

Theatres and a Spectrum of Engagement



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Abstract This chapter frames the ideas and structure of the book. It defines the parameters of the collection of studies published in the volume and looks at the manner in which work in education, community, and outreach are core to the function of many contemporary theatre venues and companies. The chapter proposes that in these uncertain and changeable times, it is incumbent upon theatre professionals to innovate and diversify in the ways in which they engage with communities and make the work of their venues and companies accessible and relevant to new and diverse audiences. Equally important is the critical analysis of such work, in order that models of best practice are laid down and analysed. Core questions for consideration include those about intent, the nature of practice, guiding policies, the relationship of the work to the ‘core’ functions of the organisation and the manner in which success is measured. The chapter proposes a spectrum of engagement of the ways in which contemporary community work reaches beyond the four walls of the theatre, and positions the chapters of the book as representing five groups of distinct but interrelated and overlapping nodes along that spectrum of engagement.

Keywords Theatre · Drama · Education · Engagement · Spectrum · Community · Partnership

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1 Introduction

This book is about theatres and the ways in which they both educate and engage with the world. It is about both explaining why theatres (venues, companies, artists and practitioners) are a vital part of the humanising force of the arts; and about capturing models and practices for rigorous critique so that they may be replicated elsewhere. In the foreword to this volume, Jonathan Neelands reminds us of the democratic, pedagogic, transformational and radical practices that come about when partnership is enabled in the theatre. The openness and collectivity he identifies as central to the success of such work can only come about through looking to extant models of best practice and sharing them, but also by bringing about culture change in our venues and organisations so that they are open to the types of partnership required and can see worth in the outcomes of such innovation.

The book explicitly and deliberately seeks to exemplify best practice in how theatres, in the broadest possible sense and through their engagement, educate. The challenge that we lay down from the outset is not to look on education, outreach or community work in theatres as separate to a 'core' function of the life of a theatre but as part of a continuum of activity: a spectrum of engagement within and beyond the four walls of a building. The work contained in this volume joins a growing and loud collective of voices concerned with mapping the progress and extent of this spectrum of engagement.

2 Why This Book and Why Now?

This idea for this book was conceived on a crowded subway train in Manhattan. The editors were attending a conference and musing on the tendency for many in the arts, ourselves included, to 'reinvent wheels'. One of the wheels we tend to recreate are programmes that emerge from theatres for schools and communities. Many theatre companies undertake programmes of work through their companies and in their venues that are not necessarily destined for the main stages. These programmes are known in varying ways; sometimes as outreach or extension programmes, sometimes as community engagement, sometimes as education or youth programmes, or by various other titles. Across the globe we see theatre companies developing practice that is then reproduced in other places and spaces with little or no reference to what has been learned from past endeavours elsewhere, which are sometimes very similar in form or content. Whether this is due to the often independent and commercially sensitive ways in which theatres operate, or whether it is through the absence of a strong and vibrant community of practice, it is, in our view, an impediment. It inhibits the global field from developing an informed body of practice that might lead to further growth. While we're not claiming that we are the first to notice or even do something about this, we, with the contributors in this volume, seek to create a lively, collaborative and engaging discourse that promotes ongoing local

and international partnerships. This seems especially pressing to us now as the demands on theatres, on schools and on communities have become more complex in the context of shifting twenty-first century realities. This opening chapter seeks to engage with those realities and to contextualise to some extent the forces in society, communities, schools, and elsewhere that have led us to the current context within which partnerships exist between theatre organisations and the communities they serve, and moreover with regard to the ever evolving and changing nature of that engagement.

Our sense in compiling this work is that the enthusiasm for new modes of collaboration and engagement reflected in this volume comes from a number of places, the forces of which lie alongside each other to varying degrees in the stories being told here. It is borne from a marked 'social turn' within much theatre practice and a growth in the desire of theatre organisations to seek deeper connections with their communities. This has led to an unprecedented opportunity to rethink what theatres do, and with whom. This is a welcome, voluntary change in direction within the sector. The change is also borne of a forced evolution of practice in the sector, something we will dwell upon in greater detail at a later point. And it is most certainly a reality of the changing nature of twenty-first century life.

In the past, significant claims have been made about the power and possibility of drama and theatre to bring about change to both individual lives and indeed the world. This core belief in a good and worthy change is the basis of much work in the fields of drama education and applied theatre, as well as being the traditional driving imperative behind many of the education, community and outreach projects associated with major theatres and theatre organisations. An unquestioned or mythologised belief that theatre as a positive and agentive educative and social force is an inherently troubling and counter-productive basis for practice. We and the contributors to this book believe in what Neelands has called in the foreword, a 'theatre of possibilities', however we are also keen that it is one which is deeply and rigorously questioned.

Therefore, at no point does this book wish to be a critically disengaged volume, a simple litany of victory narratives. It does, however, aim to understand and celebrate success. We wish to identify the characteristics of that success so that we can better understand it, and use it as a template for further success elsewhere. To do so is not an easy task. Throughout this book, we will identify some of the tenets of what successful (in the sense that we understand it here) theatre partnership and engagement work may look like. In doing so we will critically extrapolate and identify characteristics which may be used to build a framework upon which a critical narrative of success, and not a hollow rhetorical 'roar of victory', can be based. This chapter begins these discussions. It will outline some of the critical concepts in the development of practice beyond main stages in theatre. We acknowledge at the outset that this is a potentially difficult task. So, in this opening chapter we do not seek to provide a series of answers but rather to survey the landscape and suggest possible thematic pathways that the chapters will detail and extend.

From the outset we do need to address and be clear with regard to who is included and who is excluded from this work. We acknowledge that the contributions in this book are predominantly from a western theatre tradition and are located within what

is regarded as the Global North. This acts as a limitation on the book and the emergent discussion. Some approaches which originally emerged from South America, Africa and Asia infuse and inspire much of the debates that we see in these pages, and yet countries from those continents are under-represented here. In charting success in innovation work in theatre partnership and engagement, we choose to look in the first instance at those programmes and innovations which were most advantageously placed and inevitably those which are best resourced. The fact that many of those which we found are located in the largely white, Anglo-European world is a commentary in itself about inequity and global distribution of resources. It is our belief that the discussions begun here, and the lacunae identified here need to be broadened and diversified, and we are excited by the prospects of further volumes that deepen enrich and extend these perspectives. These future conversations hold particularly significant possibilities in the examination of international partnerships from non-Western theatres, and from cultural and ethnic traditions which are not traditionally building-based in the way in which many of the examples contained in these pages are. We hope in some small way that the perspectives here can inspire, provoke and illuminate ongoing discussions, debates and collaborations with regard to what we understand to be an ever-broadening spectrum of engagement in the theatre.

3 These Liquid Times

We have entered, in Zygmunt Bauman's terms, a phase of liquid modernity:

... in which all social forms melt faster than new ones can be cast. They are not given enough time to solidify, and cannot serve as the frame of reference for human actions and long-term life-strategies because their allegedly short life-expectation undermines efforts to develop a strategy that would require the consistent fulfilment of a 'life-project.' (2000, p. 303)

These new fluid social structures make imagining what might constitute the engagement between communities and theatres in the future, somewhat difficult. In the immediate past, it has been relatively straightforward and embodied through a clear division of tasks. The business of theatres was largely to entertain, and depending on the epoch, occasionally question or provoke. The business of communities was to socially regulate, educate, support and engage their members. Within communities, formal education was the business of schools, and informal education the business of family units, peer groups and places of worship. When the idea of theatres as places of education and engagement in ways other than the lived portrayal of literary works began to emerge, it largely emanated from the United Kingdom and occurred within a revolutionary post-war context of rebuilding society and as part of a broader societal drive to ensure that totalitarianism would never again rule. Nicholson (2009, 2011) charts this emergence and growth. Thus commenced a twentieth century blurring of genres between the work of theatres and communities,

especially schools, which has proven to be fruitful for many and intoxicating for those of us who live and work within the blur. Over the course of the last 50 years, the work of education, outreach and community work has primarily been in the realm of three distinct and inter-related purposes: arts (drama/theatre) education; socially productive applied theatre projects, e.g. in road-safety or HIV awareness; and also community development for the purposes of audience development, either driven by the needs of individual organisations or at the requirement of funders.

What was clear to us as editors from the outset of our work in compiling this volume is that the ‘liquid times’ within which we live have disrupted our understandings of engagement, both in form and content, but also in motivation. They have evolved significantly over the past decade in particular, and we argue, will continue to do so at a similar rate. Such a case arguably renders a volume such as this already outdated by the time of publication. That may well be the case, however we would argue that it in fact makes the critical interrogation of narratives of success contained in these pages, all the more urgent.

The socio-cultural forces driving these changes are multifarious and broad and unique to each and every specific context. They all bring with them, as change inevitably does, a number of distinct challenges (that we who believe in the possibilities of theatre as a social and educative force, face), and which the stories gathered in these pages seek to grapple with. In no particularly order of significance, and in broad terms, some of the following issues impact upon our work in this area.

The Demise of Old Audiences

Theatre as an institutional form is arguably in a time of pre-paradigmatic crisis (Kuhn 1962) in terms of the ways in which audiences engage with it. The changes in audience desire and engagement, brought about by general societal change and by the influence of televisual and online media, are forcing rapid innovation and diversification within theatre. An associated period of new ‘scientific’ discovery is in full throe, whereby new modes of engagement are beginning to emerge. We suggest that this volume charts many of the experimental modes of this period of ‘scientific’ discovery, charting a new spectrum of engagement with theatre companies and venues, and before the formation of a new, definitive paradigm of how theatre audiences engage.

The Reinvention of Community

Changes in the very nature of community are palpable and visible in much of the Global North. We are transitioning from a geographical understanding of what community entails (a street, a parish, a county) to more globalised and virtual communities. Communities of practice and of shared interests now have profound meaning in the absence of traditional neighbourhood or geographical communities. These new communities are typically more dynamic and less embodied, often offer great support in some domains given their shared interest base, but also less in others; and are at once more and less liberal in their tolerance of difference and dissent. But, they also do not fulfil many of the traditional and occasionally ritualistic functions of a community, thus leaving lacunae (Bauman 2001). One of the challenges in this

reinvention of community is the place within it of the arts and engagement with the arts, traditionally at the heart of many community rituals and celebrations.

The Challenge to Politics and Democracy

The events of the months and years prior to the publication of this book point to a marked change in the politics of some countries in the Global North. Seemingly 'stable' political nations such as Turkey, the United States and the United Kingdom have been somewhat destabilised because of events which bring us to question whether the democratic political ideal is any longer the norm. The proliferation of new technologies changes the nature of engagement with dramatic form, as discussed, but also poses broader challenges with regard to the relationships citizens have with their home state. Fundamental amongst these is the question as to what we might consider as normative political behaviour. The changes in Global North socio-political contexts, which can be clearly charted in the normalisation of heretofore extremist political behaviour, makes demands of both the arts and our communities, particularly our schools, as it runs to the heart of what it means to be a citizen and to have agency within the life of a nation.

The Rationalisation of Education

Changes to the perceived societal role and function of education, with a general tendency towards 'back to basics' and 'value for money' agendas are evident across many of the countries of the Global North. The forces driving these are multiple and powerful and the phenomenon is often sarcastically referred to by its critics as the *Global Education Reform Movement* (GERM). Even before such a movement began to gain momentum, the arts have generally struggled within schools and the new policies derived from these socio-cultural trends tend to sideline them to an even greater degree.

The de-prioritisation of the arts within formal schooling is an important consideration for this book. At its heart is what Schechner (2013) describes as the efficacious function of performance, broadly understood here to be the educative function of the arts and particularly theatre, which for the majority of the contributors to the book is not so much a function, but more of an imperative. The structures that have emerged in society over hundreds of years such as discipline based learning, fact-based knowledge, passive audiences and students and a tacit acceptance of what the 'core business' of theatres and schools are, will continue to be challenged by the liquidity of modern times. That said, we do know that theatre and drama do provide access to some of the must have skills of the twenty-first century: creativity, collaboration, critical reflection and communication (Jefferson and Anderson 2017). So, even in increasingly liquid times the dynamic, shape-shifting aesthetic of the theatre can take a prominent place in helping our communities to contend with looming challenges and opportunities. Theatres require education and community partnerships to engage beyond their four walls. Without them, their work ceases when the curtain drops. Of all the challenges posed to the arts by these liquid times, the most immediate rising challenge for theatres and its associated community of scholars and practitioners more generally is the active defunding and de-prioritising of the arts and arts education in our communities and schools.

4 The Challenge to the Arts and a Challenge for the Arts

A renewed enthusiasm for connection between theatres and communities is critical currently because the arts and arts education are under siege. Arts education has been systematically and in some places aggressively cleaved from the curriculum (Adams 2011; Ewing 2010; UNESCO 2013), from classrooms and from teacher education (Cutcher 2014; Oreck 2004). This recent systematic removal of arts education from the United Kingdom curriculum is just one example of a tendency to view arts and theatre/drama education as an optional extra. This is not an isolated occurrence. As Selkrig and Bottrell (2016) claim, the current discourses and practices in schooling have pushed arts education to the periphery:

Arts education provision in schools is often cited as one of the casualties of the current dominant educational discourse in many parts of the world. This discourse is premised on hierarchical compliance regimes that focus on standards and reductionism. Similarly, knowledge/skills transfer is gauged through measurable outcomes and high stakes testing. This has led to the education of young people in most developed and some developing countries becoming performative in nature. As a consequence, evidence is emerging that arts education can be pushed to the periphery (p. 57).

This downgrading of arts in the curriculum has occurred simultaneously with often savage cuts to the arts sector (Cuccia and Rizzo 2016, p. 109). In the face of the twin threats of reduction of the arts in schools (through decreased time and resources) and in theatres (through reduced governmental funding for the arts and increased reliance on earned revenue and philanthropy), it seems to us timely to consider how the arts education sector and particularly theatres and communities might learn from each other, and how they might collaborate creatively to generate programmes that are relevant, effective and engaging for the audiences (considered in the broadest possible sense). The opportunity here is to understand how international projects have the potential to live within our local communities, and also meet the needs of a more integrated and diverse international education sector beyond that for which they were originally designed. Contained in these pages, there are case studies of theatre companies and their partners who have worked with communities (which some of us may have not considered as traditional audiences) such as prisons, hospitals, mental health facilities and community organisations. One of the striking features of these connections is their determination to make drama/theatre available and relevant to new and diverse audiences. Such a determination needs a brief exploration of the possibilities that theatres hold as spaces for work which might be regarded as 'pro-social'.

5 Beyond the Four Walls: A Spectrum of Engagement

The main business of theatres is to entertain through the staging of plays, right? Well, right and wrong. It is certainly the case for some theatres in some towns and cities, and it certainly might be the primary preoccupation of many, but it also

largely depends on what kind of a theatre you might happen to go to, and where in the world it is located. In the white, Western world (the Global North as we have referred to it here), there can be a troubling tendency to look on theatre from a singular, canonical perspective, as is the case for all the traditional art-forms:

the idea of the arts as essentially European high culture, though no longer hegemonic as it once was, still finds expression in some of the major art houses around the world (Belfiore and Bennett 2007, p. 136).

This singularity of mission finds further expression in the types of works that tend to find life on the main stages of these companies and venues. It is a generalisation, but many belong to what Jonothan Neelands describes as a private, literary aesthetic tradition of theatre (2004, p. 14). While theatre companies throughout the world trade on their main stage offerings, we argue that an “oral, communal aesthetic tradition” of theatre (2004, p. 14) is often taking place alongside this other tradition. In the work that might be characterised as oral and communal, theatre companies are working with community members through theatrical approaches to educate, advocate and empower. At times, there are direct connections between the two aesthetic traditions, such as if, for example, an exploration takes place using Augusto Boal’s strategies, of the themes of social justice arising from a main stage performance of *Death and the Maiden*. Other programmes engage with their communities without the need to make reference to a production that is currently in performance, by undertaking work such as building literacy in schools through drama and theatre techniques.

Yet, what has become apparent in preparing this volume is that a multitude of practices exist within and around what are described as mainstream theatres. This book deliberately seeks to unsettle any perception of singular and linear relationships between significant, established theatres and the audiences (or perhaps communities) which they serve. It aspires to looking beyond the stages and plays of those venues and companies, and instead to interrogate how these theatres engage in a range of ways with their communities, framing the theatres not just as entertainers but as leaders; framing the participants not just as audience but as members of a community of practice; and framing the practices not as alternative, peripheral, or add-on activities, but as core to the operation and policy of these theatres and as part of a well-developed but fragmented field of international practice.

Schechner’s concept of the ludic braid (2013, p. 70) posits that there is a fundamental relationship in performance between entertainment and education (efficacy). At times this relationship is oppositional and at other times it is integrated. When we consider the programmes that are outlined in this book, this construction becomes a little inadequate. The various motivations and approaches that companies take to engage with the communities are more complex than entertainment or education alone. In these pages, you will see discussion of audience development, outreach, engagement and social justice. This work defies a simple definition and calls, in our view, for more nuanced understandings of how theatre companies position themselves within educational and social spaces. While there is no doubt that Schechner’s braid is still alive in the theatres represented here, an understanding of their

motivations is complex, unique to each distinct project and lies beyond any potential binary of education or entertainment.

The contemporary nature of the relationship between theatres as places of entertainment and places of education is most comprehensively captured by Nicholson (2009, 2010, 2011). She is optimistic about the state of play in this arena, and points out that at best this work develops practices which are responsive to the 'narratives and cultural memories of the participants' (2010, p. 152), as well as being artistically imaginative. Nicholson implicitly warns of the importance of avoiding confusion over nomenclature, as well as eschewing a linear chronology in charting the evolution of this type of work, noting instead the need for a critical genealogy:

Theatrical experiments in educational and community settings are complexly interwoven with the dramatic and educational innovations of their day, and this means that the practices of theatre educationalists often offer insights into why theatre was considered a necessity in its time and how it spoke to the culture and society of the period (2010, p. 153).

Nicholson's analysis reminds us to take careful account of contexts and history in the development and delivery of these 'theatrical experiments'. We need a nuanced understanding of the pervasive educational and social policy that creates demands in schools and communities as a critical factor in understanding why theatres create these programmes. In this book, we argue that the case studies presented here constitute a spectrum of engagement that reach beyond the four walls of the theatre.

This is appropriate given the emergence of a range of participatory modes in the cultural sector in response to the liquid times that we live in. The work in this volume is evident of a distinct move from a binary of on/off engagement with communities to companies, individuals and venues which are now locating themselves along a continuum of practice in this domain. We suggest that the work contained in the volume represents five distinct but interrelated and overlapping nodes along that spectrum of engagement. These are:

- **Tradition and innovation:** Work that builds on a solid and perhaps traditional basis of educational or community practice in theatres, but which has begun to innovate away from that base.
- **Moving beyond the main house:** Engagement work that takes place at a step removed from traditional spaces – which is somehow beyond the main house and which perhaps strives to redefine artistic spaces.
- **Artists in education and beyond:** Artistic practices which have an unambiguous and unapologetic educational focus and basis, linking directly with the formal education system.
- **Agentive partnership:** Partnerships and practices which have a relationship driven by agency and efficacy, and which seek to affect change in participants.
- **Redefining engagement:** Work which is ground-breaking in how it redefines engagement and pushes the boundaries of what it means for members of communities and societies to engage with theatre organisations.

In our initial discussions with our contributors about this book we strongly encouraged them to be analytical, critical and courageous in the way they wrote

about their work. While it is obviously up to readers to make that judgement, we feel that these contributions make a critical contribution to establishing and generating a coherent understanding of theatres and their partnerships. Some of the key questions we asked them to consider were:

- **Intent** – what are the philosophies and ideologies driving some of the work in this sector?
- **Practice** – what innovative ways of working are evident in this analysis of work and in what way can their success be translated to other cultural milieu?
- **Policy and relatedness** – how does the work in this domain link back into the values and practices of the company or venue as a whole and how central is it to the ‘core’ function of the organisation?
- **Success** – how do the facilitators and funders of the work define what successful work looks like and how it is achieved and measured?

The discussions in the chapters that follow, clustered loosely around the nodes above, and oriented around the key focus questions, allow us to begin to define, through snapshots of practice what the activities of this sector constitute, and where they might be located along a spectrum of engagement between theatres and society. The chapters also develop a range of perspectives that focus on policy, intent and success. This matters so we can stop reinventing the same wheels, and that we might genuinely learn from the efforts of others in our community of practice. The work in this book also allows for an analysis of the practices that exists so we can understand the gaps on the spectrum of engagement. It seems to us that these gaps in our collective knowledge are quite significant, and this discussion goes some way towards identifying what is happening, where and for whom. Critically this selection allows theatres and those who work with them to establish who is not being catered for. Of course, an identification of these gaps is only the first step. A collaborative set of strategies is required to develop more effective and networked approaches to understand and engage with work in theatres that extend beyond main stages. Collaboration involves building and sustaining partnership.

6 The Role of Partnerships in the Twenty-First Century

Partnerships are one way through which we can combat some of the challenges of a liquid modernity, but also make theatre programmes beyond the main stages relevant and engaging for non-traditional audiences. One of the persistent missed opportunities (at least when we talk about education) is the often-piecemeal partnerships between cultural organisations, schools and broader communities. We are not arguing that excellent work is not taking place but rather that there are missed opportunities when these partnerships and the programmes they produce are not described, analysed and shared beyond the local context. Too often, this results in perennial pilot project syndrome and a persistent need to reinvent the wheel with regard to education and outreach in theatres. In this book, we have really only

focussed on theatres but we are aware of other cultural institutions that in themselves are storehouses of culture such as those in the GLAM sector (galleries, libraries, archives and museums) in many countries and cities creating highly productive partnerships with communities, schools and universities. In our view this work deserves a broader audience. This matters so that when policymakers ask ‘what good is the theatre?’ (or libraries or art galleries or museums), we have robust and thoughtful ways to respond which have been rigorously tested in the field and critically evaluated. If we can demonstrate that partnerships have the potential to deliver distinctive and effective learning opportunities and community benefits for diverse populations, funding resources will follow. Of course, if we fail to provide evidence for these programmes funding may also disappear. Several international organisations have also emphasised the centrality of partnerships in order to enable our communities to survive and thrive in liquid times.

Over a decade ago in 2005, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) provided a series of scenarios as a way of describing what schools might be like in the future. Scenario three was one of the most optimistic. It imagined schools as places that work in high-level partnerships across the ages:

In this scenario, the walls around schools come down but they remain strong, sharing responsibilities with other community bodies. Non-formal learning, collective tasks and intergenerational activities are strongly emphasised. High public support ensures quality environments, and teachers enjoy high esteem (p. 21).

While these scenarios were, and continue to be speculative, they do point to an opportunity to rethink the relationship between cultural organisations, communities and schools. The OECD scenarios focus on schools as pivot points for many communities and the concept of partnerships and shared connections that they embody are implicitly and in many cases, explicitly critical to the work of theatres throughout this book. The ‘siloining’ that we have witnessed in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century of different disciplines and sectors has done little to prepare our education sector, theatres and our community generally for the looming liquid challenges of the twenty-first century that will require citizens to be skilled collaborators, creators, critical reflectors and communicators (Jefferson and Anderson 2017). Drama and theatre companies work daily in the domains of communication, creativity and collaboration. They understand imagination, problem solving and design. Within theatre companies there is a storehouse of capability that sits at the centre of twenty-first century capacities. The challenge is to find feasible, effective, efficient and relevant ways to share these with a community that needs these skills more than ever.

There is significant possibility in increased engagement through partnership. Despite the many obituaries written for the theatre it remains resolutely alive. And not only alive, but it continues to seek connections and to actively explore its place as a contributor in several sectors. It is perhaps possible to conceive of a theatre that does not partner or engage with educational work. A theatre that sits alone, presenting but never engaging. The cases explored in this book suggest this is not the reality and that theatres are constantly seeking ways to engage with their schools and their

communities. While in the past organisations may have hidden behind the mantra of ‘core business’ to reject partnerships, this is becoming less feasible as the realities of the twenty-first century will demand stronger connections and partnership between institutions, communities and education. In our view this is an opportunity and a challenge for theatre companies to forge partnerships that have real influence and impact on their communities—theatres that are culturally and socially aware and enthusiastic about the role in engaging partnerships and collaborations.

7 The Changing Nature of Twenty-First Century Partnerships

Partnerships between arts companies, communities and education are not new (Hunter 2015) but the affordances of rapidly evolving technologies in western societies means that the opportunities have exponentially multiplied. Global partnerships can enable students all over the world to connect with the world’s cultural resources, if they have the means to do so, the equity of which, is of course an important issue in itself. It is now relatively commonplace for the Royal Shakespeare Company or the National Theatre in the United Kingdom to produce high quality broadcast performances that reach vastly larger and different audiences than traditional live performances (Bakhshi et al. 2010). Yet, access to these cultural assets is only part of the picture. Effective engagement (and learning) that is immersive and participatory occurs when audiences become participants and makers using the tools of creation that theatre and drama offer. One way this has become more feasible is through the emergence of pervasive and inexpensive networked technologies (Cameron et al. 2017) that will allow participatory engagement to be a reality for those not geographically local to a theatre company or venue. The opportunities now available for people transforming from passive receptors of culture (e.g. recorded theatre) to *makers*, where they can engage with these partnership spaces as active contributors, is in our view, the necessary next step in taking advantage of the affordances of new technology allied with the opportunities that the networking of cultural organisations provide. While there is considerable further potential for the integration of curriculum, technology and cultural resources, this is currently occurring sporadically. The emergence of new technologies and greater levels of understanding in resource design, delivery and pedagogy will support this change. The continued digitisation of cultural archives will further accelerate the access and malleability of these cultural resources. Mary Ann Hunter articulates the qualities of these partnerships as they are now, and as they might be:

... schools must scaffold opportunities for this interplay of certainty and uncertainty as well as model what a curious and discerning approach to life’s many available communities of reference might look like. At this historical moment, however, it takes more than the schools and dispositions of teachers alone to do this. Caught in the difficult dilemma of contemporary schooling, teachers must themselves connect with other communities of reference to

collaborate on offering quality education. Professional artists make natural partners in this effort...Curiosity and inquiries are the professional tools of trade (2015, p. 369).

Hunter (2015) nominates the benefits of strong partnerships (in this case with artists in schools) and their ability to awaken curiosity and inquiry in a liquid world. Partnerships that position a collaborative making process at the centre of the learning have the potential to radically alter the relationship between education, cultural institutions and society generally. All of these places become not only sites of reception, but potentially for invention, co-creation and innovation. Inherent in this opportunity is a challenge for communities, schools, education systems, theatres and other cultural institutions to reorient themselves; making them more outward-focused organisations who understand that silo thinking is a remnant of a bygone era that is dangerously inappropriate to the needs and expectations of our community in the twenty-first-century.

8 Overview of the Chapters

Within this broader socio-cultural context of liquid times, with its inherent challenges because of the death of old audiences, the reinvention of communities, the societal challenges to politics and democracy and the rationalisation of education, we now move to introducing the theatres and practitioners who can assist us in locating our practices along a spectrum of engagement. As the reader moves through them, we suggest that our caveats around intent, the nature of the practice, issues of policy and relatedness and the metrics of success employed in the work are kept to the forefront of your mind. So too, a watchful eye should be maintained as to the challenging and ever-evolving nature of partnerships being described in these pages.

The case studies presented in the 20 chapters ahead are on a spectrum of engagement; between work that is strongly connected to main stage performance to programmes that have only the most tangential connection to a main stage theatre. You may also notice that some theatre companies such as Queensland Theatre Company (QTC) feature in more than one chapter. We did this purposefully to signify the multiple perspectives that one company and even one piece of work can generate. All of the work featured here however has in common a sense of searching for a way to engage people *with* theatre and drama *and/or* through theatre and drama. We have not been prescriptive about the way these stories are told so in some chapters you will see a focus on history and others you will find an emphasis on describing practice. To us this reflects the diversity of approaches and cultures in this fascinating sector.

The volume is organised into five sections, all driven by the five nodes on the spectrum described earlier in this opening chapter and each of which we have used to conceptually gather chapters which speak to each other, though they may be somewhat different in style and focus and in their adherence to the overarching theme.

9 Tradition and Innovation

Opening the studies contained in these chapters, the work of Tarragon Theatre Company in Toronto, Canada is first. Kathleen Gallagher and Anne Wessels prompt us to reconsider how relationships between theatre companies and schools might work by reframing what learning and theatre can mean. The chapter offers reflections on a 17-year relationship between scholars and theatre-makers to examine the ongoing and as of yet unmet potential of this relationship. In Joe Winston and Mon Partovi's chapter, '[Within the Girdle of These Walls](#)' the nexus between school transformation, Shakespeare and the Royal Shakespeare Company is interrogated. Their account asks us to consider how theatres might be a change agent to imagine transformed learning and teaching. In another kind of partnership Michael Anderson and Peter O'Connor's chapter considers how creativity can be enabled for schools through innovative partnerships between places of high cultural capital and schools. The Creative Leadership in Learning program was a collaboration between the Sydney Opera House and The University of Sydney and schools. It invited four schools (in its pilot phase) to identify an issue in their school and then partner with the Sydney Opera House, The University of Sydney and a teaching artist to devise creative strategies to engage with the issue. The chapter describes the initial processes of partnership and discusses some of the challenges and opportunities that emerged in the programme. The Queensland Theatre Company in Australia features in the final chapter of this section, as Sandra Gattenhof and Heidi Irvine explore the patterns that emerge in that company's education programme. They critically reflect on the work to date and the likely evolution of these programmes.

10 Moving Beyond the Main House

Remaining with the Queensland Theatre Company but offering a different perspective, John O'Toole's account reveals some of the pervasive features of the schools and theatres nexus that lead to connection and sometimes disconnection in partnerships in the history of that organisation. In their chapter Rachel King and Baz Kershaw consider a trans-disciplinary model for artist-academic collaboration based at the Warwick Arts Centre in the United Kingdom. The project partnered academics from biomedicine and economics with regional and national artists and theatre-makers to engage with young people living in socio-economically deprived and ethnically diverse areas of Coventry (UK). They argue that these kinds of collaborations could create a new model for trans-disciplinary research dissemination and public engagement for the higher education sector. Remaining in the United Kingdom, we then read of Selina Busby's exploration of the National Theatre's Connections program. Connections has been one of the most prominent theatre

‘outreach’ programs engaging several thousand young people for over two decades. Her chapter “‘[The Biggest Youth Theatre Festival on the Planet](#)’: [National Theatre Youth Connections](#)” considers how the programme fits into the cultural and educational landscape in the UK and considers its contribution to personal and social transformation for the participants. Natalie Hart and Joe Winston’s chapter concludes this section, and focuses on three groups in the Young Rep programme at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, again based in the UK. The chapter explores the young people’s connection to theatre through an analysis of spatial dynamics, ethnicity and social class.

11 Artists in Education, and Beyond

One of the programmes that is not tied directly to main stage programmes but draws from the theatrical energy of a theatre company is The School Drama Partnership at Sydney Theatre Company. Robyn Ewing and John Saunders describe the ways the programme has engaged teaching artists to support schools using drama to interrogate contemporary literary texts for children to enhance deep literacy learning. The chapter considers the outcomes of the project seen through the theoretical context of the collaborative zone of proximal development. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the impact of the programme and a consideration of issues of ongoing sustainability of these kinds of approaches. One of the powerhouses of theatre activity and innovation has been New York City, USA where this book was first imagined. The opening contribution from NYC that considers theatre companies programming work beyond their four walls is Jennifer DiBella, Mitch Mattson and Jonothan Jones’ examination of Roundabout Theatre in their chapter “[Education at Roundabout: It’s About Turning Classrooms into Theatres, and the Theatre into a Classroom](#)”. Working with over 18,000 students and educators across 265 schools their work must rate as one of the largest and perhaps most complex in this collection. In this chapter, they discuss the way the company uses main stage programming to engage and connect young people with the rich content of main stage theatre. Returning to Australia, we next encounter Christine Sinclair, Richard Sallis, Christian Leavesley and Jolyon James chapter on Arena Theatre Company. The chapter describes an experience for 8–12 year olds where they were audience and active participants in two thematically linked experiences – a main stage theatre production and an interactive theatrical event. The chapter explores the potential in these kind of hybrid experiences as a way of creating a unique learning experience that recruits dramatic play and process drama to directly inform and deepen theatrical experiences for young people. Back to New York and Lindsey Buller Maliekel, Courtney J. Boddie, Dennie Palmer Wolf and Steven Holochwost’s chapter explores one of the key themes of this book – measuring the impact on young audiences of theatre and associated programmes. In this chapter, they consider the Schools with Performing Arts Reach Kids (SPARK) programme

that intends to bring theatre education to elementary and middle schools where it is not and has not been part of the curriculum.

12 Agentive Partnership

Opening this penultimate collection of chapters, George Belliveau and Monica Prendergast's chapter "[Shadows of History, Echoes of War: Performing Alongside Veteran Soldiers and Prison Inmates in Two Canadian Applied Theatre Projects](#)" looks at the concept of 'inreach'. Working as applied theatre practitioners they describe the project and discuss the issues related to the roles of teacher and actor that were part of this innovative and 'risky' project with precarious communities of participants. Katrine Heggstad, Kari Mjaaland Heggstad, and Stig A. Eriksson's chapter, "[Visiting Schools for Visiting Theatre. Researching a Drama Workshop and Young People's Response](#)" considers a collaboration between the Drama Department at Bergen University College and the city theatre in Bergen, Norway. The study explores a programme designed to engage 15-year-old students with a main stage production. The authors make some striking observations about the connections between theatre education participation (or the lack of it) and the young people's ability to connect effectively with the performance and the associated activities. Peter Duffy and Terry Greiss' chapter tracks the history of New York City's Irondale Ensemble Project and its attempts to engage young people. In "[Irondale Ensemble Project: Creating Community in Neo-liberal Times](#)" they critically discuss the role of 'politics', 'place' and 'audience' in the development and delivery of programs for schools and young people. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the sustainability of partnerships in a climate of neo liberal attacks on the arts and education. Finally under the heading of agentive partnerships, Prue Wales and Alvin Tan explore the effectiveness and impact of Singapore Theatre Company's Theatre for Seniors programme. The programme that aimed to provide a pathway into professional theatre has been, according to the authors, a great success.

13 Redefining Engagement

Beginning a selection of studies that pushes the boundaries of theatre work, we move from the older participants to the very youngest with Emma Miles and Helen Nicholson's exploration of a year-long programme for early childhood students based on the performance *Grandad, Me and Teddy Too*. Their chapter details the process and explains how these young people become "educated in theatre-going, as well as by theatre going". "[Reach Out and Relax: Extending Access to Theatre for Families Living with Disability](#)" is Andy Kempe and Sarah Gregson's description of a project which investigates how young people with special education needs and specifically autism spectrum disorder can be supported through 'in-reach' activities.

Their chapter focuses on the proliferation of relaxed performances by examining a performance at the Newbury Corn Exchange. As seen in the Miles/Nicholson chapter, another area of engagement that has expanded rapidly in recent years is the work of companies with the very young. In their chapter, “[The Dance of Life](#)” Judith McLean and Sally Chance detail a professional conversation about the role of the teaching artist, arts-based learning practice and infant development theory in the creation of a program/performance called ‘The Dance of Life’. Our extensive collection of cases concludes with Barry Freeman’s chapter which considers notions of success as they relate to the National Arts Centre’s (Toronto, Canada) SpiderWebShow. Working with Michael Wheeler, their discussion calls for an understanding of the possibility of place (such as the NAC) for creating advocacy and discussion and for institutions to value this kind of activity in theatres as success.

Notwithstanding the limitations we have identified earlier, this collection of chapters does provide a broad survey of theatre programmes which extend beyond the four walls of theatre venues and organisations. As editors, we have had the benefit of working with these cases and their authors over a substantial period of time. With the benefit of this ‘helicopter view’ we thought we might offer some tentative suggestions about the possible shape of the future of this kind of work.

14 Possible Futures

The future that we glimpse by virtue of the cases here is a series of new and enhanced networks that share ideas, resources and practice for the benefit of their partners and communities. Whilst it may be more convenient to continue to work individually and to remain ‘siloeed’ in our own limited contexts, the challenges we face to make theatre relevant and critical to the lives of people is perhaps more pressing that it ever has been. What this means strategically is that companies need to build partnerships with communities, schools and universities where their values and missions align, irrespective of their location. While this is not without its difficulty the work we glimpse here provides a practical way to start those conversations.

Additionally, this work requires the development of a sound theoretical and research base. While many companies have been involved in sometimes systematic but often piecemeal evaluation, the sector lacks a coherent and methodical approach to research that is international, theoretical and seeks connections between theory, practices, audiences and intent. This is problematic insofar as we do not have sufficient knowledge about our impacts, successes and common challenges in this work. In short, we cannot always see what works and what doesn’t. When this is the case, we remain likely to continue reinventing the wheel. The future we imagine for the sector partners universities with companies to understand their work beyond main stages. What this looks like will ultimately be up to the theatres, schools and communities themselves but the developing affordances of networked technologies could make for an effective and relevant international consortium of researchers, theatre workers and schools all working toward ways to make their practice more

effective for all. This approach offers potential efficiencies that will appeal to those who ‘count the beans’ in theatre companies and cultural policy more broadly. Instead of constantly inventing approaches and methods this collective approach could see theatres sharing increasingly scarce resources for more sustainable impact.

Of course, there are objections to a collective approach and indeed the inherent dangers of cultural flattening because of a more globalised approach. There are significant and critical cultural differences of which organisations need to take full account. Additionally, many of the approaches detailed here are not readily adaptable. We’re not calling here for some sort of theatrical cultural essentialism but rather a way to learn, engage and grow from each other’s practice.

15 Conclusions

As you read this book, we hope you that you feel as we do, that the riches of practice, partnership and insight we see in these stories are replete with possibility – full of treasures and opportunities that demand sharing beyond individual theatres and national borders. As theatre practitioners, theatre managers, policymakers, educators and others read these cases, we hope it will inspire not idle wonder at these riches and innovation of our sector but instead prompt an inspiration to act. We hope that it inspires organisations to understand the opportunities that are implicit within drama and theatre for learning and engagement and seek to use that to create new and enduring partnerships, to educate, provoke and rejuvenate our schools and our communities. There is no doubt that we live in liquid times. One of the ways that we can engage and respond to these times is to consider how we transition and transform our practices to meet the challenges that complexity, chaos and contradiction presents to theatres, schools and communities.

While many inside and outside the sector may argue that the role of theatres beyond main stages is trivial and peripheral to ‘core business’, the work here argues strongly to the contrary. In these slices of practice, we see a theatre, research and education community who are ready to take on all the challenges that the twenty-first century presents. There is deep compassion, ingenuity and integrity in the work that we showcase here and it is these values and capacities that will ultimately, in our view, make the difference. We believe that drama and theatre has a distinct and critical role to play in the lives of our young people and our communities as a participatory and active process to enable them to know and interpret human experience. Returning to Jonothan Neelands’ contribution in the foreword, it is our belief that these projects and the insights we can gather from them showcase the best transformational effects of critical artistic pedagogies, which can help us in building a coalition of resistance in offering a political as well as an artistic response to the challenges of liquid modernity. If this view is shared in theatres, as it clearly is as evidenced through the cases in this book, all of us must redouble our efforts to organise, research and collaborate to make the riches of these stories available more widely in our venues, companies, schools and communities.

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