Outreach in the Deep North

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Abstract This chapter maps and informally compares two theatre companies of similar size and age, on opposite sides of the world: Northern Stage in the UK and the Queensland Theatre Company. These companies have similar or at least parallel 40 year histories of outreach and education work. The author was personally involved with both in their early days, and uses this personal knowledge and memories along with in-depth interviews with the contemporary artistic directors and education/engagement managers, and the local archives in both locations, to analyse and compare some of their aims, priorities and achievements, and how those have changed, converged and diverged in four decades.

Keywords Theatre-in-education · Queensland · Newcastle upon Tyne · Theatre in schools · Northern Stage · Participatory theatre · Community theatre

Two theatres in two cities are the origin of this case study: two provincial capitals a globe and a time span apart; England and Australia, 40 years ago and now; some arresting similarities and the author's personal involvement with all four settings. How have attitudes in the professional theatre towards young people changed in 30 years, and what can these two theatre companies tell us? The case study is based on archives of the two companies together with personal memories, and interviews with Wesley Enoch, at the time of writing (2014) Artistic Director, and Heidi Irvine, Producer (Education and Youth Programs) at the Queensland Theatre Company, Australia; and with Kylie Lloyd, then the current Director of Participation at Northern Stage, Newcastle upon Tyne, England.

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1 Origins

Northern Stage grew out of a University Theatre in the 1960s – specifically a dedicated theatre building, the Flora Robson Playhouse at the Newcastle upon Tyne University (then a college of Durham University), and the student and university community theatre that inhabited it. This was before the days of dedicated university drama courses, and the students were drama aficionados from generic degrees in Arts, Law and so on. During the 1970s it morphed into Newcastle upon Tyne's professional civic theatre company, the Newcastle Playhouse, with a new building (Flora Robson got demolished in a road redevelopment). The new theatre was right on the edge where the city meets the university. It was initially called out of courtesy The University Theatre, then later just The Playhouse, and more recently, after a major refurbishment in 2006, the Northern Stage. In the 1970s an arm of the Playhouse Company, called Stagecoach, ran touring shows for schools, commissioning local playwrights. In 1979 an Education Liaison Officer (ELO) was appointed, who came from the world of teaching rather than the world of theatre, and simultaneously a participatory Theatre in Education team, known as Tynewear TIE, was born. The ELO position quickly lapsed, but the TIE team lasted until the late 1980s. This author was the Education Liaison Officer through most of 1980.

The Queensland Theatre Company also emerged – not exclusively, but primarily – out of a 1960s University of Queensland groundswell of interested theatre groups from Arts, Law, Architecture and Engineering, performing in a couple of theatre spaces on the campus. Based on a core group led by a charismatic young director, Bryan Nason, this crystallised into the quasi-professional College Players. For them outreach was the name of the game from early days, and, with no theatre to call their own, they embarked on ambitious tours throughout Queensland's vast distances – including, famously, railway tours thousands of miles long where the company in its carriage got hooked on to a succession of long-distance, slow-travelling trains taking Shakespeare and musicals to far-flung regional centres. They led the charge to establish a fully professional state theatre company, and the Queensland Theatre Company (QTC) was formally established in 1969, housed in a remarkably well-designed theatre buried deep in an insurance office tower block. Nason was surprisingly overlooked as artistic director in favour of a 'safe' British director based in Sydney, Alan Edwards, who ran the company for the next 17 years. 'Cultural cringe', regional and national, was still a feature of Australian artistic life until the next decade when groups like the Australian Performing Group, Nimrod, La Mama and Nason's own Grin and Tonic established a confident and independent Australian theatre voice.

From the beginning, the company was directed by its charter to reach out to the whole vast state, not just Brisbane. They were also aware of the need to cater for young people, and their very first 'fully professional activity' (Hedge 1980) tidily put the two needs together in a program of three productions which would tour Queensland schools, provided by an ensemble company known slightly incongruously as the 'Young Elizabethan Players'. The final activity of that year (1970) was

a 4-week full-time Theatre Training School in Theatre Techniques, with members of the company joining and tutoring 25 students from round the state. At the time, there was no professional tertiary theatre training to be had in Queensland. That had to wait for another 5 years.

The company had an established education officer almost from its inception, and almost a decade earlier than the Newcastle Playhouse. This started from the end of 1970, though unlike at Newcastle, this person was appointed from within the theatre industry, rather than education (the first, Murray Foy, was a main company actor). This changed over the years towards more educationally experienced education liaison officers, and the position was maintained, usually with State Education Department funding, until 2012. As with the Playhouse, the QTC operated a touring company for schools, with locally commissioned playwrights, including this author in 1978. For economic, cultural and geographical reasons dealt with elsewhere (O'Toole and Bundy 1993) the British TIE movement featuring integral audience participation did not prosper in Australia. My own single effort in this genre for the company was ill-conceived; it was directed without comprehension and mercifully sank almost without trace, though the company report kindly noted that the 'theatre in education company broke new ground' (an experiment they were never to repeat, in this kind anyway).

2 1980s

A search through the Newcastle Playhouse records in the local and regional archives showed very thin pickings for the education and young people's offerings, either of the ELO or, initially, the TIE team, though production records after 1982 have been preserved. These few records – and their scantiness – triggered my own 1980 memories. As the second appointed ELO, I do remember that in the 9 months I worked for the company, I met the artistic director, John Blackmore, just once, at my request, and the interview terminated with my conclusion that further meetings would accomplish little. I wrote, developed and directed one practical schools' workshop to accompany a main house production of The Merchant of Venice. All the main house productions were directed squarely at adults, except for the Christmas family show (for which an education officer or young persons' specialist was not required, and I had by then left, anyway). For all the rest of the time, I worked with the TIE team, which had effectively a totally separate establishment and program, in a building right across the city from the theatre. This was mainly funded by the local education authority (LEA), and provided participatory, highly socially conscious small-group theatre work in and for schools… in the Local Education Authority (LEA)'s zealously guarded territory. We got into trouble when we performed for a neighbouring LEA, the only time apart from my sole interview that I remember the artistic director intervening or indicating concern about the TIE team's work. He never saw a TIE program. I was puzzled, and remain so, why a director who had established the role of ELO, as well as a TIE team, seemed so detached.

In the 1970s and 1980s in the Queensland Theatre Company, the education and young people's work was almost equally detached from the main house, and the Director took little more personal interest than Newcastle's. However, it was almost certainly more highly valued, getting numerous mentions in the company's first 10-year report (Hedges 1980); indeed 1977 was declared its 'Year of Youth', with increased funds and a special initiative in the form of a regional Youth Theatre. As late as 1996, an in-house report (QTC 1996, pp. 2–5) clearly delineated the separate visions, partially separate funding and also considerable tensions between the main house and the education program. Main house programming was overwhelmingly but not entirely devoted to catering for adult audiences, and children's audiences were seen as something else. The idea of a Christmas show or pantomime was not practicable in Brisbane, owing to a large proportion of local families leaving the city for extended summer holidays; however the company's first children's play was presented near the end of 1971, in tandem with its second tentative excursion into Australian theatre. This was repeated annually. From the late 1970s there was an almost annual production of a popular Shakespeare play, with an eager eye to the box office opportunities that schools provided. The company from its inception, however, had been given and had faithfully fulfilled its responsibility to the whole state, not just Brisbane. Outreach was not just a pious idea, but a political necessity, in a state where over half the population lived in regions up to 2000 km and even more away from the capital (and where political power lay in the country votes). Some adult shows toured, and also a lot of this responsibility devolved to the education program, which dutifully toured from end to end of the State, reaching one and a half million children in its first 13 years (Frame 1984). From that first 1970 Theatre Techniques workshop the company ran annual acting and directing workshops more and more targeted towards regional and remote school students.

This broader regional and touring responsibility was not imposed on the Newcastle company, and only emerged gradually during the latter years of the century. Nevertheless, striking convergences emerge from these histories between the two companies in the 1970s and 1980s: the clear separation of audiences from participants, and indeed the separation of work for young people, particularly those in formal educational settings, from the work for adults, that in both theatres was seen as the core business of the company. Plenty of anecdotal evidence suggests that artists' attitudes mirrored the theatres' policies. Some adult playwrights explicitly despised the quality and aesthetics of young people's theatre: 'The TIE people do a great job educating children, but it's not art, and it's not entertainment' (Buzo 1988, p. 44). In the main, acting for theatre in education (in the UK) and young people's theatre (in both countries) were less career paths than something to do until a proper – i.e. adult – job came along. This author can testify to that from many conversations with creative staff, including some colleagues. Similarly, schools' matinees tended to be dreaded or mocked rather than eagerly anticipated. This may have been partly because the 'theatre literacy' of many school students and therefore their understanding of theatre protocols was far inferior to that of contemporary school parties, and their behaviour often reflected that (Burton et al. 2013; Stinson 2013).

3 Reaching Out in England

Towards the turn of the century the picture in Newcastle changed, first with the appointment in 1992 of Alan Lyddiard, a Scot with an outward-looking perspective, who was determined to make the company the theatre not just for Newcastle but the region and to make work which was locally, nationally and internationally significant. His artistic vision was summarised:

> We recognise that the arts are an integral part of our society. They enable all people to think and behave creatively in their daily lives and are a means by which people's imaginations can be expanded. Northern Stage aspires to the creation and promotion of great art. The company is committed to communicating with people on an intellectual, emotional and spiritual level in order to encourage debate, feelings and desires that reflect who we are, the place where we live and our relationships with the rest of the world. (Lyddiard 1995, p. unnumbered)

In 1998 Lyddiard founded the Northern Stage Ensemble as the resident company at Newcastle Playhouse. This brought two major shifts relevant to this chapter – firstly the perspectival move towards a broader regional awareness, and secondly the establishment of a resident ensemble company. This was, as Kylie Lloyd explained, to give people a period of time to be a fulltime artist. She added, significantly for this essay, that Lyddiard's vision was 'fully inclusive of any participation and education work as well as work they were doing for the main stage'. Lyddiard identified the three key equal areas of work for the company as being 'produced, presented and projects'. With a Projects team, including Education & Events, headed up by Tony Harrington (1992–2001) the work was conceived as a part of the 'total theatre' experience, where education was not 'separated off'. In 2002 Lloyd joined Northern Stage as Projects Manager, promoted to Director of Participation in 2006, a nomenclature she still held in 2015.

The Northern Stage Ensemble model ran for 8 years, with large scale participatory projects taking place across the region and internationally, and forming part of the programme. This included The Blaze! Funded by Creative Partnerships, Northern Stage devised a new street opera, working with over a hundred students from five schools across the Tees Valley (part of a separate major conurbation 50 miles South). In contrast to those early days when the LEA-funded Tynewear TiE got into trouble for straying into the next-door borough, Northern Stage now defines its touring area as from the Scottish border to Teesside and further South into North Yorkshire, as well as West into Cumbria, to cater for those young people for whom Manchester (over a hundred miles South) would otherwise be the nearest option. While geographically this is a tiny fraction of Queensland's vast distances and emptiness, in England's much more compressed and socially variegated society it is quite comparable – with a population of more than half of Queensland's, for instance.

The company suffered something of a hiatus for more than 2 years, as the theatre building closed for a major redevelopment in 2004, not re-opening until 2006. Lyddiard resigned in 2005 and his successor as artistic director, Erica Whyman,

joined the company in 2006. Whyman had the same strong commitment to work for young people as her predecessor, and some of the team, including Lloyd, were still in place. Together they made a significant linguistic shift, replacing the word 'Projects' as the leading term for their young people's work with 'Participation'. This change came because they felt strongly that they did not want to be seen as:

> an education department, with the implication that we teach people what to do and how to do it: we want people to come and take part in drama for whatever that might mean at those points in their lives.

This change of language, and of the perspective and attitude that the shift means, is symbolic of perhaps the major shift in understanding, or reconceptualization, of young people that has occurred in the theatre industry internationally, and in attitudes of arts organisations generally. It is part of a broader societal shift, with many contributing factors, such as the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child, the growing purchasing power and decision-making agency of young people, and the availability to young people of communication and information through IT and social media. Young people are now, more and more, considered as active citizens, rather than citizens-of-tomorrow, or citizens-in-waiting. Their artistic interests and concerns are now more and more being taken into account as serious opinions (e.g. Martin et al. 2013; Reason 2010; Barrett and Smigiel 2003; Brown 2000). And not only in the literature; these opinions are increasingly affecting company programming in Australia (Fleming et al. 2013, pp. 110–111). And correspondingly in the UK, in a significant linguistic shift, all of the 'Education' departments from the Big 12 UK Producing Theatres have shifted to Participation and/or Learning departments.)

The company's commitment not only to working with young people (as emerging artists not just as audience) but also actively engaging with 'people who think that theatre is not for them' was strongly pursued, even while the theatre was closed. This took the form of projects, most notably an ambitious international project with Noord Nederlands Toneel from Holland, called On Top of the Town, funded by the British Council. These two companies had a number of things in common, including an established ensemble, a theatrical vision embracing social cohesion, and a commitment to working with young people. The roles were peer matched in each company, so there were two directors, two project producers, two co-ordinators and eight young artists. They worked on a devised performance for a year, over a number of weekends, and a 3-week production period, that culminated initially in a performance in a car park in Groningen, and then was re-staged as the showcase performance to re-open the rebuilt Northern Stage theatre. This was a remarkable affirmation of trust in young people's artistry and participation, from an established civic theatre company.

And, moreover, it affirmed Northern Stage's trust in group-devised work, which has remained the mainstay of the company's work for young people. This underlines the theatre's artistic approach, which is to 'empower young people to believe that what they want to say is inclusive and valid'. Devised projects, increasingly funded by philanthropic foundations, became and remain important. Following Top

of the Town came a project Happiness, devised – and group-devised – as a counter both to the current main-house season laden with tragedies, and the general air of despondency that accompanied the 2008 global financial recession.

Much of the energy of Lloyd's Participation team goes into securing funding for these kinds of projects, of which there have been at least six major ones, besides regular programmes of activities such as workshops for babies, 5–12 year olds, Young Company and ongoing collaborations with local acting courses at Gateshead College and Northumbria University. Touring to schools is now a much smaller part of the company's work, as is the schools' matinee, which has almost disappeared, along with funding from Education Authorities and even the capacity of schools to organise school visits to theatre. This is mainly because of the English National Curriculum's continued and increasing neglect of the Humanities in favour of a literacy-, numeracy- and science-based curriculum bolstered by frequent testing – as vividly analysed in the Cambridge Review of Primary Education (Alexander et al. 2009). Drama has suffered particularly from not having full subject status - as noted critically by inter alia Jonothan Neelands (1992) – since the 1980s but mainly treated either as a component of English or, in primary education, as a pedagogical approach. Neither of these are especially conducive to visiting theatres, and the testing regime, increased teacher loads and reduced arts funding in schools all further limit the capacity of teachers to arrange extramural expeditions to the theatre. However, many school groups do still come to the main house shows; performances are scheduled for early evening (6.00 or 6.30), so that students can come after school and their teachers can get them back home. The theatre is also pro-active in running workshops for teachers, connecting them to the shows and the shows to the curriculum, where relevant. Besides those opportunities, there is an annual Teachers' Forum.

Within the last 4 years, the company has been exploring and investing in the process of young people becoming professional artists – looking at the steps and journeys that young people can make, at what point their developing expertise can meet the company's professionalism, and how they can maintain that contact. The pioneering work with Newcastle College has broadened into a commitment to working with recent graduates and other young professionals, providing them with actual employment experience. They have started up the NORTH programme, an intensive training residency funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, that enables up to eight young artists to work with Northern Stage, to create and tour work. Another of these initiatives takes people as young as 14, and invites them to contribute their work to a couple of the company's 'Scratch Nights' for local artists trying out new work. These are not only devised and performed by young people, but also curated and partly produced by them (mentored by company members), offering them an unusual level of engagement in theatre's mysteries. The events have been sell-outs.

A new artistic director, Lorne Campbell, arrived in 2014, and mainly ensured continuity of these policies, and particularly the vision of the theatre as a community centre and resource, focusing more on the theatre building itself, again reaching out to those who might not think that theatre is for them, as well as for unfunded,

experimental, amateur and profit-share groups. The location is actually a big disadvantage, now tucked away as it is and hidden from the city behind a large and forbidding university building (the old Playhouse was visible across the road from the Civic Centre and the bus station). However, they do what they can. The theatre has three spaces: the smallish main house, seating 450, a black box studio seating 180 and the original Front of House, now rebranded Stage 3, that they have turned into a community workshop space holding about 70. Stage 3 is made available for free to community groups, when not used for company activities. The main house has five major productions a year, again strongly focussed on young people and community: two of these are at Christmas, one for under-sixes, written and directed by Lloyd's team, and one for families. One of the others during the year she describes as 'participatory' by which she means that community members and non-professionals take part – rather than the more commonly used definition of the term meaning audience participation. This would have been much more difficult for Blackmore's company back in the 1970s, had it been considered, because the actors' union, Equity, barred the use of non-professional performers in a professional theatre; the many 'Fringe' groups experimenting with any kind of participatory theatre had to find other spaces like pubs to perform. And in addition to all of this, the company provides one of the major offerings at an annual Children's Festival, 'Juice' in October.

Although there is a congenial and very modern bar and café in the foyer, the company feels it is underused (again, partly the theatre's hidden position). Newcastle playgoers old and young tend not to stay after the event, nor to use it for the kind of socialising – turning the visit to see a play into a whole-evening social event – that is so much a growing part of young people's valuing of theatre visits in Australia (Stinson 2013).

4 Reaching Out in Queensland

In Queensland, the QTC's initial commitment to children and young people has been maintained almost unbroken, though the language has changed very significantly. In the 1970s and 1980s, a major purpose of catering for young people, quite explicitly (Foy 1978), was to create the next generation of adult theatre audiences of the future - bums on seats - and the next generation of specialist actors. This could be done by attractive in-house plays for children and families, around Christmas time, or by taking theatre into schools, and by annual skills workshops for a selected few. The current director, Wesley Enoch, uses statistics to shape a different vision:

> We use the education system… as a way of talking to a very broad base, and then we have more and more specialist activities that have deeper and deeper kind of engagement. So we would have about 10,000 young people who come and see our shows – our main house shows – and then we have another 10,000 that engage with workshop activities, and then roughly about, say 10,000 when we do schools touring that we connect up with them in their schools, so we are not often talking to people in a deep way unless they want to engage and opt in.

As with the current Newcastle management, in my QTC discussions I often found it difficult to distinguish whether we were talking about young people as audiences or as young artists, and what ages we were actually talking about. Enoch's picture is also full of subtexts that vividly illustrate the changes that have occurred in the perception within the company of young people and their relationship to the art of theatre.

The position of Education Officer, or some similar title, remained unbroken in the company until 2012. Through almost the whole period some funding – sometimes the entire funding of the position – was provided by the State Department of Education, (a scenario Northern Stage could only have dreamed of). In addition, the State Arts Department provided solid infrastructure and promotion for the education touring program throughout the whole period, through the Queensland Arts Council (QAC), a body set up and dedicated to ensure that regional and remote areas were properly looked after (a political necessity as well as an equitable vision, as the country vote has always been massively influential, and until 1991 reinforced by a spectacular electoral gerrymander). The QAC support did have one major drawback, as it came with conditions: a production assessment panel that vetted every performance program officially entering schools, and at times operated – or was at least seen to – more as a censorship body than quality control, and had the power to prevent programs it did not approve of being seen. Though never particularly draconian or repressive, this assessment program tended to err on the side of caution, particularly as some Queensland schools and parent groups had a tradition of highly vocal conservatism, especially in matters of political and other contentious material (see O'Toole and Bundy 1993, pp. 144–146). This had a twin impact, financial and aesthetic. It led to a very safe, cautious, curriculum-centred approach to touring theatre, and largely prevented experimental or possibly contentious or risky theatre for schools from happening in Queensland: no professional company looking for the Arts Council sponsorship (as the QTC was bound to) could risk employing for several weeks a creative team of director, production staff and actors, and maybe playwright, with the real possibility of the show being canned by the QAC's assessment panel. A few brave independent companies like the Albert-Hunt[1]-inspired but short-lived Popular Theatre Troupe and Bryan Nason's much longer-surviving Grin and Tonic ignored this whole system and toured to the schools anyway, but that independence was not available to the state-incorporated QTC.

Safe and conservative it may have been, but the QTC's touring provision to schools remained prolific until well into the new millennium, under a number of names: The Young Elizabethans morphed into the Brolgas (named after a large stork native to country Queensland and noted for its spectacular dancing displays), then in the 1980s into Roadworks, then back to the Brolgas, and from the early 1990s the

[1] Albert Hunt was a radical British theatre director whose visit to Queensland in the mid 1970s, and his book *Hopes for Great Happenings* (1976), inspired the foundation by Richard Fotheringham of the *Popular Theatre Troupe*. This company took its politically activist productions into schools, independently of the QAC, until it was actually banned in 1983 by the highly conservative government of the day. See also O'Neill 1995, pp. 37–60

severely functional title Education Unit. Every year there was always a primary and a secondary touring program at least, and from the 1990s the increasing use of accompanying educational resource materials, something that has survived and grown into an integral part of the education provision today.

However, with the coming of the millennium, a new awareness was dawning of the limitation of single-visit, fly-in, fly-out theatre for young people. Certainly it gave students a pleasurable experience of theatre, usually new to them. However, it was impossible to identify from market research whether there was any evidence of those bums on school hall floors transferring themselves to adult theatre seats. On the contrary, there was a startling new study which suggested that the reverse might equally be true. As with PE and sport – but not music, significantly – new evidence (Brown 2000) suggested that a significant proportion of students associated theatre with schooling, even where they had enjoyed it, and when they left, they left theatre behind with the other experiences of school, turning to other sources of entertainment. Moreover, the company's 1984 vision:

> To present programs which do not set out to teach directly, but are designed to develop and foster an interest and motivation which, if followed up by teachers, can continue and extend to a learning experience long after the performance is over. (Frame 1984, p2.)

was honoured more in the breach than the observance. As in the UK, there had been limited evidence of teachers, especially of primary and non-drama specialist teachers, integrating the company's visits into their pedagogy or curriculum. In many schools, the supervising teachers could (and can) still be observed using the performance time to get on with their marking. Although the company still provides some touring theatre for schools, this dawning realisation prompted the search for new and different models of delivery.

The situation of drama in schools was another major factor that impacted on this company in quite a different way than on the Northern Stage (at least until recent years). As we have seen, the negating and whittling away of drama from within the curriculum in England had a highly deleterious effect on NS's educational provision. Almost the opposite happened in Queensland. From the founding in 1976 of a very active association of drama teachers, QADIE[2], drama, which had been very peripheral and mainly extra-curricular in schools, took off exponentially, especially in senior schooling. Between 1979 and 1991 the numbers of students taking drama subjects at senior examination level leapt from under 1000 to over 13,000, a number that has been roughly maintained ever since, so that drama is one of the ten most popular subjects chosen by senior students (BSSS 1993; BSSSS 2003).

In the same period tertiary drama courses were founded. These included acting courses and courses for drama teachers, and more recently applied theatre workers, which within a generation had established a solid cohort of trained and experienced drama teachers to cater for this exponential growth. They were beginning to train a different kind of actor and director, too, who did not necessarily see young people as a sideshow. Together with the continued prominence and energy of QADIE, there

[2] Queensland Association for Drama in Education, now Drama Queensland.

was beginning a shift in the theatre-going culture of Queensland. It manifested itself in the growing number of profit-share companies of performers, and a growth in alternative venues with a different audience age profile and theatre-going habits from the largely middle-aged and elderly Queensland Theatre Company's Brisbane subscribers.

Over the early decades, the QTC's theatre for schools programs had aimed to cater for a broad range of school contexts – including history and English classes (poetry-based performances have been a staple). For primary education, it was plays with generally moral or social content, either for discussion, or with an uplifting message. The growth of secondary drama gave another focus of support – to help the drama teachers, especially in the regions, to provide a rich experience of live theatre for their specialist groups. The QTC responded in terms of its touring commitment in the early 2000s by developing for secondary students a regional workshop program, rather than another run of one-off performances. This was essentially like an artist in residence program where the company would offer regional schools an artist in residence for a whole day. They would pay a subsidised fee, and an artist would be in their region for a number of days and would work among however many schools in that region wanted that engagement. As Education and Youth Programs Producer Heidi Irvine explained, the schools would essentially get an artist for a day, to use however they wanted them to, as a classroom resource, or running workshops. Alternatively teachers might say 'Oh we want to work with all the kids in the school musical doing some skills work, direction and that sort of thing…'.

This kind of flexible short-term residency shifted the company's provision firmly towards the drama teachers and classrooms, and began the process of trying to establish with their audiences a deeper and less transitory engagement with theatre. The program ran successfully, accessed by 'thousands and thousands of students and teachers', for over 6 years.

However, in that time, significant changes were happening in schools; not so much to drama classes as to the dynamics and imperatives of the schools themselves. Curricula are becoming more tightly organised, partly in pursuit of a more highly test-driven curriculum (shades of the UK). In the last 6 or 7 years, as noted by Irvine, herself an ex-drama teacher, it has become much more difficult either to make a whole day free for large numbers of students for a program such as the residencies described above, or even to negotiate the school's limited capacity to take students out of school on visits, particularly if they involve travel. This is similar to what had happened much earlier in England, and had such a deleterious effect on Northern Stage's relationship with schools. In Queensland too, special schools' matinees became rarer. With some regret, the QTC started looking around for another model.

Another youth initiative developed in this same period, also wound up by the current director Wesley Enoch, who took over the QTC in 2011, was a program of plays specially for young people and schools, including classics such as Waiting for Godot, hosted down in the company's base theatre. There would be maybe three or four shows a year, identified from current curricular texts in Drama or English curriculum and speaking directly to curriculum needs. Irvine spoke regretfully about

their demise too, in terms of the quality of work and the challenge to the students presented by the productions.

However, by this time, another vision was forming, a radical departure for the education provision of the QTC. Enoch was questioning the whole concept of a 'special' program for children and young people. This was not that he puts little value on them – on the contrary, like Irvine he has been a drama teacher himself, and is passionate about engaging young people in theatre.

> With Wesley's appointment here at QTC: we went from having a suite of work that was specifically for an education audience. He decided to get rid of that programming: 'Should we be encouraging those audiences into our mainstage?'

Enoch's vision also incorporates a commitment that is not necessarily common among elite companies. There is another professional theatre company in the city, La Boîte, and a number of successful independent and profit-share companies catering largely to young 'alternative' audiences – mainly performing in La Boîte and touring the schools. Enoch was careful not to duplicate what other theatre professionals do. For instance, La Boîte runs successful masterclasses for young adults, so QTC tailors its own masterclasses to school students only – conveniently continuing its long tradition of periodic (at one time annual) acting and directing classes for schools. They also run three Youth Ensembles – senior, intermediate and junior – as a specialised non-tertiary actor training program that is described elsewhere in this book (chapter "From Access to Participation: An Historical Account of Queensland Theatre Company's Commitment to Theatre Education for Children and Young People").

A lot of the education program's time and effort is spent in producing useful educational resources for all the company's productions, and in fostering and maintaining a very close relationship with Queensland's well-trained and close-knit drama teachers. The company recently hosted two of Drama Queensland's annual conferences, and Irvine prides herself on the many teachers who regularly ring or contact her to discuss in detail the suitability of plays for particular classes. For her and Enoch, it is a crucial responsibility of the theatre towards young people, to create a deep engagement with theatre, and a sense of the theatre belonging to them, rather than just to give a lot of young people ephemeral experiences.

The profile of Brisbane theatre audiences in general has noticeably changed, with a much larger proportion of attenders in their teens and twenties than might have been seen in earlier decades. This change, very noticeable in alternative theatre providers like La Boîte and the more experimental Powerhouse, can be seen in the QTC, both in the main house and its experimental ('Greenhouse') offerings – though this is not yet provable with statistics. This process had started well before Enoch arrived, driven by the school drama teachers and their own changing school environments, with the growing attendance of drama classes at evening productions at least as often as at matinees. All the programming, and particularly the Greenhouse season, is done with an awareness of the whole age demographic, not just older adults. Financially, in Brisbane as in Newcastle, there are swings and roundabouts: the large numbers of school and tertiary students swell the overall attendance figures,

but they pay correspondingly less for their tickets, through the theatre's youth and incentive schemes.

Beyond Brisbane, to replace the disbanded Regional Workshops program, is another initiative that is designed specifically for students. QTC's ambitious 'Scene' project clearly aims to provide a deeper engagement than 1 day to remember. It is a participatory project where schools have access to a script commissioned for them. For a term they work on that script, either as a curriculum-based project or as an extracurricular drama group project. The following term, all the groups in each region come together to perform a 10-min segment of their work for each other – so they get the opportunity to watch what the other schools have done. Then they have the opportunity to see the team of professional actors from the QTC perform the entire script. This is followed by an intensive debriefing discussion.

This initiative was 'borrowed' from a scheme started at a major Melbourne theatre, the Malthouse, that is similarly focussed on changing the profile of theatre by initiatives designed to attract youth and young adults. Like the schemes in Newcastle, they are all part of a world-wide recognition of young people, in arts as in other spheres of life, not just as citizens-in-waiting, but as discriminating consumers and more than that, participants. This is different from how it was: even in 1998, at a seminar hosted by the QTC, the eminent American doyenne of arts education Maxine Greene expressed astonished scepticism when faced with the proposition that (in Australia at least) school drama and arts curricula were designed primarily to give all children the experience of becoming emerging artists rather than just educated audiences. 'How can you ever find employment if everybody is an artist?' she queried incredulously (O'Toole 1998). By 2014, our participatory perspective had been enshrined in the Australian national curriculum, for all children, as:

> Students learn as artists and audience through the intellectual, emotional and sensory experiences of the Arts… [they] communicate ideas in current, traditional and emerging forms and use arts knowledge and understanding to make sense of their world. (ACARA 2014)

5 Summary

This word participation is the keyword for the major change from the dedicated but specialised educational service provided by these theatre companies in past ages. In both the Northern Stage and QTC the word features in the job specification of the officer formerly principally responsible for the education provision of the theatre. In both cases, particularly the Northern Stage, it signals a broader brief that addresses young people as an integral part of the theatre's core community. In both cases it still involves addressing school and curricular issues and demands, as well as a greatly increased commitment to practical training and hands-on experience for young actors and other theatre artists. Those educational needs have changed too in the period, in quite radically different ways. Northern Stage has had to cut its cloth according to the constantly shrinking flexibility and funding of a previously generous education system, with administrators, teachers and students all under great

pressure from education policies consistently unfavourable to drama in schools. QTC, though originally part of a much more 'user-pays' environment and an education system that in 1980 did not see drama at all as a core part of its business, has enjoyed unbroken educational funding and support, in a climate of increasing recognition and support for drama. That is, until the sudden and unexpected complete cut-off of this funding in 2012, which to the enormous credit of its director and board, the company managed to surmount from other resources. Both theatres have been fortunate for the last two decades at least to have directors with a genuine interest in young people, who with their staff were able not just to react to the changing tides in the affairs of young people, but to anticipate them and shape appropriate provision that has made youth and children's programs an integral and substantial part of the theatre's core business.

> It's about a relationship with the Company, not so much a 'Oh that's just the whatever Theatre Company'… they've developed a relationship with us. (Irvine, QTC)

> ...and just believing that if we invest these kinds of resources in young people, in five or ten years it's going to look like a very different city. (Lloyd, Northern Stage)

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