**Professor Bruce Burton**

Prof Bruce Burton: As a playwright, theatre director, drama educator and the chair of applied theatre at Griffith University I believe the art form of theatre is not only an extraordinarily powerful discipline but it also has the potential to enhance the scholarly, professional and personal learning of students and even transform their lives.

I also believe that theatre is a potent learning medium that can generate learning and understanding across disciplines. For me the theatre is the classroom. Theatre is an invaluable teaching and learning tool, stimulating motivation and engagement.

I use theatre techniques a lot in my teaching, not just in my teaching about theatre but also teaching in education because that allows the students to have that intense experience, first hand experience, which then allows them to feel that they are achieving real competence in what they do. So for example, with drama education students, before they go out on their first practicum in schools they’ve got very high levels of anxiety about what it’s going to be like to teach a class for the first time. And I use micro teaching in the class where they take on the roles of teachers and they’re given specific roles, they plan their teaching, they research how to teach it and then the class take on the roles of the students and they’re given specific briefs about what kind of students to be, what learning styles they have and they go away and research that. And so what we have is a classroom which is a theatre.

[classroom] Alright, are we ready?

Student 1: Everything you’ve ever thought …

Student 2: Someone’s thought it all before.

Student 3: All the feelings you’ve ever felt …

Student 4: They have all …

Prof Bruce Burton I’ve been very passionate about having extensive work integrated learning in all my courses. In the theatre field I try and give my students authentic first hand experience of what it’s like to be engaged in a theatre industry. So all the students do a placement with a theatre industry organisation in Brisbane, as well as that because I’m a theatre director and playwright and I’m chair of
Metro Arts here in Brisbane, which is a major arts organisation, my students are offered the chance, as a theatre company, to work in a professional environment. So each year the final year students rehearse a play for four weeks as a professional company would do, here at the university, and then they go into the Metro Arts theatre, they go in as an emerging professional company and are treated like that by Metro Arts.

All our courses in fact offer that kind of work integrated learning to some extent. So first and second year courses, where the students have projects to complete, those projects are working with other students in other courses. So our theatre direction students have to direct a play. The first year students in play making, performing those plays, they become the actors in those plays. The technology students who are learning lighting and sound do the lighting and sound for those plays. The drama teacher students who study development of plays work with the theatre directors to help develop the plays. So when those plays are staged in a public auditorium for a public audience, all those students from four different courses see their work arising from their study actually being performed in public and it’s an authentic, it’s a real experience and not just a project or a class based one.

[classroom] Same star. Same scrum. Singles groups, go!

Amy Bradney-George: Bruce’s teaching has been incredibly valuable to me, both as a student and as an emerging theatre industry professional. The public performance of stage craft really gave me a chance to apply the theories that Bruce taught to real world professional experiences.

[classroom]

Student 1: Excuse me, are you talking to me?

Student 2: Yeah, I am.

Prof Bruce Burton: Closer Freddy.

Student 2: I am.

Prof Bruce Burton: Inside her personal space, good.

As a professor in applied theatre, just as all my teaching is in that area, so my research has been in the area of applied theatre too. Here at Griffith University we’ve actually created projects which
have been really innovative in the field, but they’ve all been applied using theatre techniques, using education techniques to actually change individuals’ experiences, the world, to change behaviour, to change the way systems work.

[classroom]

Student 2: And that happens when they have fear.

Student 1: It happens when they’re not trained. It happens when they’re stupid.

Amy Bradney-George: I’d heard about Bruce before I went to university and how he explores way theatre can be used in social and educational situations. Going to university with Bruce, I think he gives people a lot of chances to try different types of applied theatre and he really gave me the confidence to pursue this as a career.

[excerpt from ‘Cooling Conflicts’]

Student 1: She’s trying to punch me, I’m just new here and I don’t want to be punched and I’m just trying to make friends with her.

Prof Bruce Burton: The DRACON project, which was an international project with Sweden and Malaysia, was looking at ways of working with school children to help them become more really confident in dealing with conflict.

[excerpt from ‘Cooling Conflicts’]

Student 1: That’s it, how many times did I tell you to bring your books up?

Prof Bruce Burton: And that project’s run for more than ten years in hundreds of schools with tens of thousands of school students. And we found that by using drama to enable students to enact different conflict situations safely in the drama classroom, they were able to explore conflicts, their own and other ones, they were able to create fictional conflicts they could explore and they learnt how to change them, how to deal with them and the outcomes have been really positive. I’ve then been able to use that research material in my own classrooms, particularly with my education students, in helping them to learn a lot more about conflict management through the successful research outcomes we had in that particular project.
[classroom]

Just go for a walk. When you hear the clap just turn to the person next to you, make a shape and then adjust to theirs. Now!

Throughout my adult life the theatre has been my passion and teaching my vocation. All my teaching aims to provide my students with a powerful, motivating learning experience through the transformative power of theatre and to give them the scholarship, understanding, empathy and skills to be their own artists, teachers or theatre workers.

[classroom]

Make a shape and adjust to theirs now!