for primary classroom learning. To their credit, they were totally onboard, and I was soon teamed with a digital visual arts colleague, Sadie Ly, to begin work with a Year 6 class in North Parramatta. Since that initial class, another three versions of this video literacy program have been delivered in different schools across Western Sydney and I have embarked on a PhD study into its usefulness. This article shares some of what I have learned – just in case any fellow drama teachers might be curious about using digital video and exploring their film director alter egos!

The texts – Documentary & narrative videos

National and state English curricula make multiple references to students' being able to identify the purpose and audience of a text and to understand how this influences the structure and language used. Videomaking is no different. Videos are multimodal texts. They serve particular functions which need particular types of language. The two forms explored so far in the program have been documentary-style informative texts and comic narratives. The informative documentaries have been made in conjunction with units taught in Human Society and its Environment (HSIE). In HSIE, students learned about topics like First Peoples around the world in Year 6, or national days of commemoration in Year 3. Simultaneously, in the video literacy workshops, they created documentary videos on these subjects featuring themselves as presenters. Students spent time turning their research into scripted narrations and sourcing appropriate images online to accompany them. They also filmed themselves presenting to camera in various creative ways such as popping out from behind things, speaking upside down in handstands, sliding down poles or slippery dips. Similarly, the narrative videos combined elements of live action performance with images and video footage

sourced online. This found content was repurposed with accompanying narration to depict parts of the story. Taking this mash-up approach to the story content enabled classes to depict narratives involving meteors, burning buildings, racing fire trucks and celebrities like Harry & Meghan. Using digital technology in this way meant students could inject their videos with imaginative elements well beyond the filmable confines of the actual classroom.

The tech – Curse or cure?

In the video literacy programs, students use iPads. It seems many schools are transitioning away from iPads to Chromebooks, which are less suited to filmmaking, but we can usually get our hands on a set of ten devices to work with in a class – roughly one between three students. We then arrange to download the necessary editing software onto them. The most productive app so far has been Apple's 'Clips'. This is essentially a simplified version of iMovie, which is much easier for primary students to navigate. Editing is a simple matter of selecting and dragging, and you can shoot live footage within the app itself or import video footage that has been downloaded from elsewhere. You can also import photographs into the timeline and the app has added functions such as recording narration and adding live subtitles or choosing from an array of emojis and other graphics to superimpose over content. These additional functions have important implications for using Clips as a literacy tool in the classroom.

Various forms of **multiliteracy** are supported during the making of these video texts. A key part of the process is scripting and recording narration. Students listening back to themselves as they narrate strongly activates the '**speaking and listening**' or oracy elements of the primary English curriculum. It allows them to monitor and self-correct their expressive speech and articulation skills. When using live subtitles, students need to read these to check that the AI has heard them correctly (it often hasn't!) If not, they need to go back and manually **edit** the subtitles, so they match what the audience are hearing. Videomaking pedagogy creates valuable opportunities to teach the visual **grammar of the screen**, the semantics of different shot types and how a viewer interprets cuts between them. Using the emojis and graphics function in Clips also enables students to think about the aesthetics of graphic placement and matching visual meaning to narrative context. When sourcing additional imagery or footage from online to incorporate into their video texts, students can be invited to consider important **digital and critical** literacy elements such as image resolution, copyright, and the ethical considerations of repurposing content into a new, and sometimes vastly different context.

In good conscience, I must admit that teaching videomaking in the classroom is not without its challenges! Here are the most common elements we usually need to problem solve. **Sound** can be difficult to control when recording in classrooms, or playgrounds, or even libraries! It is really helpful to have access to a small anteroom or storage space where students can go to record their narrations, away from the hubbub of other groups working. Sound editing is limited in Apple Clips, though it does have a soundtrack function with a wide library of mood

music that you can lay under your video. Depending on the type of video being made, it can sometimes be fine to have general low-level noise in the background of a narration that has a music sound bed underneath it. But if you are creating a narrative video with scenes being acted out, clean sound is much more of a consideration. It is impossible for students working in a single room to shoot each other in small groups effectively. There will always be other groups in the background of a shot, as well as a cacophony of noise underneath character dialogue. The best solution I have found so far has been to direct whole class scenes that set up a simple comic narrative which students can then expand upon using other types of found content. **Shooting** a whole class scene and editing it afterwards has great learning benefits. This strategy helps get students hooked on the filmmaking process and is more embedded and engaging than teaching theory first followed by shooting. Students always really enjoy playing group reactions such as panic, shock or boredom as they can lose their inhibitions when performing in a crowd. They also never, ever, ever seem to tire of watching these shots back and finding them hilarious during the editing process! Successful scenes so far have included a classroom panicking after being told a meteor is heading straight for their school, and zombie mayhem as someone in the class eats a mouldy sandwich and becomes a rabid flesh-eater. These whole group scenes can then be intercut with narrated imagery or individual reaction moments that students go on to create in small groups. When sending students off to find their own **content** online it can also be important to consider what search terms they'll be using and what they may encounter. In the case of content like explosions and zombies, it might be appropriate for you, the teacher, to source this content on their behalf or ask them to find 'cartoon' versions to guard against finding anything too unsettling.

Other more mundane issues that need to be problem solved involve the perils of using devices that are shared across other year groups in the school. Adding sticky **labels** with group member names on the iPad covers is really handy or creating a log with the device number and group names listed. It's also a good idea to ensure students shoot using the iPad's in-built **camera app** and then import into Clips. This just means that if they delete anything by accident during editing, it will still be saved in the Camera library and vice versa. Sharing clips between devices using the **airdrop** function has proved so much simpler than trying to get students to download content from Google Drives. This is because, when using schools' shared devices, downloading from a Drive inevitably requires them to hurdle through multiple password security logins. Take it from me, primary students and complicated logins do not mix!

Most of the schools where the program has been delivered serve lower income communities with English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D). Written literacy skills are often harder to develop for students in these contexts. In many of the classes we work with, the children, overall, do not have a strong sense of identity as 'writers'. Videomaking has been a powerful way to engage these learners in an alternate form of knowledge presentation. One that is not just highly engaging but is also intensely creative, collaborative and supportive of multiliteracy development. Students in these schools have described themselves as 'proud'

of their work and characterised the program as ‘relevant’ and ‘fun’. In one of the more affluent areas where we ran the video literacy program, teachers were really pleased at the cross-curricular possibilities of the work. Student documentaries effectively incorporated content from their HSIE unit in ways that were more purposeful, creative and embodied than their traditional ‘research and write’ projects.

Alongside the joyful experimentation and learning benefits videomaking brings to the classroom, I can honestly say that this approach has opened the door to a whole new realm of creative possibilities for me as a teacher and (wannabe) director. Despite its associated challenges, I would absolutely recommend it! I would also love to connect with you if you’re planning on creating a videomaking program or are running one already. Please do reach out anytime – natasha.beaumont@sydney.edu.au

About the author

Natasha Beaumont is an associate lecturer of Creative Arts K to 6, at The University of Sydney. Her research interests include creativity, arts-based pedagogy, digital videomaking, drama and literacy. She is also contributing researcher and drama specialist at The University’s CREATE Centre, a research hub that explores the relationship between learning, creativity and the role of the arts in education, health and wellbeing. Natasha’s work combines a love of performing arts with a strong belief in learning that develops connection, creativity and joy for both teachers and students.

Staging Ideas: From Concept to Performance

Mathew Clausen

This workshop was presented at Antidote the Drama Australia National Conference in Newcastle in June.

The aim of this session was to suggest a process for helping Drama students deepen their thinking to create more complex, original and engaging performance work.

In a presentation for Drama NSW in 2018, I shared some thinking I had been doing about the work of the playwright and director, as seen through Karen Hess' Cognitive Rigor Matrix (2009) that combined Webb's Depths of Knowledge matrix (1997) with Blooms Revised Taxonomy (Anderson, Krathwol, 2001).

From this work we developed our own criteria for the practices of directing and playwriting, recognising that a student's conceptual understanding and ability to employ symbol and metaphor in performance created sophisticated, powerful and engaging theatre.

Director as Critically Reflective Thinker			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 C's Focus - Critical Reflection Related Learning Dispositions: Cognitive - Thinks Why and How Makes and Expresses Meaning Builds New Ideas Application of Knowledge and Development of Wisdom 			
Skill Area- Managing	Beginning	Consolidating	Excelling
Elements of Drama <ul style="list-style-type: none"> knows and can apply the elements of drama to manipulate the semiotics of theatre to create original work or interpret the performance work of others, engage the audience and create meaning. 	Can list, identify and define the elements of drama in performance work. Can create performance work that entertains the audience, but does not push them to think or ask questions.	Can distinguish between the elements of drama and interpret how these create meaning. Creates performance work that is entertaining and poses questions to the audience	Can synthesise the elements of drama to create meaning. Creates performance that is entertaining and meaningful, and poses questions to the audience that may be challenging and or insightful.
Context <ul style="list-style-type: none"> conducts research and is knowledgeable about the history of theatre and responds to contemporary political, social, personal cultural and artistic issues and trends. 	Recall some facts about dramatic forms, acting processes and theatrical techniques and can link performance work to a social context	Can identify some dramatic forms, acting processes and theatrical techniques and can draw some conclusions about the influence of social, political, personal, cultural contexts	Can identify a range of dramatic forms, acting processes and theatrical techniques and can draw some conclusions about the influence of social, political, personal, cultural contexts. Makes connections between the history of theatre, contemporary theatre/media and their own performance work and can defend and justify their choices.
Organisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poses questions, solves problems, plans and organises. 	Can define a rehearsal/performance goal and put some steps in place to achieve it.	Shows initiative by setting clear performance goals and assesses achievement of goals by collecting evidence, identifying problems and drawing conclusions about how to achieve these goals.	Is influential in setting complex goals and designing rehearsal processes by collecting, critiquing and synthesising evidence to propose new ways to solve problems in a highly effective and collaborative way.

Director as Artist			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4C's Focus - Creativity, Critical Reflection Related Learning dispositions: intrapersonal - curiosity, grit, focus Cognitive - build new ideas, thinks why and how 			
Skill Areas - Generating	Beginning	Consolidating	Excelling
Risk Taking <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Takes risks to create an effective purpose/intention/vision/concept about human experiences through drama and theatre 	Is curious about ways to define and illustrate the purpose of their ideas .	Takes risks to play with possibilities to define and illustrate the purpose of their ideas to investigate and draw conclusions about human experiences.	Shows determination and risk-taking to synthesise and analyse multiple ideas that create unique and original connections to express human experiences in innovative theatrical ways.
Clarity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> re-invents and re-imagines existing works and styles for theatrical performance and pushes boundaries of dramatic forms, and breaks with tradition. 	Notifies features of dramatic forms and theatrical traditions and explores possibilities for reinterpretation. Repeats and recognises existing ideas about dramatic forms and theatrical traditions	Interprets and reinvents existing works by assessing, critiquing and differentiating to formulate new ideas about drama and theatre.	Uses complex reasoning and planning to create innovative interpretations of existing works.
Aesthetic Confidence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> realises ideas in a theatrical way that has a strong distinctive aesthetic in the use of the elements of production to create works that are entertaining, and engaging to watch/experience. 	Uses some of the elements of production, lighting sound costume etc, to adequately represent who, what when, and where. They may begin to explore simple metaphors through production elements.	Applies elements of production to investigate and show how aesthetic choices can communicate complex ideas like themes, political or social messages through metaphor.	Synthesises the elements of production in an innovative way that extends the use of metaphor to communicate new ideas alternative knowledge or perspective.

A Goal to Extend Gifted and Talented Students

My school's strategic plan goal for teaching and learning focused on extending students who had been identified through a range of data sources as moderately to profoundly gifted. Our aim was to respond to the needs of students within the mild to profoundly gifted range through effective student identification, tracking of student data and differentiated learning strategies to ensure learning growth. All staff underwent training to complete the University of New South Wales Gifted Education Research and Resource Centre's Mini Certificate of Gifted Education (Mini COGE). One key principle in this training is the importance of extending students' thinking through the design of a concept-based curriculum. While this approach to curriculum design is to deepen learning for students who are gifted, it has also provided opportunities for effective differentiation to support a range of students. The principles of effective gifted education created an opportunity to re-design the Group Devised Performance unit to encourage students to think more deeply about the themes and issues on which they would base their performances.

Concept Based Programming

In a concept-based instruction model teachers use subject content in concert with concepts and generalisations to effect higher order, synergistic thinking. A concept based curriculum promotes greater depth of understanding, provides transferable learning, provides structure

for students, and promotes higher level thinking. While there is less emphasis on facts, they help to provide the foundation and support for deeper conceptual thinking and understanding (Erikson, 2012).

The integrated curriculum model (Van-Tassel Baska & Baska, 2019) posits a curriculum design approach that links concepts, content and process/product to deepen student engagement and learning. This is sometimes referred to as three-dimensional curriculum design, as opposed to two-dimensional curriculum design that focuses on content coverage of facts and skills (Erikson, 2012).

Integrated Curriculum Model (Van-Tassel Baska & Baska, 2019)

The greatest student learning occurs when emphasis is given to each of these dimensions within a given curriculum unit (VanTassel-Baska, 1986)

Issues and themes Dimension

An understanding and appreciation of systems of knowledge organized by theme and ideas not subject matter or process skills

Process Product Dimension

Learning investigatory skills in a highly collaborative approach between teacher and student to develop a high quality product

Advanced Content Dimension

Provides opportunities for students to use advanced skills, and move through the curriculum at a more rapid pace, or deeper

What are Concepts?

Concepts are broad based ideas around which curriculum can be organised to provide a conceptual lens through which to study or frame topics. They are mental constructs, which are timeless and universal, broad and abstract, categorise a variety of examples and involve one or two words only (GERRIC Minin COGER UNSW, 2020).

The Group Devised Performance

The unit I spoke about in the workshop was the Year 11 Group Devised Performance. I wanted this particular class to develop performance skills in physical theatre while also collaborating to determine their concept from which they would devise an 8-12 minute performance. This unit focused on the development of critical thinking and creativity skills and is intended as essential preparation for the compulsory HSC Drama Group Devised Performance examination that all Drama students in NSW must complete.

Group Devised Performance

Improvisation, Playbuilding, Acting & Theatrical Traditions and Performance Styles

Making

P1.2 **explores** ideas and situations, expressing them imaginatively in dramatic form

P1.3 **demonstrates** performance skills appropriate to a variety of styles and media

P1.5 **understands, demonstrates and records** the process of developing and refining ideas and scripts through to performance

Performing

P2.3 **demonstrates** directorial and acting skills to communicate meaning through dramatic action

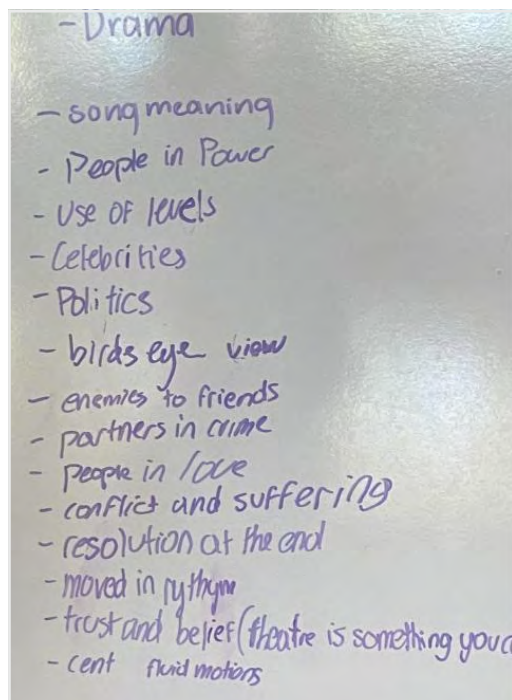
Critically Studying

P3.2 **understands** the variety of influences that have impacted upon drama and theatre performance styles, structures and techniques



The Teaching and Learning Program

As this was the first unit in the course, and I was aware of the full range of abilities, I wanted to start with practical work to engage the students before we started talking about concepts that might form the basis for their group devised plays.



Overview of Unit

10 Weeks

Phase 1 – training in physical theatre techniques

Phase 2 – Investigating concepts – generating ideas

Phase 3 – Refining and rehearsing for summative assessment

3 logbook submissions – investigating, taking action, critically reflecting

An essay to an unseen question – students could bring one page of notes

Formative assessment – peer and teacher feedback

Teaching Physical Theatre

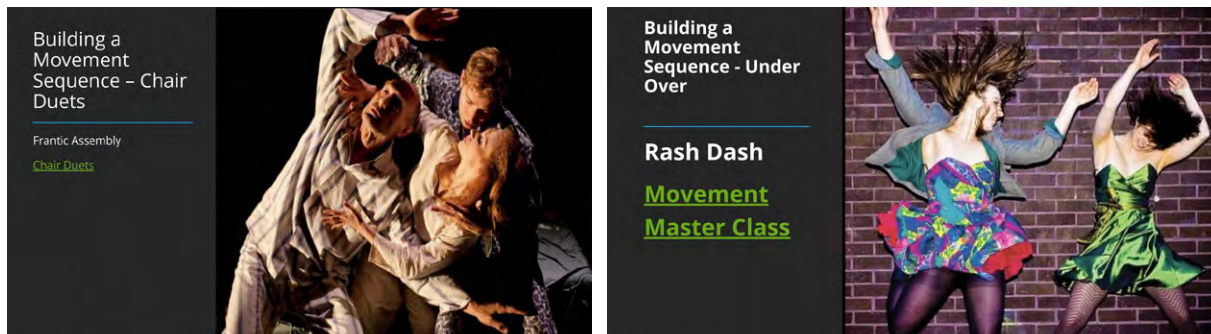
Learning Intentions

- To understand the principles of ensemble acting and effective collaboration through practical drama workshops
- To define the elements of drama and explore how they communicate ideas, feelings, experiences and cultural perspectives in performance work
- To investigate the skills and concepts of physical theatre through the work of Frantic Assembly and Rash Dash

Key Questions

- What is physical theatre?
- How can I apply the practices and processes of Rash Dash, Frantic Assembly and Rudolf Laban to extend my performance skills?
- What are the elements of drama?
- How can playwrights use the elements of drama to create performance work?

I was feeling a bit rusty regarding my skills in teaching physical theatre but found many great Youtube video resources, especially from English physical theatre companies *Rash Dash* and *Frantic Assembly*, that provided enough training and skill development, so the students were equipped to complete the tasks effectively.



Students then prepared a one minute Mini Physical Theatre Performance Task, applying the physical theatre skills they had learned. They watched the [trailer for the performance Manifesto that was performed at this year's Sydney Festival](#). Using the first minute of the soundtrack for the trailer, they devised their own physical theatre performance in a small group. As they prepared, they were asked to consider the elements of drama indicated in red.

When the groups performed for the class, the thinking routine See Think Wonder was used to critically reflect on the ways in which movement can create and convey ideas, mood and atmosphere.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

The elements of drama **in red** are the ones that you will address in this task. Feel free to play with or consider any other elements listed **in blue**.

Character/character relationships

Situation

Tension

Focus #1 theme/issue

Focus #2 audience attention

Dramatic structure

Time place

Space

Rhythm

Symbol Mood Atmosphere

Language Sound Movement

Audience Engagement

Dramatic Meaning

Critical Reflection on Manifesto Performances

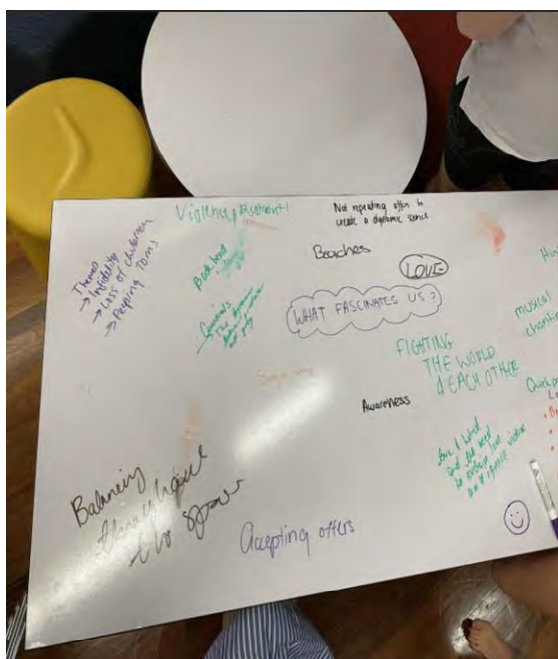
See - I saw.... I also saw...

Think - What this made me think was....

Wonder - Now I am wondering how/what/could/is it possible....

Exit Ticket - I have learned.... **OR** I am curious about.....

As the students developed performance work, they added sound and language, either improvised or from written text.



Development Workshops

What resonates?
What themes are emerging?
What fascinates us?

- Building on acquisition of physical theatre skills
- Building ideas through improvisation
- Extension activity – adding language and text. How can movement express the inner experience of a character?

Students were then introduced to the process of developing ideas for their physical theatre group devised performance, building their ideas from one or two concepts.

HOW DO WE START CREATING OUR PLAY?



How to develop a concept into an idea for a play



1. Choose a concept
2. Write 3 or 4 statements about that concept
3. Choose one of the statements that interests you
4. Unpack the statement by writing questions to explore
5. Use ideation to generate ideas for the elements of drama

CHANGE	POWER	JUSTICE	REVENGE
HOPE	IDENTITY	FREEDOM	LOVE
EXPLORATION	ORDER & CHAOS	TRUTH	FAMILY
STRUCTURE	INNOVATION	CONFLICT	DEATH



Example of how to develop a concept

Choose a concept - **family**

Write 3 or 4 statements about family

Family is....

Families....

Family can...

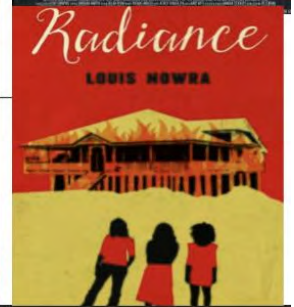
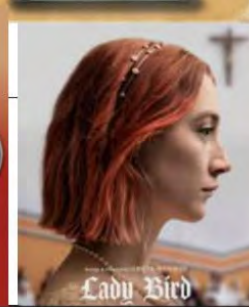
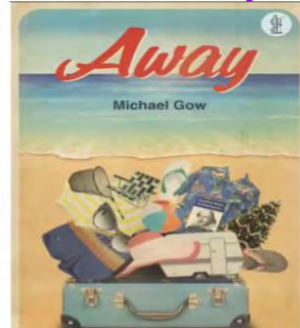
Choose one of the statements that interests you

Unpack the statement by writing questions to explore

Why do parents....?

How does family....?

Plays and films that explore the concept of family



Each group member then completed the following task using the questions provided below.

- What concept interests you?
- What are three generalisations/statements you can make about your concept? Remember to start each statement with the concept e.g. exploration is the essence of being human.
- What are three questions you have about this concept?
- e.g. When has exploration led to negative outcomes? What drives people to explore?
- Choose one or more concepts from the group. Write a list of possible scene ideas. Some of these may be inspired by your research OR class improvisation and workshops OR both.

Summative Assessment & Student Evaluation

The evidence of the impact of concept-based programming was mostly evident in the criteria – *Dramatic Structure and Coherence*. This criterion determines effective control of the elements of drama, ensemble work and the overall dramatic meaning of a piece. Of the four groups, three achieved in the upper range in this criterion. Student feedback on this unit was very positive, with many referring to the benefits of conceptual thinking as the starting point for their ideas. Some feedback is included below.

It was interesting to explore our concept throughout the development of our play and I think that the concept was the key when deciding what our play was about.

Through my understanding and investigation of my group's concept for our play, I was able to contribute to the development of the play by putting knowledge and information into our play to make it more realistic and enjoyable.

Our concept was very important for the group to understand, to create a coherent and interesting performance. The concept of our group performance was confusing and hard to grasp, and we could have provided more clarity to step up the play. Overall, I think my group and I understood the concept.

We started off with one concept which we found made our play constrictive in what we could include, so then we found ourselves with a mixture of concepts, which added to the complexity of our plot as well as our characters and lines.

My understanding of the concept of revenge helped contribute to the development of the group's play as it helped greatly in formulating Ideas and creating a circular narrative with a distinct ending and beginning. We used the concept of revenge, and the themes surrounding that, such as betrayal, forgiveness and change, to shape our story. Overall it gave us a great framework to build upon to formulate ideas.

About the author

Mathew Clausen is Director of Teaching and Learning at Loreto Kirribilli. His teaching background is in Drama and recently he held the position of Performing Arts Coordinator, bringing together two departments Music and Drama for the first time in the school's history. Mathew has been a Supervisor for Marking for HSC Drama Individual Projects and the written examination and has served as an educational advisor for AFTRS and The Ensemble Theatre. Mathew is author of the Drama text book *Centre Stage*, now in its third edition.

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Baskets of hope and inspiration. Working together to thrive in our drama communities

Annette Thomson and Kimberley Fridd (Ngā Māhanga, Taranaki)



***Nā tō rourou nā toku rourou ka ora ai te iwi –
With your basket and my basket the people will thrive***

This Māori whakataukī (proverb) can be seen as a metaphor for the drama community, when we share our resources from each other's kete, 'baskets' we can all flourish. Responding to the battleground of arts education and a climate crisis literally walking in the back door of our classrooms, Drama New Zealand has resolved to support teachers throughout Aotearoa with their resources and initiatives. This article examines our advocacy, health and wellbeing 'baskets' and offers inspiring practical actions and supportive resources for our Drama colleagues in Australia.

Part Tahi (One) – with Annette Thomson

Drama New Zealand believes that drama is an antidote to our changing world

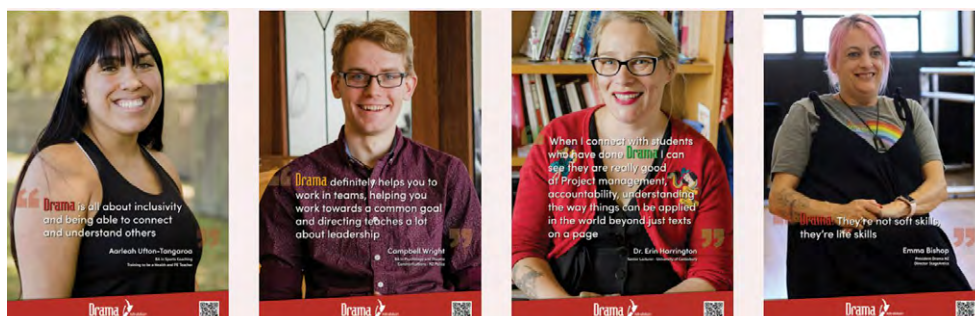
The arts in Education are often talked of in the NZ education system as 'option subjects', as less academic than other 'core subjects' as the fun 'entertainment subjects' and as having limited pathways to further study. Such comments and systems devalue the arts and position the arts as an 'option', an 'add on', a nice to have but not necessary. At present Victoria and Otago University in NZ are cutting programmes to save money and of the 56 programmes they are looking at most are from the arts and humanities.

So let's discuss changing that narrative.

Drama NZ in a response to our Arts teachers started to build a kete of resources that teachers, students and parents could use in their schools and communities to advocate for Drama

We produced a video that can be played at open nights, to boards of trustees, to senior leadership, to students and family that discusses the 'why' of Drama. How Drama adds to a students basket of skills in communication, teamwork, creativity, critical thinking and organisational management. Our second video is aimed at students – showing how Drama can be a part of a holistic programme of learning and engage with pathways other than the creative industries such as law, medicine and business.

Other Advocacy Resources



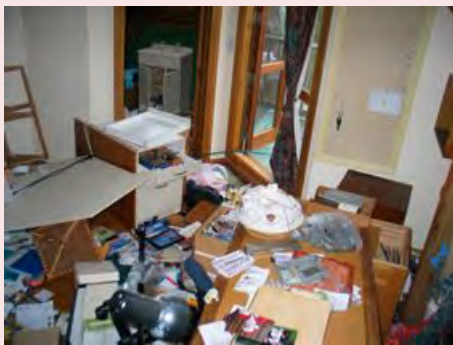


These two short videos sit on our Advocacy page along with a set of Advocacy posters and a tertiary pathways brochure. The Tertiary brochure outlines all the pathways for Drama tertiary study in New Zealand in one booklet.



Another basket that Drama NZ have been working on for a number of years is the response to crises – Let's explore that kete.

To do that I have to tell you a little of my story and why I am passionate about the arts to provide hope to our students. In 2011 the Christchurch earthquake and subsequent aftershocks caused 185 deaths – both physical and mental trauma were experienced by Christchurch people. In the slides to the left you can see my house – It took 9 years before our house was repaired. On the right is the school I was teaching at being demolished – we operated in temporary buildings for 8 years before it was rebuilt. And the photo of the young man is my brother-in-law Owen Wright killed on that day in 2011 by a rockfall on the port hills walking home to his family.



Part of the healing process for me was engaging in the arts. At the time of the first earthquakes I was in rehearsal for Hamlet, playing Gertrude. Despite incredible trauma, including one of the cast members killed in the earthquake, in May we performed Hamlet and it was the most healing and important thing for us to do at that time.

Shortly after the earthquake Professor Peter O'Connor from Auckland University came into Christchurch schools to deliver his process drama 'A teaspoon of light' – where students and teachers explored hope through restoring a child's dream cloth.

Other tragedies struck: A devastating fire burned more than 1600 hectares of land on the Port Hills in February 2017.

In 2019 a gunman attacked the Al Noor mosque and the Linwood mosque in Christchurch – killing 51 and injuring 40 – At the time I was in lockdown with year 10 about 500 metres from the Linwood Mosque- for 4 hours – setting up a toilet in the costume bin out the back – we sat in the dark – looking after each other. One was in a wheelchair. Later that year that class presented Christmas dramas to the special needs unit attached to our new school in support of that student and in acknowledgment of what they had been through together.

In March 2020 NZ went into Lockdown – suddenly we were adjusting to a different world. We discovered zoom to connect and Drama NZ began to produce webinars for our teachers across NZ. Later in 2021 over zoom I directed a production of the *Crucible*, who knew that could work!

Drama NZ provided support for teachers in the form of our reaching the edges projects. We worked online running webinars and online zoom catch ups, caring for each other in this difficult time. Those webinars were recorded and now sit on our website for teachers to access. We knew from past experiences that the arts would bring people together and provide sense of the different path we were now on.

At this time the website: *Te Rito Toi* was established in response to covid 19 – At the heart of *Te Rito Toi* is the understanding that schools need to help students make sense of the present, not just prepare them for the future. After disasters and crises, schools must as a first priority help learners safely explore the changed world in which they live. Many of our members contributed to this incredible resource that is free for anyone globally to access.(Ref)

In March 2023 I was able to travel to the Hawkes Bay after a devastating cyclone in the region with Auckland University and Professor Peter O'Connor. We could support teachers to use the arts to come back after the cyclones and share with them workshops from the *Te Rito Toi* website. I also met with Drama specialists hearing stories and supporting those dealing with the aftermath of this crises. This is an ongoing project and later this year our Drama NZ Primary conference is to be held in this region supporting further our teachers – because we know the aftermath from trauma does not disappear when it is no longer on our news reports. To me the arts have provided a healing journey of expression and support in times of crises, I know they can also be this for our students.

In New Zealand we have a Māori word 'wero' this is a challenge – and this is my challenge to you. I challenge you to notice how your schools position the arts, how yourself and your colleagues talk of the arts, view the arts – I want you to take the challenge to speak of the arts as important. Let's talk of the arts in our classrooms to our students as an essential part of the everyday, academic and valued in our schools and learning institutions. Drama is needed now more than ever.

Part Rua (Two) – with Kimberley Fridd

Who are Health & Wellbeing for Arts Education?

We are four passionate people who believe in the wellbeing of educators as well as students.

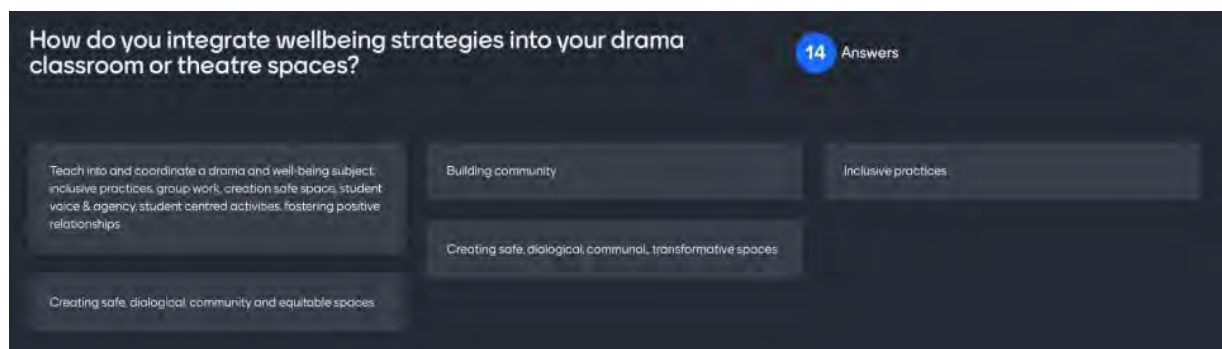
In 2018 I attended the Drama NZ conference in Auckland and this national subject conference was the catalyst for Health & Wellbeing for Arts Education forming. I was presenting on Hygge Happiness in the classroom with Rachel McMillan (one of our other members).



All of us attended each other's workshops and during the korero session following Rob Mokaraka's powerful one-man show, Shot Bro: Confessions of a Depressed Bullet, a question was asked: '...should teacher and student wellbeing be included with school policies? Or are they already?'



Many of us agreed that they should but unsure if these policies already existed. Our discussion led to the formation of Health & Wellbeing for Arts Education and the seed was planted. Since then we have taken our individual knowledge, skills and passions into our own workplaces and now into wider communities.



What does Wellbeing look like in the drama classroom?

I have a number of ways where I focus on wellbeing in the drama classroom. It begins with a focus on a positive education (which blends academic learning with character & well-being). At the start of the year we focused on values and used the VIA Institutes Strengths challenge to focus on what are student strengths. This positive approach to education sees students focus on developing life skills.

During the hugely interrupted Covid years I built in mindfulness and gratitude exercises in the classroom, through the use of practical and reflective drama exercises. Drama is the perfect vehicle for socio-emotional learning (or SEL). There is a focus on the 8 C's for Learning as always in drama class. There are always opportunities for creativity, collaboration, communication, critical thinking, confidence, compassion, culture, and challenge (building resilience).

I have a Gratitude Box – up the front of the room, where students can nominate students for a gratitude certificate, for something that I may have missed, but something which the students want recognised. I also have a small “lightbox” Whakataukī with a Māori proverb written on there for inspiration. I try to change these each month. The students get really good at reminding me! It provides a bit of focus at the front of the room and something for the students to channel.





With Drama warm-ups and beginning of the class routines, I always try to include breathing exercises, mindfulness, stretching, yoga, collaborative team building exercises, and a focus on community over competition. Regularly check in with your students, whether it is you standing on the door as they enter at the beginning of class, or at the end. Gauge where students are at in a non-formal manner. During Lockdown when we were learning from home, I set up a Google form “Weekly Friday check-in”. This way I could quickly see who needed more support from Deans or student counsellors.

Try a trial using the DOJO app with junior classes if you are tech minded – to keep track of wellbeing things like mindfulness and resilience, using the 8 C’s as a basis. This really buys into my college’s Board of Trustees ‘Future proofing students for life’ motto. The purpose of the DOJO app is a focus on Happier classrooms. It can be used to build a classroom community and is totally free for students to use. Class Dojo -brings in BIG IDEAS with Social and emotional learning. It uses great activities to help students get mindful & manage their emotions. It focuses on key areas of growth mindset, perseverance, empathy, gratitude, and mindfulness.

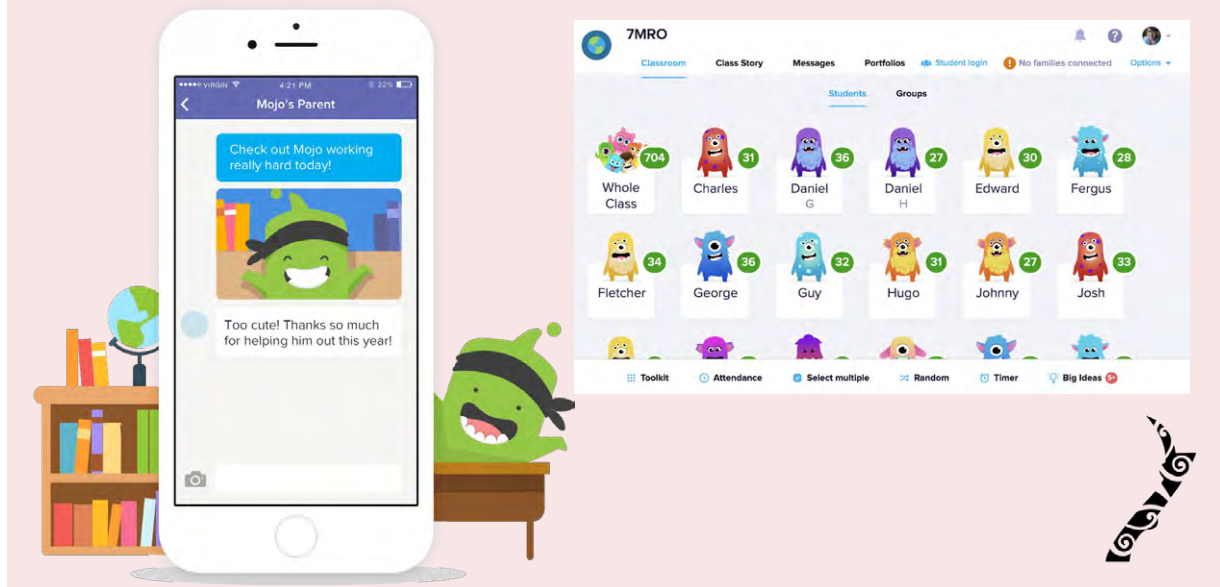
There is a “Class Story” – where families can see and share what their young people are working on. You can use the app to choose random groups in a blink of an eye, use a timer for drama activities, think pair share activities, and even gauge noise levels using the noise metre.

As example, in the DOJO app, I have awarded points for the 8Cs of Drama:

- Challenge
- Collaboration
- Communication
- Compassion & kindness

- Confidence
- Creativity
- Critical Thinking
- Culture

The DOJO app for junior drama classes...



Once they build points, they can change their emoji, depending on the points raked up by the end of the week, I can easily see which students are deserving of a “Purple card” – which is a school initiative we have at John McGlashan College to recognise the excellent mahi or work of a student, a great effort, or an example of good citizenship

Over the past few years, I have been exploring big ideas such as sustainability and climate justice with the process of drama devising in senior classrooms – creating ‘Drama for change’. We’ve approached topics that challenge students to think global and act local.

At John McGlashan College as part of our strategic plan, we are asked to provide initiatives that enable students to be active contributors in the local and global community. That means recognising the social, ethnic and cultural identities of students and staff; and meeting their wellbeing needs. We do this by embedding an ‘Active McGlashan’ culture across the College promoting global thinking and local activity, service in the wider-community, as well as building capacity for sustainability practices and initiatives that involve our community.

Drama is an effective method to raise awareness and generate meaningful discussions on climate change, sustainability and other global issues. Weighty topics like these ignite student curiosity and excitement, but they also serve an important purpose, to remind students that we need to focus on stories which really matter.

Thinking global, acting local



We need to engage youth and recognise that they are the future custodians of our natural resources. The youth of today are the ones who will have to deal with the serious consequences of climate change impacts. Therefore, engaging youth in topics like these is vital to ensure availability and security of natural resources for the next generation.

Throughout my devising unit, I had students connect with the community by interviewing a local Eco Warrior, Laura Kitty Cope from the Use Your Own Cup initiative (ProActivist Reusies @ uyo.forever.ok on Instagram). She and her friends set up an awesome initiative. UYO is a not-for-profit, responsible-cafe finder working out of Aotearoa. UYO stands for Use Your Own and is an online digital ProActivist Cafe Guide.

A Proactivist is anyone who goes beyond talking of the problem to courageously, innovatively, positively solution-ing the problem. Proactivists are the ‘move the convo along’ version of activists: they create new systemic containers for things to thrive.

UYO represents our planet, and they work for cafes who are committed to minimising their environmental impact by welcoming people to use our own cups and containers, plates, bowls, cutlery, anything, when we take out. Every cafe listed in the guide will pour a brew into any vessel you bring them, and will smile while they do so.

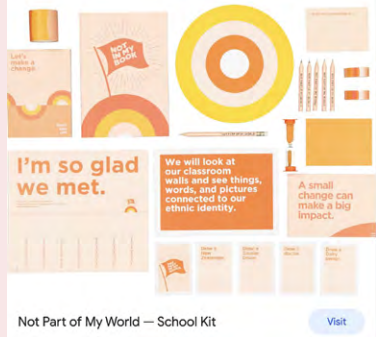

When the students interviewed Kitty Cope online via ZOOM, they were able to dig deeper into why an initiative like UYO is so important and were also educated on ways they themselves could make a difference. Students were encouraged to abolish the need for single use, especially at the canteen and bring their own reusable containers and drinking vessels to school.

Here is a quick example of what I did with my seniors for devising across the senior levels, *“Thinking Global, Acting Local” – Climate Justice – Creating waves, performing change:*


One of our Year 12 groups focused on cafe culture for this task and the need to change our usage of single use cups. I also built a resource list for groups to use throughout the task, for quick access to links: Thinking Global, Acting Local – Climate Justice Resources

We also explored the Climate Change Theatre Action platform Climate Change Theatre Action in our pre-devising activities. Climate Change Theatre Action is a global festival of short plays about the climate crisis that brings communities together to take local and global action on climate. You can join Climate Change Theatre Action by presenting an event in your community between September 16 and December 23, 2023 using at least one play from their collection. Your event can be anything from an intimate reading to a fully staged performance, and from a podcast to a film adaptation. They provide you with a collection of 50 plays, a list of resources to help make your Action effective and unique, organisational and marketing support, and a lot of enthusiasm!


Using drama for change ['Are we there yet?'](#)



<https://www.schoolkit.co.nz/not-part-of-my-world-kit>



"It confronted my passive acceptance of our education system's entrenched inequality for Māori and Pasifika. It challenged my beliefs about microaggressions, racism and my role in reinforcing negative stereotypes."



Even in junior drama classes from Years 7-10 we have approached how to use drama for change through a range of thought provoking topics. To ensure students are safely supported to discuss and develop these concepts in a drama context, I used SchoolKit as the resource for exploring topics like Inclusivity and Diversity for the Not Part of My World Schoolkit with Year 7 students and the *Are we there yet?* units. The *Not Part of my World* kit looked at challenging racism and cultural assumptions. The goal of this kit is to promote kindness, call out racism, and make students aware of unconscious bias. Process drama was a fantastic vehicle for exploring this topic and different points of view and social emotional learning skills.

The highlight for the Year 7 students was the Stereotype Charades exercise we played, especially when the students realised that their unconscious bias started to creep into their

portrayal of certain characters when acting them out under time pressure. It was a fascinating social experiment and we had a great oral debrief afterwards, reflecting on what we learned from the exercise.

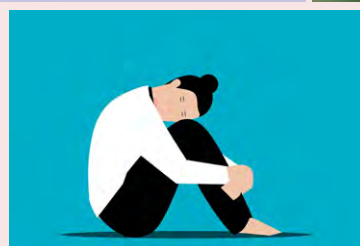
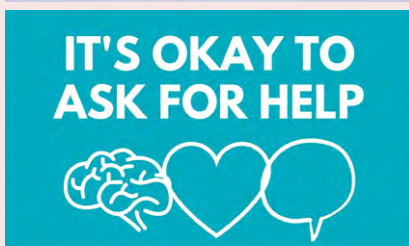
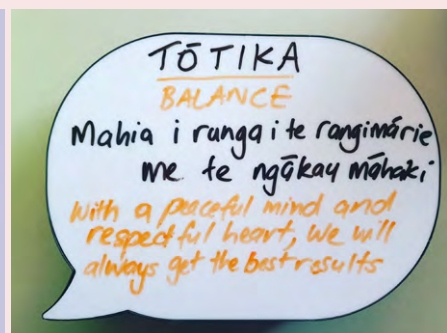
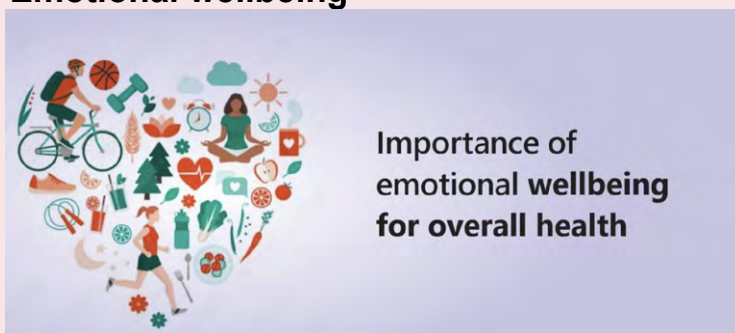
In the other SchoolKit School Kit Are we there yet? We explored women and equity in Aotearoa. Working at an all boys school, John McGlashan College, students were interested to learn that our college wasn't actually started by John McGlashan, but two of his daughters after his death. I felt it was really important for our students to know about our college's foundation story, while also examining issues around women's equity, in particular the suffrage movement and Kate Sheppard's story.

The Year 7 drama students examined women's suffrage in New Zealand using the Auckland Museum sponsored 'Are we there yet?' SchoolKit, to focus on Suffrage in New Zealand. Students asked the all-important question, are we there yet? Their work culminated in a Suffrage exhibition featuring some of our McGlashan women.

Students interviewed various female support staff, as well as their homeroom teacher, and had their work presented on large boards in the foyer of our Edgar Learning Centre outside the library. In the glass cabinet case, there were replicas of items from the Auckland Museum Suffrage exhibition. On the foyer video screen, we featured each student speaking parts of Kate Sheppard's famous speech – which was a fantastic way to focus on voice techniques in drama. Our exhibition was titled – 'Are we there yet?' *Our women – McGlashan Wāhine*

At a senior drama level, we explored the school kit even further by using the kit as a stimulus for site specific devising, in conjunction with the Suffrage exhibition down at our local Toitū Early Settlers Museum. Senior students used the promenade theatre style to retell suffrage stories in the museum.


Emotional wellbeing



[FACT SHEET Reference list for Working Well fact sheets.pdf](#)



Understanding wellbeing



Te Whare Tapa Whā

Taha wairua
Spiritual

Taha hinengaro
Mental & emotional

Taha tinana
Physical

Taha whānau
Family & social

Whenua
Land, roots

A Ministry of Health Survey² found

1 in 2
Meet the criteria for a mental illness at some point in their lives.

Across the world³

2 in 6 at work
1 in 6 people suffer from symptoms of mental illness. Another 1 in 6 suffer from symptoms associated with mental ill health such as worry, sleep problems and fatigue.

Cost benefits of wellbeing programmes
Looking after employee mental health and wellbeing saves businesses money.

Average return per \$1 spent on mental wellbeing programmes was \$4.20.⁴

Workplace cultures that value employee wellbeing are linked to having the strongest productivity.⁵

WORKING WELL

Mental Health Foundation
Mauhihi Te Whare Tapa Whā

Cost benefits of wellbeing programmes [FACT SHEET The business case for wellbeing.pdf](#)
Looking after employee mental health and wellbeing saves businesses money.

Average return per \$1 spent on mental wellbeing programmes was \$4.20.⁴

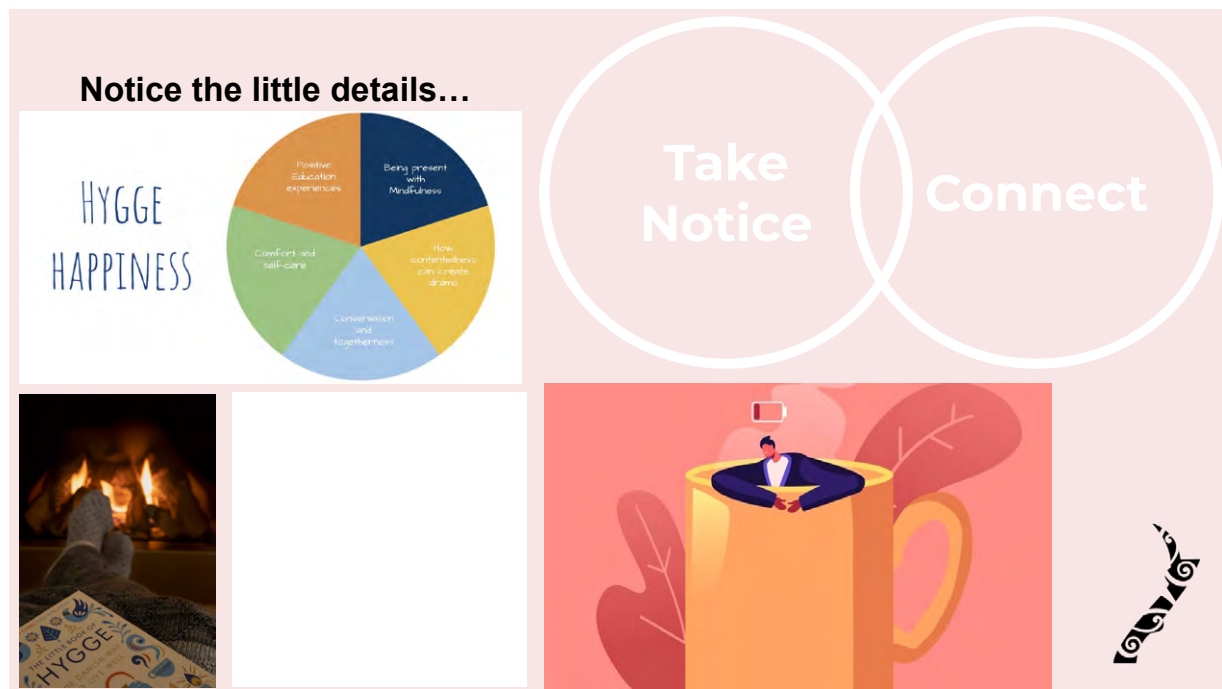
Workplace cultures that value employee wellbeing are linked to having the strongest productivity.⁵

Now I'd like to focus in particular on drama teacher wellbeing. One model for understanding Māori health is the concept of 'te whare tapa whā' – the four cornerstones (or sides) of Māori health. With its strong foundations and four equal sides, the symbol of the house (or wharenuī) illustrates the four dimensions of Māori well-being.

Should one of the four dimensions be missing or in some way damaged, a person, or a collective may become 'unbalanced' and subsequently unwell. For many Māori modern health services lack recognition of taha wairua (the spiritual dimension). In a traditional Māori approach, the inclusion of the wairua, the role of the family or whānau and the balance of the hinengaro (the mind) are as important as the physical manifestations of illness.

A good place to start in the Te Whare Tapa Whā model, is Mental and Emotional Wellbeing – te taha hinengaro. In Te Whare Tapa whā, mental and emotional wellbeing is the capacity to communicate, to think and to feel. Mind and body are inseparable. Thoughts, feelings and emotions are integral components of the body and soul. Pathways for wellness at work include: being self-aware, having a positive outlook, managing your feelings better, accepting yourself, having good coping skills, looking out for others

Emotions are one aspect of a person's health that often get neglected. If your emotional health is suffering, your physical health will too. Remember the old adage, you can't pour from an empty cup! People who are emotionally healthy are in control of their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. They are able to cope with life's challenges and are more resilient. Being emotionally healthy does not mean you are happy all the time. It means you are aware of your emotions, & know how to deal with them – whether they are positive or negative. This is something we ask the students to work on, so we need to model it ourselves.



Emotional Wellbeing – what does it look like?

Being emotionally healthy is a huge plus. People with good emotional health:

- Have good work-life balance
- Feel good about themselves
- Have purpose in their lives
- Are able to better accept changes and ‘go with the flow’
- Enjoy living, and know the value of fun and laughter
- Have better relationships with others
- Are more content

Don’t let this list make you feel inadequate... not everyone feels happy all of the time.

Take Notice – Appreciate the little things. Savour the moment.

- Be mindful – notice more
- Practise gratitude – start a gratitude journal;
- Have some alone time
- Change your desk or classroom – classroom hygge – lighting, nice smells, plants, music to set tone & mood, create wee spaces that have a calming feel to them. Danish hygge both at home and at work has become a huge part of my lifestyle. It’s all wrapped up in the way spaces and situations make you feel. Hygge is a deep sense of place and wellbeing, a feeling of friendship, warmth, contentment, and peace with your immediate surroundings. Hygge is about finding a work-life balance.

Have you ever walked into someone else's classroom and just thought, I don't know how I could be inspired or be creative in a space like this? That's why we should pay more attention to the way spaces make us feel.

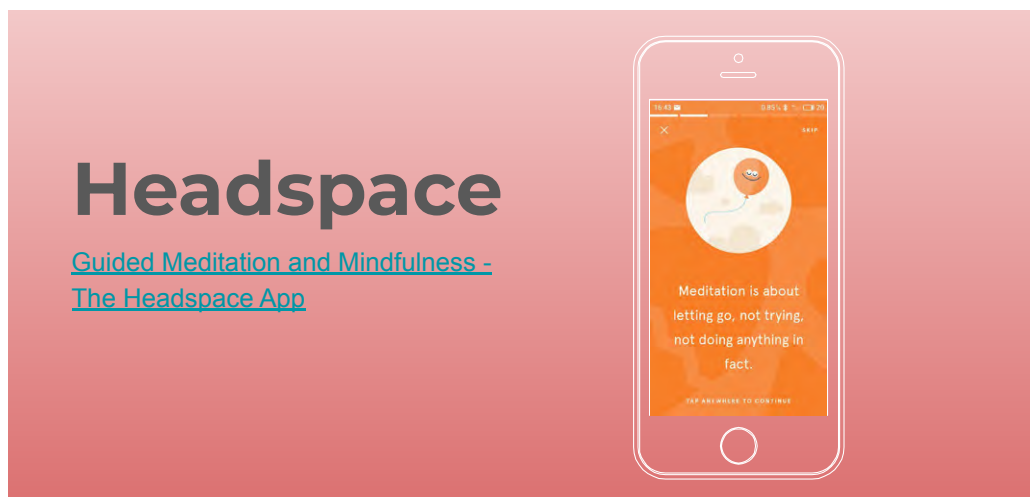
A basket of wellness ideas

Make a decision to do something nice for yourself every day and stick to it. It may have to be a conscious process. Find peace and relaxation throughout your work day. Take time to do it. Find a simple ritual as a way of honouring yourself.

- Try daily meditation, breathing techniques, or just being 'present'. This doesn't even require a yoga mat, it could be done in your office chair
- Lock the classroom door between classes, so you can have a few minutes to clear your head and get mentally prepared for your next class. Take a short walk outside, put on headphones and listen to music, close your classroom door between classes, so you can have a small break
- Instead of a meeting inside, make it a 'walking' meeting'
- Listen to some music – lots of great playlists on Spotify. Music is great soul food
- Connect with a workmate. My Department friend used to bring me Custard Squares on a Friday & I would get the coffee. The Swedish call this 'Fika', hence our Fika Fridays. It was time each week to reconnect & recharge
- Do something nice for someone at work – make someone else feel important – it's great for the reward centre of the brain. Last year a colleague and I wrote little appreciation postcards (using a beautiful Māori whakataukī quote) to each and every member of the teaching staff – as a bit of a positive wellness boost when we were having a slump in the middle of the term.

Drama teacher kete – wellbeing toolkit

Here are some sure fire ways to focus on teacher and student wellbeing.



Calm

[Calm](#) link

The Calm Schools Initiative

Link to free teacher version of Calm:

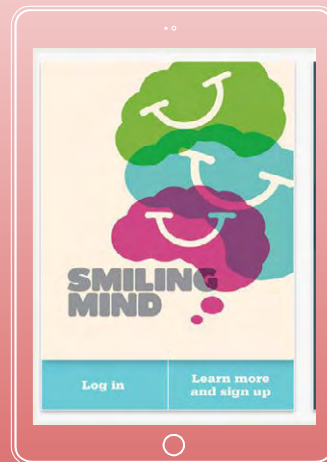
calm.com/schools--



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The Smiling Mind

<https://www.smilingmind.com.au/>



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The Strengths Challenge

<https://strengthschallenge.com/>



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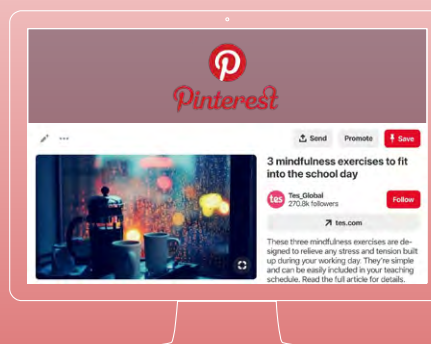
Teaching Council Podcast Series



<https://educationcouncil.org.nz/content/teaching-today-podcast-episode-2-teacher-wellbeing>

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Health & Wellbeing for Arts Educators on Pinterest



<https://pin.it/n747yievlq7zf2>

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Want to explore more health & wellbeing for Arts Education?
Here are links to our first two issues...



UHO Issue #1 [UHO Issue 1.pdf](#)
UHO Issue #2 [UHO Issue 2 2022.pdf](#)



Ngā mihi ki a koutou.

About the authors

Annette Thomson is a passionate drama educator and is the current President of Drama NZ. She completed her Masters in Education in 2022 and is currently working for the University of Canterbury as a Professional Practice Lecturer and Tatai Aho Rau – Core Education as a facilitator. She is committed to supporting teachers through times of trauma and stress.

Kimberley Fridd (Ngā Māhanga, Taranaki) is Curriculum Fellow for the Secondary Drama programme MTchGL at University of Otago, an Executive Member of Drama NZ, Co-Founder of Health & Wellbeing for Arts Education, and Teacher-in-Charge of Drama at John McGlashan College in Dunedin, NZ. A teacher for over 15 years, Kimberley is passionate about hauora and wellbeing in arts education.

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Re-imagining cultural heritage through drama: a participatory project with older adults

Elena Viseri and Niki Nikonanou

Introduction

Participation is a “catch-all term” (Black, 2018, p. 302) widely used in museum, art and heritage education as “a label for the multiple ways museums can engage with communities and communities with museums” (Kreps, 2013, p. 85). Though often functioning only as a slogan for attracting visitors (Klindt, 2017), community participation can serve the democratisation of culture by introducing concepts of inclusiveness, recognizing community members as “specialists of everyday life” (Kreps, 2013, p. 87), and questioning authority and existing hierarchies in knowledge production. Participatory community projects in a context of cultural democracy face the challenge to be open in various interpretations of the community members, to accept meaning making that is bottom up instead of top down (Witcomb, 2003), and therefore employ procedures of collaboration, sharing and decision making with regard to equality between all individuals taking part in the project (Piontek, 2017).

Research findings on the potential of Museum Theatre are very promising in creating a safe space where ideas, emotions, narrations, meanings and relationships can be observed, negotiated, interpreted and performed. Museum Theatre can have a positive and long-term effect on the participants’ relation to cultural heritage. It activates their imagination and creativity fostering personal and shared experiences. Furthermore, Museum Theatre can provide ways to address difficult issues and contested histories and approach “a diverse audience that doesn’t feel related to the cultural displays” (Nikonanou & Venieri, 2017, p.17) while “helping us to understand the social meaning of artefacts” and “animating the inanimate” (Jackson & Kidd, 2007, p. 2).

Taking into account the above mentioned discussion on inclusion and participation in culture and the research findings on Museum Theatre we designed and implemented an intervention in a cultural monument, in which participants co-created the scenario, characters and storyline of the performance. In order to explore issues of the process, levels of participation and the experience of the co-creation practice, we introduced an open-ended perspective regarding the involvement of the community and decision-making processes with emphasis in equality. We tried to provide a space where possibilities that are not foreseen can be shaped

together with the participants, unexpected and extraordinary encounters can take place through performative actions, creating new forms of relations between the community and the monument (Nikonanou, 2015, p. 15).

The Intervention

The intervention took place in Alatza Imaret, a 15th century Ottoman Mosque in the centre of Thessaloniki, Greece. The name literally means colourful mosque and throughout the years the building served as a poorhouse, school, prayer room and shelter for refugees and people in need. Lately it is open for visitors while exhibitions and concerts are regularly being held there. We collaborated with an existing community of women, who are part of the Association of Cancer Patients of Central Macedonia and live near the monument. The women community is actively involved in many different cultural activities such as dance classes, choir and a theatre group. Participants have a long lasting relationship with the Association, forming a group with strong bonds, common interests and shared experiences regarding their health issues, disease and treatment. The intervention was carried out in six meetings, which we will briefly present in the following part.



The Alatza Imaret monument.

Our first meeting with the community took place in the facilities of the Association of Cancer Patients. After a short introduction to the main idea of the project, the participants discussed and decided on the structure of the meetings that were to follow and proposed and agreed certain steps as necessary for developing the performance:

1. Acquaintance with the monument
2. Creating roles and stories
3. Exploring movement, posture and objects

4. Creating the storyline of the performance
5. Designing the scenery and costumes
6. Performing.

The second meeting was held in the monument itself. Participants were invited to observe, feel, move, imagine, think and discuss about Alatzá Imaret and their experiences. Role playing games, movement techniques, monologues and improvisations were introduced as ways to explore the monument and think about its different visitors throughout its long history. Short improvised stories were created and presented by the participants, roles were interchanged and different views were experienced through creative practices. The meeting concluded with the participants deciding on the roles they could develop for their performance such as a cleaning lady that is also the leading role, a refugee woman, a young girl living in the neighbourhood, a sex worker, a homeless man, a poet, a school teacher, and so on.

In our third meeting, we used movement, postures, tableau vivant, monologues and improvisation in order to elaborate on the stories and prepare the performance. Then the participants worked in pairs in order to experience the roles in the monument's space, develop relations and specify details of the stories. The objective of our fourth meeting was to find the links to connect all the stories in one scenario. Movement games, team building games, dance in pairs and reflective discussions were helpful in developing the script. In our next meeting we discussed and made decisions on the final links between the different stories, as well as the order of appearance, scenography and costumes. In the end, the participants repeated the performance four times and collaborated in order to agree on the details. Our last meeting was devoted to the implementation of the performance followed by a discussion on the shared experience of the community and interviews in focus groups with all the participants.

The Performance

The final performance consisted of 10 parts, each one with different fictional characters and plot. The main character was the cleaning lady of the monument. The role of the cleaning lady served as a connective element between the different stories. The storyline was not linear, including scenes of the everyday life of the cleaning lady in the monument, flashbacks in 1922, when a large number of refugees from Anatolia were transported to Greece, and a not clearly defined period of time in the past. The cleaning lady was 'magically' transferred in time and either observed or actively participated in the different stories.

The performance starts in the present, with the scene "Oh! Those walls!" presenting the cleaning lady considering the different incidents that might have happened in the monument throughout the years. She is referring to the walls of the building, as an element that remained unchanged, "what if they had eyes and could see...". She is then magically "transferred" in

1922, when she suddenly notices a woman sitting in the centre of the space crying and praying. Through a conversation with a young girl that lives in the neighbourhood and enters also into the next scene, we get informed that she is a refugee from Anatolia who found shelter with her children in Alatza Imaret.



The refugee woman dressed in black, hiding her face on her hands and crying.



Two women holding fans, gossiping about everyday matters and smiling.

In the next scenes, she remains once again in the background, observing two women arguing on love matters, conversations on a charity event that was going to take place in Alatza Imaret, a poet, wandering around while seeking inspiration and his talk with a homeless young man. The finishing scenes bring us back to the present. The cleaning lady is tired and can't wait to go home. However, when a schoolteacher with her pupils enters the space the cleaning lady

decides to stay and listens carefully to her narrating the story of the monument, facts about its construction, architectural elements and historic events that took place in it. At the end, the cleaning lady is left alone reflecting on her experience with gratitude and joy.



The cleaning lady and the teacher. The teacher is reading something while the cleaning lady is listening.

Findings

Data analysis brought up interesting insights referring to the community's experience and the concept of participation. Moreover, it highlighted matters of implementation of drama in participatory projects.

“Experiences like that give me strength and hope”

The participants' experience seemed to have positive effects in three different aspects: individual, community, and social (Sandell, 2002). At an individual level participants mentioned positive feelings, emotional expression, and improvement of everyday life. At a community level, participants felt that they strengthened their bonds, lived a new collective experience, collaborated for a common aim, and discovered new capabilities, skills, and dynamics while in a safe space. A member of the community confessed that *“the things we do together make us a stronger group. We try together, we laugh together, we make fun of each other and we understand; ourselves and the others”*.

Furthermore, we might argue that in a social context, the participants shared their experiences with their friends and family. As a member of the group mentioned *“I have shared my experience with everyone around me. I told them that we are making a performance about Alatzá Imaret and that we are part of the monument's current history”*. Also, they decided to be actively involved in cultural heritage issues in the future as one of the participants indicated *“I will visit more of the city's monuments in the near future”*.

“We made everything by ourselves! I still cannot believe it. We are all very proud”

The community members underlined that their active and equal participation in all stages of the performance making process was very important for two reasons: they accomplished their aim with effectiveness and they had the feeling of a shared authorship, which developed their self-esteem and their trust in the creative potential of their community.

The collective decision making processes and the discussions were based on the concept of consent in order to include everyone's point of view, making the community realise that everyone's opinions are equally important. One of the participants reflected on the matter saying *“it's very important the fact that we all participated and discussed and decided everything together. It makes our performance truly ours”*.

The use of drama as creative practice was welcomed by the participants, who mentioned its potential to engage with the monument, motivating them to observe and imagine, inspiring them to create fictional scenarios, and also communicate and express their feelings and thoughts. A member of the group reflected on their past experiences as a group saying *“our previous experiences in theatre were more like stage, this experience was more like life”* while another one focused on the importance of creativity and imagination mentioning *“I imagined a lot of stories that might have happened here. I feel like the stories we created might have happened at some point of the monument's history”*.

Participants also indicate that through theatre they were motivated to learn a lot about the city's past, to search and study resources and materials on the monument's history, mentioning *“these days I read and thought a lot about the history of Thessaloniki. But I also thought a lot about everyday people and their stories. That is something you never learn when you visit a monument”*. Another important outcome is that they expressed a critical attitude towards the main discourses about heritage. As one of the participants put it *“in museums we basically see informative labels that never include everyday people and their experiences, problems and life events. I will remember the stories we created more than the informative labels”*.

“History is human experience after all”

In the performance the participants presented Alatzá Imaret as a place where everyday people live and work, refugees and homeless people have found shelter, as a meeting point, as a safe space for making confessions and new friends and as a place of learning. They also approached a variety of topics, such as gender inequalities, immigration, unemployment, poverty and solidarity. A participant mentioned *“in Alatzá Imaret I imagined sad stories. Stories about refugees. I have heard similar stories from my grandfather. Sad things, hard lives. Just like contemporary refugees of course”*.

The performance, far from presenting historical data, reflects the creative response of the community in interpreting the past through drama. It is a mosaic of fictional events, characters

and periods of time, and at the same time communicates the participants' ideas, thoughts and feelings on Alatza Imaret. One woman observed *"we didn't focus on dates but I feel like I know what life was like in the neighbourhood a hundred years ago. I somehow remember it. I can dream of it"*.

Conclusion

Research findings confirmed outcomes of previous studies on the fields of Museum Theatre and drama. Drama created a safe space where ideas, emotions and relationships were observed, discussed, interpreted and performed. Participants approached "difficult" histories, such as immigration, poverty, unemployment and sexism, while they negotiated ideas, emotions and meanings and activated their imagination and creativity. They expressed their creative response, and developed a sense of belonging and empowerment.

Furthermore, the participatory and open ended character of the intervention demonstrated that Museum Theatre can be inclusive when focusing on democratic values. Through decision-making processes the participants set "the rules of the game" (Sternfeld, 2012), defined the process, co-developed their idea, co-created the scenario and roles, and co-designed the storyline and the artistic elements of the performance. Collaboration for a common goal and participatory art-based practices, proved to reinforce the active engagement of the community offering an experience of shared authority and inclusion which in our regard constitute essential elements towards cultural democracy and social cohesion.

To sum up, it is important to note that during the intervention we faced difficulties due to time and space restrictions combined with the participants' fragile physical condition. Furthermore, we were planning to continue working with the same community shortly after the intervention but the breakout of covid-19 cancelled our plans. Nevertheless, the further exploration of the connection between theatre, heritage and democracy lies at the core of our future research plans.

About the Authors

Elena Viseri is a PhD candidate at the University of Thessaly in the Department of Early Childhood Education. She studied Theatre in the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and holds a master degree in 'Aesthetic Education' (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki). She has worked as a drama teacher in primary education and adult education and as a researcher in the European Research Programme SMOOTH- H2020.

Niki Nikonanou is Associate Professor in Museum Education, at the Department of Early Childhood Education, University of Thessaly. Her research interests include theory and practice of museum-education, art education in museums (visual arts, theatre, music), participation and inclusion in cultural education, critical cultural mediation. She is partner in several research projects (Socrates, Euromed Heritage II, III, Interreg III, Chiron, Eunamus, H2020-Smooth). She has published books and articles in international scientific publications, journals and conference proceedings.

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Forum Theatre – The ultimate antidote for these times (or so I reckon)

Matthew Stewart

I recently had the pleasure of presenting workshops for Drama Queensland and Drama Australia about Forum Theatre. I'm currently working for a Perth organisation, Constable Care Foundation, which kindly funded these trips, however, the obvious question is "why?". Why go all the way over east to talk to drama teachers about "Theatre of the Oppressed" and Forum Theatre? I was pretty confident that most, if not all, drama teachers already possessed a good knowledge of Forum Theatre. However, what I wanted to achieve and what is becoming a personal mission, is my belief that not enough people, drama teachers included, are doing it! So, before I do my big sell, here's a little about me:

In the beginning

In 1992 I co-founded Darlinghurst Theatre Co. in Sydney with my good friend Glenn Terry. In 1999 we were approached by the now-defunct South Sydney City Council to do a bit of theatrical work with the local homeless community. From this was born the Milk Crate Theatre Co. which is where my Forum Theatre journey began. Since then, I have, through no choice of my own, become a bit of an "expert" in delivering Forum Theatre. I was the creative director for Mind Blank, a multi-award-winning mental health promotion company, and have worked with many local governments and NGOs delivering Forum Theatre.

My last 5 years have been spent in ten-week blocks with Year 8 to 10 Drama and non-drama students, helping them to devise and perform their own Forum Theatre work in and around Perth. I have also been writing and directing Forum Theatre incursions for WA schools, delivered by a team of professional actors. So, I know that along with hitting a good amount of curriculum items, what a powerful tool Forum Theatre is for having important conversations about big topics and stimulating critical thinking amongst the cast and audience.

Kids at Risk – We're doing it there too

Twice a year, we run a 1 to 2 week Forum Theatre program in remote and Regional communities of WA, primarily with Aboriginal students. Early on, it was decided that getting this cohort to do theatre was going to be a tough ask, so it was decided to make a film, which was a much more relatable media for this cohort. It is still Forum Theatre, the only difference is that the

first telling is a short film, devised and created by the students. The replay scenes happen after that.

We have taken that model into C.A.R.E (Curriculum and Reengagement in Education) schools and, for the last three years, Banksia Hill Juvenile Detention Centre. Generally, these groups, along with most non-drama groups, don't want to play drama games, so my advice is not to push it. Some groups don't want to play any games at all. In these cases, I make the process a lot more "talky" and get them to devise stories to act out through conversations. Strangely though, I never have any problems finding participants in these groups willing to give acting a go and they are usually naturals and take direction well.



Students at Karalundi College, near Meekatharra, learning about film-making to create stories about drug and alcohol abuse.

Over the last thirty years I have done Forum Theatre for children, young people, young people at risk, young people in the criminal justice system, people with disabilities and people experiencing homelessness. I strongly believe that you can do Forum Theatre with any group and that it benefits all.

Bring whatever you have to the table

When I first started participating in Forum Theatre and, later on, directing, writing and teaching Forum Theatre, I stuck pretty closely to the games and exercises outlined by Augusto Boal. Slowly I started including different things. For instance, I'm a bit of a fan of David Mamet's and William H. Macy's Practical Aesthetics, so I started including some exercises from that into my workshops. I believed that it would help the participants to connect with each other more convincingly and become more agile adapting to changes the audience were throwing at them. Generally, that had good results so I stuck with it. I am also a big fan of Keith Johnstone and include some status work in workshops if time permits. Whatever your pet methodology is, I recommend that you bring it into the mix and see how it goes.

We all tend to build up a toolkit of techniques that work for us and devising Forum Theatre is no different. Use whatever tools you think will work with your students or whatever your particular curriculum demands. There are no wrongs here. Forum Theatre is amazingly adaptable to a practitioner's whims and will most likely work no matter what direction you take it in.



Year 10 students from Ocean Reef Senior High School during their forum theatre performance about isolation and bullying.

Here's how to do it in 3 easy steps

As I mentioned earlier on, don't overthink it, just do it. I am by no means suggesting you ignore the work of our past masters, however at some stage I suggest you put down those volumes on Forum Theatre and just give it a crack.

I won't go into ideas for warming up, bonding groups or drama games to extend them as forum actors. Most of you are drama teachers so I'm confident you can work out that bit yourself. I'll share all the things that have worked for me when I publish *my* book on Forum Theatre. In the meantime:

Step one – Decide the focus topic

I went through a journey here over many years and I'm just going to give you the end point. In brief, what brought me here was wanting to have difficult conversations about serious issues impacting us all, without triggering participants with lived experience.

For me the best method is to split a group into smaller groups of 4 or 5, getting them to discuss and list challenges that are impacting them and agreeing on one person in their group that will present those ideas to the larger group. Importantly, I ask them to feedback on any topics they don't wish to explore. You scribe all the small group's ideas (and exclusions) on a whiteboard, then get the groups to decide on a focus topic from the list. Whatever gets the most votes from the smaller groups determines your focus topic.

Step two – Devise a story in 3 to 4 key scenes

Tableaux is a handy tool here however I have gotten by without them, especially with non-drama groups who respond better to facilitated discussions.

As above, I get them to work in groups of 4 to 5. I also like to start at the ending. I get participant groups to create a tableau about a crisis that could arise as a result of the focus topic. Then I ask them to turn the tableau into a moving scene. From there I get them to build scenes, using the same methodology, for the beginning and middle of their stories. This gives the students a good starting point. What they need to consider in their stories is:

- Is it realistic?
- Does the story have a beginning, middle, and end? I.E: Do the characters have a journey (especially the protagonist).
- Are there opportunities for change? There's not much point if the protagonist is a powerless victim. There need to be better ways to behave and approach the situations depicted.

For non-drama students, I simply get them into their groups to discuss what a good story would be about the focus topic that ends in a crisis.

Step three – Run the scenes and replay them

Now this might be the bit where some people baulk, simply because being the facilitator, or “Joker” as Augusto Boal phrased it, may seem like a hard gig. My advice is to not make it hard for yourself by trying to “do” anything. Sure, there may be an element of shaping and guiding, however predominately it is about asking. I've presented student's work with no idea where to start and simply asked the audience, “*where do you think the opportunity of change is?*”. If someone gives an idea or suggestion that I believe is unhelpful (or even downright silly or trying to sabotage the process), I'll ask the audience if they think it will help. I use terms like “*does everyone agree*” or “*does anyone disagree*” a lot. Basically, I think the key to being a good “Joker” is to get the audience to do all the work for you. When in doubt, ask questions.

In terms of how to do it, my favoured method is to start off by allowing the audience to freeze the action on stage when they see or hear something they think should be different, to avert the crisis at the end. I may get the actors on stage to act out that suggestion or I might ask the audience to get up and act out the idea themselves. That bit is completely up to you and I'll add a bit about that next.

Some of the talented people I work with prefer to run the whole scene, have a discussion about what just happened, then get suggestions for what could have happened differently. Then they get the actors to take on the suggestions or get the audience members to come up (if they want). That works too. Generally, I believe that if you are facilitating discussions about the focus topic and trying out different ways to get around tough situations, you are nailing it, no matter your preferred way of running replays.

Once again, and I've said it before: Just give it a go.

Now a little on getting audience members up:

Is getting the “Spect-actors” on stage really that important?

First up, I know I've been saying “audience” instead of “spect-actors” in this article. The reason is that I really hate that term. There is no particular reason, so please forgive me.

Now I struggled with this for many years. An integral part of Augusto Boal's “Theatre of the Oppressed” was getting audience members on stage to act out their own suggestions. The theory being, that only they can really know how to implement the behavioural change they have expressed.

On the other hand, I have seen whole rooms close down when the first person is invited on stage, thinking “if I give a suggestion, they are going to pull me up there”. Being in front of other people is some people's worst nightmare, however I want their opinions too. Sometimes I have seen around 6 to 10 people dominate a discussion simply because they are more extroverted than the others there.

I have often also felt that I am ticking a box once I persuade someone to get up, like a little voice in my head is saying “*this is **proper** Forum Theatre now*”. Once I had a group of predominantly parents watching their kids do a Forum Theatre show about drugs. I could see a mass of arms crossing and eyes being cast down when I asked the first person to get up, so I decided to stop trying with that group. It worked a treat; the audience feedback was tremendous and nobody got up that night.

Don't get me wrong, when you get a group (and groups do have their own personalities) that are up for it, getting audience participation on stage is fantastic. All I'm saying is that it is not always 100% necessary, so don't be hard on yourself if you get one of those groups that want to sit back and suggest things for the actors instead. It's the conversations and the collective solutions that are the real important stuff.

In Conclusion

I honestly don't know if this is going to convince anyone to do Forum Theatre for the first time or do Forum Theatre more. I hope so. If you've made it to the end of this article, the least I can say is “thankyou”. I'm always happy to discuss Forum Theatre and would love to hear your journeys, so flick me an email if you have any questions or would like to give it a go:

matt@constablecare.com

About the Author

Matt Stewart has decades of experience as a professional theatre practitioner, manager, trainer, and facilitator. He was co-founder and General Manager of Darlinghurst Theatre Company and Darlo Drama acting school from 1992 until 2004, and was instrumental in overseeing the rapid growth of both companies during that time. He was also a founding member and regular performer of Milk Crate Theatre for the homeless, where he fulfilled the role of facilitator/joker. He has successfully adapted the forum style of theatre for Access Week, youth at risk in Western Sydney, YWCA Canberra, Hornsby Council, and Mind Blank Inc, where he worked as head writer, director, trainer, and facilitator. He has toured Australia with Mind Blank Inc using Forum Theatre to raise awareness of Mental Health issues in youth and suicide prevention. Most recently in the NT and Northern NSW.

Matt is currently the Arts and Education Manager at the Constable Care Foundation in Perth, Western Australia. He devises, writes, and directs Forum Theatre shows delivered by a team of professional actors into WA secondary schools. Concurrently, he runs a program enabling school students to perform their own Forum Theatre shows with topics of their choosing.

Matt is spending increasingly more time working in regional and remote communities in WA and with youth at risk, including regular sessions at Banksia Hill Youth Detention Centre. He is currently experimenting with film as a medium to engage with this demographic, while maintaining the Forum Theatre model to encourage further discussion and critical thinking around the chosen topic.

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Decolonising Arts Practices – how drama teachers and practitioners can move away from the Eurocentric hierarchy of arts prestige

Bina Bhattacharya

This essay is adapted from a 90-minute workshop delivered as part of the AntiDote Drama Conference 2023 and as part of the PYT Fairfield Ensemble Program.

The discourse on theatre, film and drama in Australia is finally catching up with what everyone with eyes and ears has been saying for a long time – that what we refer to as “drama”, or acting and creating for the stage and screen – has a race problem, a cultural diversity problem. My high school drama studies were 20 years ago. At 37, after a long hiatus from the arts in my twenties to finally making it as a successful writer, director, dramaturg and creative producer, I can confidently connect the dots and say that high school drama is symptomatic of, if not the root of, widely discussed issues of representation and access across Australia.

I run an ensemble program for young artists aged 18-28 at Powerhouse Youth Theatre (PYT) Fairfield, Western Sydney’s leading professional theatre company with a focus on multicultural youth. Western Sydney is home to one in ten Australians and 50% of Sydney’s residents, yet we receive 3% of national arts funding, or approximately \$7 per resident, compared with residents in the city’s East who receive \$55. The issues around access run deep – most of the high schools in the multicultural heartland where I work do not offer high school drama. Why? Because migrant, working-class parents cannot see the value in studying it. Our PYT Ensemble members get free tickets to theatre shows through our partnerships with Bell Shakespeare and Belvoir St Theatre. For many of our young people, this is their first trip to the theatre, ever. Even with agreeable parents, the transportation and cost barriers are too great.

But what of the rare young person from a migrant background who IS lucky and tenacious enough to pursue the study of drama?

I was an unusual case – I grew up in the Federal electoral division of Reid that straddles Sydney’s Western and Inner Western suburbs, matching my biracial identity. My father was

Indian, born in Kolkata and was a Professor of Economics at Sydney University. My mother is white, having grown up in Adelaide, and also with an academic background. I had a lot of privileges the young people I work with now don't have – middle-classness, academic parents, a migrant father who had qualifications recognised in Australia, mostly due to his PhD acquired in Manchester, and an Anglo mum who played good cop to my father's bad cop, letting me go on a bus by myself from my teens to watch a play or film in the city, as well as inculcating me in lots of white person arts stuff – ABC Classic FM, Stephen Sondheim, Opera.

So the time came when I studied drama for my HSC. My public all-girls school in Sydney's west did fortunately have eight students willing to take a risk on a "low-scaling" subject. Here's where it gets interesting. I was an outstanding student. I won't tell you what my ATAR was, but I'm confident most of you reading this would be jealous of it. But the subjects I received the lowest marks for? Drama, where I wrote a play, and Extension English 2, where I made a video with cheap equipment. Given my clear talent for writing and drama as evidenced by my career and my ability to do well in non-creative subjects, it's always been baffling to me that my academic and creative abilities didn't translate to doing well in the subjects I was most passionate about.

Drama teachers, markers, assessors, head of curriculum, much like the broader arts landscape – artistic directors, playwrights, programmers, producers – are overwhelmingly white and Anglo. Those with the most clout and experience in the industry do not represent the immense cultural diversity of Australia in the same way drama teachers do not reflect their students.

When I was studying drama at high school, all the movements we studied were from Europe. We did 'Australian theatre' but this was focused on white Australians and occasionally First Nations playwrights. There was nothing in the curriculum that explored theatrical and storytelling styles from the non-European world.

All of this, the centring of white and European perspectives and sensibilities to the exclusion of all others, is a legacy of colonialism. Colonial thinking is rooted in the idea that Europeans are inherently more evolved, advanced, sophisticated – more *humane* than non-Europeans. It's a message so pervasive and insidious that all of us have internalised aspects of it. Even young artists of colour, desperately trying to get good marks in drama like I was twenty years ago like good migrant children do, know that they need to offer something palatable to a white lens, that their probably-white teachers and markers will like, and usually this involves a level of self-orientalising. If we were to be brave enough to make a work imbued with our culture, our humour, our sensibility, our artistic style we know deep down that there would be no one equipped to assess it.

When we talk about 'decolonisation' we are quite literally talking about 'undoing the work of colonisation'. It's about recognising the rich artistic and storytelling histories all over the non-European world. It is about viewing non-European people as full human beings with rich

inner lives. The origins of Post-colonial studies is usually traced to Edward Said in his seminal work *Orientalism*.

All of this can feel very abstract, so allow me to delve into how I explore these ideas in a practical, concrete way in my workshop.

Let's start with what we can probably all agree is a high watermark of European culture: *Don Giovanni*. Full disclosure: I LOVE *Don Giovanni*. On my bucket list is to one day direct *Don Giovanni* for the stage. I'm also a firm believer that anyone, from any background, can love opera. (This opinion is in stark contrast to Pierre Bourdieu's sociological theory of 'habitus' explored in *Habitus and Field: General Sociology Volume 2*) that posits that opera can only be appreciated by people who have been exposed to it, thereby cementing one's love of it as a marker of social status.) When I run my decolonisation workshop to the PYT Ensemble I show them the first ten minutes and last ten minutes of *Don Giovanni*. Every year, it piques the interest of the young people in the room who say how much they'd love to see a full-scale opera show and how much they loved the music, set design and costumes. I screen the Metropolitan Museum of New York's 2011 version, but there are some great versions available on YouTube for free.

After the goosebumps from *Don Giovanni*'s descent into hell have settled, I ask the participants to list exactly what they saw as objectively as they can. Costumes. Music. Singing. Performing in a language other than English. A duel with swords. A dramatic death sequence. Ghosts.

No matter the background of the participants, and bearing in mind that some of the young people I do this workshop with are newly arrived to Australia with no exposure to opera or classical music, no one EVER laughs during *Don Giovanni*. On some deep level all participants know to treat the material with reverence.

I contrast this by showing a trailer and excerpt from PYT Fairfield's brilliant show *Dorr-e Dari: A Poetic Crash Course in the Language of Love*. *Dorr-e Dari* is a bilingual show devised and performed by three Hazara refugees from Afghanistan. It blends poetry, language, history, fables, and dramatic retelling of anecdotes from the performer's own lives to make a spectacular, rich celebration of culture and storytelling from the non-European world. It is the most truly decolonised piece of theatre I have ever seen in Australia.

I ask the participants again to list what they saw. Singing. Dancing. Performing in a language other than English. But why is *Don Giovanni* \$300 per ticket, and *Dorr-e Dari* is \$30? The participants correctly observe that *Dorr-e Dari* has much lower production values than *Don Giovanni*, with just three performers, recorded music and a simple stage set up. I push them – but WHY? Why couldn't we theoretically scale up *Dorr-e Dari* with a full live band with Afghan musicians, more performers, more elaborate set ups? Because if we scaled up, we'd have to charge more per ticket, and we just couldn't justify that in terms of the disposable income of

our audience, nor the recognition or demand for the show. The Met can stage a large-scale production safe in the knowledge that it has a pool of affluent, wealthy audience members with leisure time as its core audience. In Australia it is no different for our ‘prestige’ arts, and that’s not even including issues around subsidising.

Then I show the first ten minutes and last ten minutes of *Disco Dancer*, an iconic Bollywood disco film from the 80s that is a cornerstone of my childhood the way *Star Wars* is for some people. Its story can only be described as operatic: Anil, a poor busker from the slums, taught about music from his Uncle, becomes a famous Disco sensation known as ‘Jimmy’. Jimmy must fight off the recording mafia who are determined to squash the threat he poses to his mediocre counterparts at their label and win the girl, who happens to be the daughter of the evil head of the label, Mr Oberoi.

At about the 1 hour 40 mark, Jimmy is scheduled to front a crowd and perform. But there is an assassination attempt afoot – Mr Oberoi’s minions have planned to hand Jimmy a guitar connected to 5,000 volts. Jimmy’s mother learns of the plan and intercepts the guitar at the crucial moment, saving her son but killing herself. Jimmy is so distraught he cannot play anymore. At the World Disco Championships, he is catatonic on stage and angry audience members pelt their shoes at him. Not even Rita, his girlfriend, can lift him from his funk. Suddenly, Uncle appears and reprises the song they sang together from Jimmy’s childhood. He throws the guitar to Jimmy and screams, “If you don’t sing your mother dies forever!”

Finally Jimmy sings: a rousing Bollywood classic called “Yaad Aa Raha Hai” (“I’m Remembering Your Love”). The memory of his mother fuels him and he delivers a breathtaking performance. But Oberoi’s gangstas arrive at the last minute and attempt to assassinate him again, this time with a rifle. Now it’s Uncle’s turn to sacrifice himself for Jimmy. He dies in Jimmy’s arms. A riot breaks out and Jimmy beats each of the mafia members with hand-to-hand combat.

When I show *Disco Dancer* to people who have never seen Bollywood before, I get a range of reactions. Some people are bewildered. Some people cannot listen to Bollywood music – it hurts their ears, like spicy food hurts people’s tongues if they’re not used to it. I usually get a few giggles. I challenge the gigglers: why is it funny? Does it not have all the same elements as *Don Giovanni* – singing, dancing, duelling, dramatic death scenes, operatic storylines, flashy production design, performing in a language other than English? Why do we instinctively respect *Don Giovanni* but see *Disco Dancer* as a bit ridiculous and extra? And this is the crux: we are not trained in appreciating art forms that deviate too much from the Euro-centric canon, and so we view stylistic choices from those art forms as gaudy and in poor taste.

Some young people I show *Disco Dancer* to are very familiar with, and big lovers of, Bollywood. Interestingly, not JUST people from the sub-continent. Go to *Disco Dancer* on YouTube and you’ll see loving comments from Nigeria, Croatia, Turkey, UAE. More comments in the Cyrillic alphabet than I can count. It was the second-highest grossing film in the Soviet Union ever,

as well as the highest-grossing foreign film there. Why? Eastern Europe has no linguistic or religious ties to South Asia. I would argue it's the *sensibility* that is so universal. In the English-speaking world, we are taught that good, serious art shows restraint. Prestige Australian films make a virtue of sparse, affected dialogue and repressed men of few words as protagonists. In Australia, this is usually coupled with some horribly tedious true crime backstory and some landscape shots, all remnants of a confused, colonised country that is obsessed with the rural setting and our history as a penal colony.

One very smart Lebanese-Australian young woman also observed that the *values* in *Disco Dancer* speak to ethnic people – the core love story is always between the hero and his mother, with the wife/girlfriend as an afterthought. Many ethnic women in particular see this as a wholesome counterpoint to what they perceive as decadent Western soap operas where girls kiss boys openly.

I make my final point by showing the opening of another film from my childhood. My Indian father was obsessed with the 1988 version of *The Adventures of Hercules* starring wrestler Lou Ferrigno. The director is credited as Lewis Coates, but his real name was Luigi Cozzi. The film was panned for its terrible acting, bad dubbing from Italian and gratuitous, scantily-clad women in Roman sandals. There's no doubt my father loved it for some of its more exploitative elements. But there's something deeper going on here, beyond the wonderfully 'extra' Italian sensibility.

The Adventures of Hercules opens with a badly animated night sky, an omniscient voice-over from Zeus, and a round table of all the Greek gods discussing what to do with Hercules.

Let's jump quickly to *The Mahabarat*, an epic soap opera that depicts the ancient Sanskrit epic, sacred to Hindus. *The Mahabarat*, despite its soapy coverage, phony-looking sets and hokey special effects, brought the whole of India to a standstill every Sunday when it was broadcast in the 80s. Its spiritual depth touched Indians of all religions and castes. Indians prayed in real time during the miracles depicted on their tiny TVs.

And how does *The Mahabarat* start? With a badly animated night sky, an omniscient voice over from Time, and a round table of Gods discussing what to do.

When my Baba loved this seemingly gauche portrayal of Hercules, what he really loved was the similarities to *The Mahabarat*. When he watched *Hercules*, a cinematic realisation of Greek Gods, he was given a chance to feel at home, watching concrete depictions of multiple Gods in the Hindu tradition.

So. When your non-Anglo, non-Western European drama students put something of their tastes, their humour, their values, their sensibility, the genres they like for reasons that might not immediately meet the eye into their work – how do you mark it? How do you determine its worth?

You can't.

But having the courage to confront your own biases and exploring art forms from the non-European world can be your first step to decolonising your mind to give those students a fighting chance, until we achieve a teaching cohort that better reflects the full richness of cultural diversity coming through the next generation of Australian drama students.

About the author

Bina Bhattacharya is an AWGIE-nominated feature film writer and award-winning filmmaker from Campbelltown in Sydney's southwest. Her credits include "Here Out West", the upcoming "From All Sides" and the music video "What You See", featured by Rolling Stone India. She also works as a Creative Producer – Youth and Emerging at PYT Fairfield.

Acknowledgement

My insights into *The Mahabarat* were influenced by a lecture delivered by Professor Devleena Ghosh, Honorary Professor in the School of Communications in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences as part of their "Colonialism and Modernity" subject in 2004.

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State and Territory Associations' Year Reflections for 2023





DRAMA NEW SOUTH WALES

President: Kelly Young

Drama Australia Liaison Officer: Amy Gill

After many years of dedicated leadership, Sonia Byrnes stepped down from her role as President in September 2022. We extend our profound gratitude to Sonia for her unwavering commitment, especially during the challenging COVID years. In her stead, Kelly Young has taken up the role with determination and enthusiasm.

The Annual General Meeting in March saw the formation of a new and robust committee:

- Kelly Young, President
- Amy Gill, VP Professional Learning & DALO
- Alyssa Clarke, VP Finance
- Georgia Andreacchio, VP Advocacy
- Najee Tannous, VP Communications
- Isabella Christenson, JEDA Editor
- Dan Jones, Rural Officer
- Stacey Whitmore, eMAG Editor (Communications portfolio member)
- Clare Colebrook, Professional Learning portfolio member
- Natasha Saboisky, Professional Learning portfolio member
- Christine Huynh, Communications portfolio member
- Hannah Date, Communications portfolio member

Despite the fresh makeup of the committee, our mission remains steadfast: to offer rich experiences for Drama educators and students alike. We anticipate broadening our range of projects and activities, as the reinforced committee promises to drive Drama NSW's vision forward.

As we transition into 2024, a rebranding initiative is underway, including a comprehensive overhaul of our website. In tandem, we are embedding our core values into the Drama NSW Constitution, representing our dedication to creative excellence, focused advocacy, community engagement, and top-tier branding and communication standards.

Drama NSW remains committed to prudent financial management to bolster our projects and activities. The fiscal year has seen challenges in generating profits from our Professional Learning Events and Membership uptake, a lingering impact from the COVID-19 pandemic. Our 2024 Professional Learning Program is anticipated to fortify our membership and revenue streams in the forthcoming financial year.

The success of the 2022/2023 Professional Learning Programs is a testament to the dedication of Drama NSW members and our collaboration with esteemed organisations such as Milkcrate Theatre, ATYP and WICKED The Musical Australia.

Highlights include:



***Drama Australia Conference: Antidote:** Our delegates presented outstanding work in advocacy, research, and teaching. Our heartfelt gratitude goes to Drama Australia and especially to Christine Hatton for orchestrating the event.*



***WICKED The Musical:** A riveting experience for members across the state. Alongside the performance, members indulged in panel discussions and set explorations, thanks to Wicked The Musical Australia.*



***Drama for Wellbeing Day:** Led by professionals from ATYP Sydney, Milk Crate Theatre, and Youth Off The Streets, this day was a transformative learning experience, underscoring drama's impact on wellbeing.*

Regrettably, the regional event, 'Taming of The Shrew,' was cancelled due to low ticket sales. A renewed approach to supporting our regional members is underway.

Keeping a finger on the pulse of discussions on Drama Peeps, Drama NSW recognises the community's advocacy efforts. We remain dedicated to bolstering our network of Drama educators. A robust advocacy program for 2024 is underway.



President: Stephanie Tudor
Drama Australia Liaison Officer: Sam Neill

Hello from Queensland!

Drama Queensland have had another great year of spotlighting key advocacy communication, engaging publications and exciting professional learning opportunities for our members.

Our State Conference, ODYSSEY 23, took place in May and it was fantastic to be able to come back together for another conference with our delegates. We always have a strong turnout of around 300 people each year and we love the energy and commitment we see from teachers across the state at this event. We had some insightful key notes this year from Dr John Nicholas Saunders, Dr Tricia Clark-Fookes, Professor Emeritus Brad Haseman and Dr Sharon Hogan as well as some refreshing insights from practicing teachers. Our industry partners were front and centre at our IP treasure hunt and our delegates had quite the journey engaging with them. We also received excellent feedback from our members and we are looking forward to continuing planning for our 2024 conference. Our biggest highlight from the conference was the launching of our new games posters, available on our website to purchase, as a resource used in all classroom, when you need a game idea to accompany key learning.

Early in Term 4 we ran our new PD offering, DQ Toolkits which replaces our annual Nuts and Bolts PD. This newly formed professional development day is not only designed to accompany our new DQ Toolkit resources for members, however, provide experienced knowledge-based opportunities for attendees to build their professional networks whilst attending workshops that offer practical strategies and ideas in relation to the teaching of Drama. This year we had a wide range of contributors across both Primary and Secondary contexts. This was a great day with very practical ideas and help for the classroom. Throughout the year we have also engaged our Primary teachers with an online webinar PD, our Senior teachers with our Subject report webinar as well as our annual external assessment potluck PD, preparing teachers for teaching the external exam texts for Year 12 students.

Advocacy has been a big focus this year as we continue to navigate our changing curriculum. Our year continues with conversations regarding our curriculum reform and draft syllabus feedback junctures to better improve the teaching and learning of Drama in Queensland. We worked with the Queensland Advocates for Arts Education (QAAE) and Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) as well as key stakeholders to continue working in the revision space of these endeavours to ensure a strong and positive outcome for students across Queensland. We wish to thank our wonderful community who have overwhelmingly supported these tight feedback deadlines and we remain hopeful continuing these discussions moving forward.

Our publications team continued their great work with our monthly DQ News and working on our annual journal. The committee members responsible continue to produce high quality communication for our members and this has been received well throughout the year.

Moving forward into 2024, we aim to continue our efforts with our professional development offerings and publications as well as advocating for Drama education with our members and affiliates. We have had such a productive and busy year and we can't wait to keep the momentum of Drama Queensland going.

Take care everyone, until 2024 😊



President: Zoe Tidemann

Drama Australia Liaison Officer: Rebecca Hassam

Drama South Australia has had a very full year of both success and challenge. It is inspiring to consider the things achieved by our association, considering the nature of our professional lives. Key pieces of work the board has undertaken on behalf of our members and the Drama community in South Australia during 2022-23 include:

Senior Drama Officer and SACE Review

With an identified need to review our relatively new Senior Drama curriculum, and additionally, a need from our community to have representation in the Senior Drama space, the DSA Board appointed a Senior Drama Officer who has been working with the board, and SACE, to plan a successful pathway for a review process to take place in the coming year and this work will continue with board renewal.

Industry Partner Renewal

Our industry partners from 2022- 2023, Windmill Theatre Co, Slingsby, UNISA, The Adelaide Festival Center, centrED, Dream Big and the Adelaide Film Festival, and our newer partners State Theatre Company and Flinders University have helped us enrich offerings to members and provide an invaluable connection between Drama teachers and the arts industry. Drama SA has made huge strides in attracting new partners and strengthening connections with existing ones and look forward to the impact these collaborations will have in the future.

Professional Learning Program for 2022-23

DSA successfully planned and delivered, collaborated on or supported several PL opportunities for our community and members.

- Clarifying and Resource Sharing (DSA)
- Primary Teachers Music, Dance and Drama (DSA, Ausdance SA, Kodaly, OSASA, ANCA, ASME)

- Commedia dell'arte Workshop (DSA)
- Senior Drama Forum (DSA)
- Theater Makers Award Pilot Program (DSA, Flinders University, STCSA)
- CentreEd and State Opera Theatre Tours and Talks (CentreEd)
- Step Outside The Classroom CentreEd Online PL series (CentreEd)
- Musical Theatre Workshop (STCSA)
- Shake N Stirs The Twits Teachers Professional Learning Package (CentreEd)

Theatre Makers Award Program

An initiative and collaboration between Flinders University, State Theatre Company and Drama SA, our Industry Partnership Officer has been at the heart of the pilot program for what will develop into a wonderful opportunity for our Year 11 Drama students across the state.

Professional Learning Community

A growing Professional Learning community has communicated, met and participated in a huge amount of professional development across the year. A big thanks goes to our board members for their unwavering commitment to teachers who need upskilling and their ability to create community and belonging in this space.

Drama Australia

Our Drama Australia Liaison Officer (DALO) and President have regularly participated with our national peak body to share thoughts and reach a consensus on key issues. Some of those issues were: numbers in Drama, advocacy for Drama education, developments in the Australian Curriculum: The Arts, the state of senior secondary Drama, teacher training, artist training and emerging artist pathways.

A huge thanks to our members: your support, curiosity and ideas are what drives the work of DSA in the advocacy and professional learning space. Our subject is richer for your contributions and the young people you work with tirelessly everyday value your insight and commitment. Drama, and the Arts, fuel society in such a myriad of ways and you are the life blood of this important subject in our curriculum. Every day, you inspire the young people that you walk alongside.



President: Michelle Weeding
Drama Australia Liaison Officer: Kelly Howell

Over the last 2.5 years the Drama Tasmania committee have worked hard to secure more members, build funds and provide PL opportunities.

In the last 12 months

- Drama Tas has continued to be our members voice at a national level
- Drama Tas has voiced member concerns at a state education level. When our members write to us for assistance we respond.
- In August last year we ran a conference @ UTAS Campus in Launceston – The purpose was to support drama teachers in the introduction of First Nations study into the curriculum, in line with V9 of the Australian Curriculum. We had guests from Victoria and high profile palawa community members at this conference. This was a wonderful experience and a conference we were very proud of presenting.
- This year we ran a conference at The Hedberg, University of Tasmania in Hobart; Ignite23. A great opportunity to share ideas in such a creative space. Members loved our speed date sharing session and participating in a variety of professional workshops. We gained a few new members as well as new committee members
- The Drama Tas website www.dramatas.org.au continues to be updated with links, lessons and easy to download Drama Australia publications.
- Last year we introduced Drama Tas Talks and this year we have recorded 2 podcasts that will be released in the coming months.
- As a committee we have discussed the release of a newsletter to be sent to members twice a year. We are in the development phase of this initiative.
- The committee is also in the process of developing a Life Membership Award in recognition of services to Drama Tasmania

Without a more secure membership base and more people willing to come onto the committee, Drama Tas has a limited future. Our antidote for survival is members and members who participate in the PL opportunities that are offered. It is our hope that as a professional association we continue to survive and garner support from our Tasmanian Drama Teacher community.



Some photos from Ignite23.



DRAMA TERRITORY

President: Mark Bunnett

Drama Australia Liaison Officer: Sally Crawford

Over the last 12 months Drama Territory's membership has steadied at 19 people, made up of primary, middle, secondary teachers and teaching artists. The members are primarily from Darwin, with a couple in Alice Springs and one on the homelands of Utopia. Over the last 12 months we have endeavoured to provide PD opportunities to introduce drama teachers and artists to fresh ideas and concepts to enhance their own practice in the classroom and in the performance space.

At the end of September 2022 four Drama Territory members attended the Drama SA conference, REIMAGINE in Adelaide. The day was jam packed with enriching PD opportunities and the chance to network with our SA colleagues, and a time for us as Drama Territory members to get to know each other a little more in a more relaxed setting. There were some really challenging discussions held with other senior secondary teachers around the new curriculum and the realisation that we all face very similar issues in the classroom.



Drama Territory members Mark Bunnett, Scott Gooding, Maritia Smith and Gillian Furniss catching up with John Nicholas Saunders at Drama SA conference Reimagine.

In October 2022 we held an Augmented Reality workshop in October which offered participants the opportunity to develop exciting new skills that could definitely be used in performance, combining AR with live actors. It was a fantastic way of easily incorporating technology and drama.

2023 began with visiting artist Emily Goddard in Darwin working with students and teachers in classrooms and also conducting a full day Bouffon workshops for Drama Territory members. Emily's skills in closing, physical theatre and devising are exceptional and everyone who worked with her agreed that she really pushed their personal and professional boundaries working in

This was closely followed up by a visit from a team of artists from Zen Zen Zo who also worked in classrooms with teachers and students. They also brought their school performance of ROMEO and JULIET with them which was shared with an enthralled audience, demonstrating how little in the way of set and props is required to tell such a big story!

Drama Territory continues to be an active and innovative association that continually is trying to find ways to support members and overcome the tyranny of distance by providing quality professional development opportunities, and to create links between industry and education.



Above left: Augmented Reality workshop.



Above right: Team from Zen Zen Zo.

A big shout out to the 2023 committee for all of their work so far;

DALO/Secretary – Sally Crawford

Vice President – Gillian Furniss (our first Alice Springs based committee member!)

Treasurer – Thevi Chelliah

Committee member – Tahnee Cvirn



Getting our Bouffon on!



President: Andrew Byrne

Drama Australia Liaison Officer: Jane Carter

2023 has been a busy and exciting year for Drama Victoria. Lots of things happening, change, new beginnings and building on the successes of the past year.

Susan Cooper moved on from Executive Officer (2020-2023) and took on the role of Director of Community Development. Kelly McConville took over the role of Executive Officer at the beginning of 2023 and the transition has been seamless. Susan left us in October and we would like to thank her for her tireless work and ingenuity that saw the organisation through Covid and resulted in the relationship with the DET and the funded opportunities. Suzie Martens, our Administrator, continues to be the glue of the organisation. Continuing Committee Members in 2023: Andrew Byrne, Jane Carter, Nicholas Waxman, Tim Roach, Danielle Hradsky, Ashleigh Phillips, Amara Jensen and Laurence Page. New Committee members in 2023: Sam Mackie, Kathryn McLeod and Hayley Gamble-Curran. The committee continue to contribute valuably to the organisation through the development of resources, providing mentoring and advice, and the development of programs.

Contractors: Director of Community Development, Pamela Peelen; Curriculum Manager: Nick Waxman; Expert Teachers: Claire Wearne, Kate Ellis, Rebekah Walsh, Jane Carter. These contractors add significant value to our organisation as representatives committed to our vision and core values.

Some highlights of 2023

Blended arts Program: We are in the third year of this program delivering two terms of a drama program to 15 regional/rural primary schools, grades 3-6. As part of the program we have developed a further 36 videos/lessons/resources that are freely available to anyone through our Vimeo channel (Drama Victoria Presents).

Next Stage Program: We are in the first year of this program. The program delivers a half or full day workshop for high ability students (F-12) teaching 21st Century Skills. A suite of resources have been created that are also freely available on our Vimeo channel.

VCE Drama/Theatre Studies Resources: We continue to develop high quality resources and workshops for VCE studies including: research packs, student days, teacher PL, chief assessor videos, trial written exams, etc. These continue to be highly desired and we continue to refine the process and quality of resources.

One-off workshops/PL: Unfortunately, some of these were cancelled due to low uptake. Even offering them in hybrid form. We did have two successful workshops this year on weekends with Frantic Assembly and Zen Zen Zo. Teacher as artist workshops seem to be popular and we are endeavouring to continue with this through 2024.



Zen Zen Zo.

State Conference: “Beyond the Looking Glass” at Melbourne University Nov 28/29. The conference will be promoting new curricula, new ways of learning, new ways of teaching – new ways of thinking, doing, and even being! We are thrilled and really looking forward to sharing and celebrating with our Drama community.

Connection Festival and First Nations PL: The Connections Festival for years 7-10 was developed with Monash University pre-Service Teachers, using a commissioned artwork by First Nations artist Chrissyray Weetra. The festival provides a terms worth of lessons that culminate in a performance devised by the students in response to the artwork. This festival program is available Semester 1 and 2 over 2023/24. We are intending to return to in person performances in 2024.

Time to Act: The Time to Act project is a partnership between Drama Victoria and Deakin University’s Centre for Regenerating Futures. Our aim is to build a professional learning

community for teachers interested in sharing practices in drama pedagogy and theatre as approaches to education for climate change and climate justice. The Time to Act: Sustainability and Climate Justice Professional Learning Workshop, held on July 15, 2023 at Bunjil Place, was a beacon of hope for educators seeking effective strategies to instil environmental awareness, climate justice, and socio-ecological well-being in their students. Facilitated by Jo Raphael and Mary Walker from Deakin University, this workshop was a transformative experience that left participants inspired and ready to tackle the critical issues of our time.



Time to Act workshop participants.



Time to Act presenters, Jo Raphael and Mary Walker.

Presentations at ALEA and EduTech conferences: Engaging with other associations and promoting our work via conferences are a part of our strategic plan to enhance understanding of our organisation and the impact of our activities. The ALEA presentation was an opportunity to engage literacy teachers with how to utilise Process Drama in the classroom. The workshop was incredibly well-received and we now have plans to run a full-day workshop for them in 2024. Kelly was invited to present at the EduTech conference and spoke about our partnership with the Department of Education on the Blended Arts and Next Stage projects. The key contention of her presentation was encouraging other arts organisations to think about how such a partnership might raise the profile of the arts in education. Again, this presentation was very well received.

Presentations at Universities: Our Community Engagement and Membership Manager, Amara, has been out to Monash, Deakin and Melbourne Graduate School of Education to award excellent students, as well as present to MTeach Primary and Secondary students. Our relationships with tertiary institutions continues to be a high priority as we seek to provide vital support for new and early career teachers.

Reinvigorate Jumpstart in 2024: This is our beginning of the year mini-conference – it hasn't run since 2020 due to decline in numbers/covid/online etc. We have plans to implement/reinvigorate this one day conference in 2024.

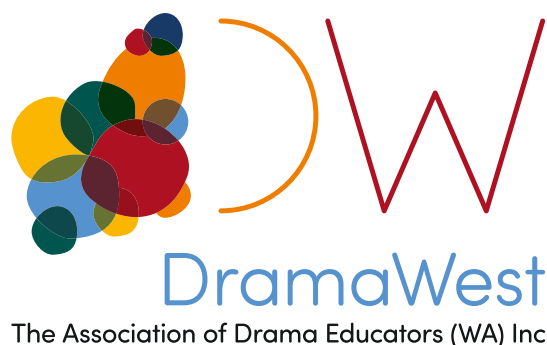
RAP: We are in our third Reconciliation Action Plan. We are working to develop our Innovate RAP. We have incorporated Reconciliation actions into all our portfolios.



Frantic Assembly workshop.



Next Stage workshop facilitator, Kate Ellis, in action with primary school students.



President: Brooke van Aalen

Drama Australia Liaison Officer: Felicity Glendinning

DramaWest experienced significant change this year as Sven Sorenson, a dedicated committee member for 15 years, retired. Sven, who it feels like has always been our treasurer, has held a variety of portfolios over his tenure. In conjunction with a team of dedicated Drama practitioners, Sven brought our association back from the brink. Had it not been for this group of dedicated Drama teachers, DramaWest would have disappeared. Sven's contributions to Drama in Western Australia, spanning his roles as a Teacher, Curriculum Consultant and Committee Member, have shaped Drama Education in our State. We extend our heartfelt thanks and well wishes for success in all his future endeavours.

2023 was the inaugural year for Year 12 students to undertake our newly revamped WACE ATAR Drama course. As of now, students have completed their external practical examination, with the written exam scheduled for November 15th. Undoubtedly, both these exams and the new course will be prominent subjects of conversation at our upcoming State Conference, Momentum.

Professional Learning 2022/2023

3rd Dec 22 Breathe – 2022 State Conference held at Perth College

Where we engaged with the theme 'Breath - inspiration, transformation, expression'.

Delegates explored practise and research, built and reinforces connections through out a day inspirational workshops and papers across the four streams below:

1. **Inhale / Inspire** – Gathering inspiration from the world around you to inform drama learning. Creating learning environments that inspire and nourish. Strategies that may support or inspire pre-service and graduate teachers.

2. **Hold / Transform** – Strategies to support self-, social- and spatial-awareness in the drama classroom. Transformative practice / transformative learning. Strategies for teacher and student wellness that can be transferred into the classroom.
3. **Exhale / Express** – Strategies to support and encourage diverse expressions of learning and understanding in the drama classroom. Drama as action. Using embodied pedagogies to enhance student outcomes beyond the Drama classroom.
4. **Collective breath / Synchronicity** – Fostering connection and collaboration in the Drama classroom and beyond. Application of Drama for cross curricular teaching and learning. Embedding inter- and cross-cultural perspectives into the Drama classroom, with a particular focus on the inclusion of First Nations voices



*Top left and right: State Conference, Breathe, Yip Yip Circus.
Bottom left: AGM Keynote speaker – Jacinta John.
Bottom right: State Conference, Breathe.*

18th March – AGM – held at Perth College

Keynote – Jacinta John who was in Perth in her role as Associate Director of Moulin Rouge (Australia, Japan and Korea)

Jacinta spoke to us about her experience in keeping up momentum when working with young actors. She shared with us her experience as resident director of Matilda and Billy Elliot in the working with these performers from the audition to the performance.

SCSA update – Max Leech

Gave us an update on the new Drama course as we moved into the first year of Year 12.

Workshops – Primary, Secondary, Vocational

Teachers then elected to attend workshops across three streams.

27th March - Performing Arts Perspectives – Perth Concert Hall

Continued our financial support and place on the selection panel for this showcase of the top performing artists in our WACE practical exams. This is a very successful event that sells out each year.

29th April – Primary Teacher Professional Learning – Melville Primary School & 16th August – Secondary Teacher Professional Learning – Shenton College

Informal opportunities were provided for teachers to share programs and current practice.

We look forward to closing our 2023 year with our State Conference, Momentum on Saturday 2 December.



Above left: 2023 AGM with Jacinta John.

Left: 2023 AGM (l-r) Brooke van Aalen (President), Jacinta John (Keynote), Felicity Glendinning (DALO) and Samanta Sankowsky (Vice President).



Above: 2023 AGM (l-r) Brooke van Aalen (President), Felicity Glendinning (DALO), Sven Sorenson (outgoing committee member, Treasurer), Jessica Wellman (Professional Learning), Samanta Sankowsky (Vice President).