Editorial

by

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(Australia)

Change – both personal and social – is a dominant theme in applied theatre, along with our genre’s obverse recognition of theatre’s potential to conserve, develop and strengthen aspects of our lives, both personal and social. So too with this journal, and our twelfth edition will be the last in its current form. From 2012, the journal will come under the aegis of the major international academic publisher Intellect. It will appear both online and in hard copy, with a greatly improved layout and formatting, and a much-increased visibility and international profile. It will appear more frequently than our current annual production. It will even have a new and simplified title, *Applied Theatre Research*, and a far more accessible website. Most significantly, it will become a subscription journal, no longer entirely free; however, there are safeguards to protect our social justice agenda: many economically developing countries are exempted from fees, and applied theatre workers and aficionados in those countries will still be able to gain free online access. We are conserving some things – the journal’s strengths, we hope:

- The international advisory board, comprising the most distinguished academics and practitioners in the field from all corners of the globe, in balanced representation, will be retained.
- So will our basic policy of seeking and publishing high-quality scholarship and praxis representative of a very broad and inclusive definition of applied theatre and drama education, and a diverse readership and writership.
- We intend to keep – at least informally – the close links with IDEA, the UNESCO-recognised international peak body in drama and theatre education, and with Griffith University in Australia, to ensure both artistic and academic grounding and credibility for the journal.
- Your editors will remain unchanged.

The first change is already happening in this edition. We welcome Professor Michael Balfour as our Reviews Editor, and we have instituted what will be a regular feature: critical reviews of key books (and other published media) in the field. We perhaps should say: ‘re-instituted’, as alongside the first edition were two book reviews by our founding editor, Philip Taylor – still on the *ATR* website.

Looking forward from that first edition, we have had three editors: Philip Taylor produced the first three editions; John O’Toole was responsible for the next three; and the last six have been edited by our current team of Penny Bundy and John O’Toole. During this period, the nature and definition of applied theatre have become much clearer, and applied theatre has become more generally known as a distinct genre of theatre and field of scholarship. Editorials over the decade have, among other topics, speculated on the nature and placement of applied theatre in the international drama world; on applied theatre’s relationship with drama education – and the relationship between the words ‘drama’ and ‘theatre’; on ethics and ambiguity; on theatre for questions or theatre for answers – and on its potential for social change and disruption; and on
the gaps and silences, inclusions and exclusions inherent in the words and in the work. We have published, including this edition, 86 articles by authors from 27 countries on all continents. These articles have been enormously diverse, though all have adhered to the basic principle of theatre applied to specific purposes beyond entertainment: from medieval Norwegian Christmas rituals to Turkish satirical folk-plays, from theatre in prisons and war zones to drama in schools and Shakespeare in the streets, from theatre for healing to theatre for training, from theatrical interventions with disempowered Sami people and African women to theatre dealing with such issues as self-esteem, democracy, the world of cyberspace and family violence … and many more hot topics in the field.

This edition has a number of articles with related themes: a strong vein of advocacy runs through the first five, all backed strongly either by research or powerful and verifiable personal experiences. This is balanced by the last two, which provide a counter by reminding us that not everybody is immediately, or even at all, bewitched by the magic of theatre and the purposes that we put it to.

David Kelman explores the mythic power of stories to create deeper learning, and the power they have to deepen the understanding of the important issues for young people – not only in their own lives, but through archetypal connections. He makes the broader claim that using drama and theatre to reinterpret myth fulfils a deep desire in young people to create a sense of order in their world. Fadi Skeiker demonstrates further strong advocacy for the efficacy of applied theatre, this time as a vehicle for dispossessed Palestinian youngsters in Jordan to learn to express and explore their own stories (unlike Kelman, using not fiction but aesthetic shaping as an exploratory and protective mechanism). Like Kelman, however, he identifies the mythic and political power of story in the young people’s lives; the article also provides an opportunity for the author to critique his own first venture into this territory. Mia Perry, theorising from her own practice about the potential of devising theatre for embodied learning and understanding of self, uses the useful, and now very familiar, frame of the rhizomatic nature of theatre practice to map and analyse intricately a young theatre-making group’s development in emergent learning and self-reflection. Perry focuses on a detailed analysis of one participant, using that participant’s invention and embodiment of a theatrical ‘character’. David Wright argues that drama is a particularly rich pedagogy for developing an understanding of global ecology and the natural balances of the world, proposing a re-evaluation – or more exactly, a return to valuing highly – the somewhat out-of-fashion notion of using drama across the curriculum to explore ecological issues and dilemmas. Margaret Lepp and her colleagues in Sweden, Germany and, coincidentally, Jordan, explore intercultural dialogue in nursing education. Similarly to Wright, they advocate drama – in the forms of role-play and, in this study, forum theatre – as a rich and particularly appropriate pedagogy for educating nurses in three very diverse national and cultural settings to develop a global perspective. They argue that nursing education needs changing from a teacher-centred to a learner-centred approach, in order to support more global awareness of cultures, world-views and ethnic diversity. Rebecca Scollen’s audience research into an ongoing Shakespeare in the Park festival, in contrast, provides sober reading and significant insights both into what makes outdoor theatre attractive (or not), and how theatre itself – and especially Shakespeare – are perceived in a typical country town community. Finally, Jack Shu’s detailed analysis of drama pedagogy in second-language development in Hong Kong uncovers the perceptions of intending teachers, again with results that give cause for hope while preventing any delusions of grandeur.
We think that there are many, many applied theatre projects out there that give similar cause for hope, and many more analyses that can swiftly provide a critical counterpoint. We look forward to having plenty of submissions from our readers to our new and improved journal, and we hope that you will tell all those colleagues and strangers who are engaged in exciting praxis, practice or theory in the field to commit their inspiring work to paper and send us an article about it. Our thorough review process and distinguished reviewers are there to help you as well as us in our quest to make public, analyse and interrogate our work.