

## How to Deal with Multitudes?

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**MCAVOY, Mary and O'CONNOR, Peter, eds.** *The Routledge Companion to Drama in Education*. London: Routledge, 2022. 610 p.  
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*The Routledge Companion to Drama in Education* is a fifty-seven-chapter strong compilation of writings on the wide concept of drama in education. It is a “comprehensive resource for scholars, artists, and educators”,<sup>1</sup> according to the editors Mary McAvoy and Peter O'Connor. The scope of themes, contexts, approaches, localities, methodologies and authors included in the volume reflect their aim, and it seems beyond question that the publication has all the characteristics needed to become a seminal reference point for those writing about drama education. It also seems evident that the book will be used as a steppingstone by many who are studying to become scholars, artists, or educators in the field of drama education.

The book presents the writings in three parts. The first one, containing twelve chapters is titled *Boundaries and contours*. The second part titled *Methods, programmes, and partnerships* offers thirty-eight chapters, while the third part, titled *Futures and possibilities*, contains seven writings. The nature of the chapters in the three sections are clearly quite different. While writings in the first part address larger themes, overarching issues, the second part feels more like looking into a drama-kaleidoscope, and getting impressions from a variety of drama projects

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<sup>1</sup> Mary MCAVOY and Peter O'CONNOR, “We contain multitudes: An introduction”, in *The Routledge Companion to Drama in Education*, ed. by Mary MCAVOY and Peter O'CONNOR, 1–6 (London: Routledge, 2022), 1.  
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and research from around the globe. The third part reflects more on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on our field, with chapters discussing the relationship of drama education and digital technologies explicitly.

In my reporting on the specific chapters of the publication I will start from this third part and head back to the beginning step-by step. As the reviewer of this massive and important collection of writing, I am not able to do justice to all the authors, my reflections on the chapters will admittedly be subjective and will cover topics within this diverse field that I am most engaged in.

While there are references in many chapters to the impact of the pandemic, one of the most tangible consequences for our field is a greater openness to the inclusion of digital technologies in drama education. David Cameron and Michael Anderson provide an extremely useful analysis of the changing position of digital technologies in the field of drama, highlighting that digital tools have become an important part of young people's creative activities and personal development, hence the authors also examine concepts like mediated self and augmented self. They argue that “the next phase of drama education and technology should see its demise as a category as we collaborate with students to see technology in drama education as commonplace and unremarkable”.<sup>2</sup> A chapter by Adisti Anindita Regar reports on a research project exploring the use of transmedia theatre experience that was built around

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<sup>2</sup> David CAMERON and Michael ANDERSON, “Evolution, diffusion and disturbance: Drama, education and technology” in MCAVOY and O'CONNOR, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Drama in Education*, 513–523, 521.  
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the South Australian Slingsby Theatre's performance. The researcher explored four different possibilities of how the theatre performance can be followed up in the digital space, reflecting on both the challenges and the productive outcomes of the experiment.<sup>3</sup> Amy Petersen Jensen and Kris W. Peterson focused on how "digital technologies might inform gesture, space, place, and the performance of identity in contemporary drama education experiences". Through assignments for their students they created a framework that allowed young people to explore and reflect on their bodily expressions on digital media, and come to a deeper understanding of their own use of these platforms and the impact it had on their non-digital communication.<sup>4</sup> On a different note, Matt Omasta's chapter titled number count makes an argument for the implementation of quantitative research in the field of drama education.<sup>5</sup> This piece offers a survey of quantitative research done in drama, but surprisingly does not refer to the DICE research, one of the few big surveys, conducted in the field of theatre and drama education, that built highly on

<sup>3</sup> Adisti Anindita REGAR, "Designing a trans-media THEATRE experience for drama education", in MCAVOY and O'CONNOR, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Drama in Education*, 524–530, 525.

<sup>4</sup> Amy Petersen JENSEN and Kris W. PETERSON, "Digital bodies/live space, How digital technologies might inform gesture, space, place, and the performance of identity in contemporary drama education experiences", in MCAVOY and O'CONNOR, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Drama in Education*, 531–544, 531.

<sup>5</sup> Matt OMASTA, "Numbers count, Quantitative research in drama education", in MCAVOY and O'CONNOR, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Drama in Education*, 553–563, 553.

quantitative methods.<sup>6</sup> Omasta's chapter comes to the undebatable conclusion that "we might most benefit from carrying out mixed-methods studies that deliberately blend multiple methodologies, thus benefiting from the strengths of each approach incorporated".<sup>7</sup>

I will now take a step back to the second part of the book and offer the chance to take a quick glimpse into the kaleidoscope, I will offer some examples of the many interesting projects and case studies presented there. Cletus Moyo shares a self-reflective journey of focusing on facilitation at Lupane State University, Zimbabwe while teaching drama classes at the tennis court of the institutions.<sup>8</sup> Chipo Marunda-Piki reflects on the possibilities offered by using Teacher in Role in English as a Second Language education introducing the story of the Gruffalo in Zimbabwe.<sup>9</sup> Branka Bajić Jovanov presents a collaboration between a theatre, the municipality, and the pre-school institutions in a district of Belgrade to use process drama in the ecological education of preschool children.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> CZIBOLY Adam, *The DICE Has Been Cas: Research findings and recommendations on educational theatre and drama* (Budapest: DICE Consortium, 2010), 8.

<sup>7</sup> OMASTA, "Numbers count...", 562.

<sup>8</sup> Cletus MOYO, "Looking back and forward: Reflecting on my facilitation as a drama in education teacher and facilitator at Lupane State University in Zimbabwe" in MCAVOY and O'CONNOR, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Drama in Education*, 484–487, 484.

<sup>9</sup> Chipo MARUNDA-PIKI, "Formulating a learning context using teacher in role for reading fluency in ESL students", in MCAVOY and O'CONNOR, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Drama in Education*, 408–412, 408.

<sup>10</sup> Branka Bajić JOVANOV, "Ecological education of preschool children using process drama", in in MCAVOY and O'CONNOR, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Drama in Education*, 166–171, 166.

Christine Hatton shares an in-depth and rare account of a school project in Australia based on Heathcote's transdisciplinary rolling role system of teaching, in which teachers of different subjects come together to form a fictional context that allows them to implement their curriculum, teaching from within the fiction.<sup>11</sup> Anne Richie G. Balgos reports on using Theatre of the Oppressed in teaching literature in the Philippines.<sup>12</sup> Peter Duffy conducts a 'project autopsy' centred around a longitudinal research conducted in the *Read to Succeed Camps* in rural South Carolina, US. The rigour in the detail and the description of the research and the honesty in the disappointment with the results are a rare example of raising productive questions that ought to make the field think beyond the assumptions we have about the impact of drama.<sup>13</sup> While most chapters use a classic academic format, others are set as dialogue between practitioners,<sup>14</sup> and besides the wide geographical and methodological spectrum,

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<sup>11</sup> Christine HATTON, "Drama as a pedagogy of connection: Using Heathcote's rolling role system to activate the ethical imagination" in MCAVOY and O'CONNOR, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Drama in Education*, 153–165, 153. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003000914-16>

<sup>12</sup> Anne Richie G. BALGOS, "Boal in the Philippine classroom: Using Theatre of the Oppressed in teaching literature", in MCAVOY and O'CONNOR, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Drama in Education*, 338–344, 338.

<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003000914-35>

<sup>13</sup> Peter DUFFY, "Mixed methods in drama education research, A project autopsy", in MCAVOY and O'CONNOR, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Drama in Education*, 297–309, 298. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003000914-32>

<sup>14</sup> Dontá MCGILVERY and Claire K. REDFIELD, "Little Red and the Wolf: Devising with young people at Eastlake Park", in MCAVOY and O'CONNOR, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Drama in Education*, 246–249, 246.

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there is also variety in relation to age-groups, with a chapter reflecting specifically on drama in education for adults.<sup>15</sup> These one-liners do not do justice to the work that is shared by the contributors of this publication, scanning the list of chapters is worthwhile to find themes or authors that reflect one's interest.<sup>16</sup> The 'multitudes' referred to in the title of the introduction, besides its many and obvious positive aspects, does also contain limitations. While the scope of what is offered is exasperating, offering a breadth of reference points and even some provocations, many of the fifty-seven chapters only offer a passing glimpse into the project, research, or theory shared by their authors. The references, of course, can be followed further for those who want to track the given subject, but in some cases an explicit offer at the end of the chapter on how to engage with the topic in greater depth would have offered much needed further context for these pieces. While the introduction of the editors at the onset of the book discusses the diversity of *Companion's* content, it seems a missed opportunity that apart from the titles of the three parts, they do not offer a compass or other form of support for those braving to navigate this multitude of thoughts and practices. Especially in the case of the second part, discussed above, where the sheer number of chapters is overwhelming, some pointers would help readers take in more of the richness that is on offer, and some form of intervention from the editor could also balance the attention among the work of the authors who face strong competition from each other in the book.

<sup>15</sup> Cortney MCENIRY KNIPP, "Trauma-informed considerations for drama in education with adults", 350–356, 350.

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<sup>16</sup> A full list of the chapters and even some of the full chapters have been made downloadable on this website:

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781003000914>

The chapters in the first part of the book discuss different aspects of drama education in a greater depth, offering useful insights and provocations. John O'Toole's historical mini-tour of the educating process of drama offers much useful insight into how different ages and cultures related to drama, even providing an example of an eighth-century English monk, Ceolfrith, stepping into the role of different characters from the Bible, basically using a form of hot-seating to make Bible teaching more accessible.<sup>17</sup> O'Toole discusses DiE as a pedagogy stemming out of the movement of Enlightenment, and offers a simplified overview of the history of drama education to come to what I see as the central question of his piece: to what extent should those "enlightened" core values at the heart of this pedagogy be negotiated to make the global spreading of drama possible and to face those unprecedented challenges that are before us. O'Toole frames his writing with the story of a visit to China by a group of drama experts in 2019. The organisers of the conference asked Prof. O'Toole to change some paragraphs in his keynote speech after asking for a copy to help the translation of the talk. He recounts rewriting his speech in code to test the water. "Instead of 'drama for social change', I wrote, 'drama to help people make their lives better'"<sup>18</sup>. The reported incident brings an exciting uneasiness to the whole chapter. O'Toole closes his chapter by stating that "We just need to find the right stage – or, to use a more contemporary metaphor, an appropriate public platform to sell our merchandise – to let people know that drama is, or could be, in PETA's words, 'the cheapest form of em-

<sup>17</sup> John O'TOOLE, "Whose enlightened pedagogy? A historical mini-tour of the educating process of drama", in MCAVOY and O'CONNOR, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Drama in Education*, 65–79, 67.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 75.

powerment'."<sup>19</sup> The metaphor of peaceful merchants selling their products can very rightfully open the question of where the boundary is between 'making accessible' and the commodification of this unique artistic-educational genre, a question that we might need to think about in the context of neoliberal agenda of the commodifying education.

Making drama education accessible is an issue that is touched on by Adam Cziboly, Mette Bøe Lyngstad, and Sisi Zheng in their important examination of the influence of the "conventions approach" on the practice of drama education in different cultures. The authors researched the impact of the three editions of Tony Goode and Jonothan Neelands' book *Structuring Drama Work* in Hungary, Norway, and China, collecting data from drama teachers and analysing their responses in detail. The paper offers a rich discussion of different perspectives on the "conventions approach" citing critiques and also Neelands' response to the questions raised. These offer a useful context for the opinion of the practitioners working in the field that is brought in through the responses to the survey. The authors come to the conclusion that the accessibility offered by this format might carry the danger of instrumentalization and also point out that:

"For those facilitators who have learnt about planning and leading more complex processes and can combine the conventions in a meaningful way, access to a wide variety of work forms (a total of 100 conventions in the third edition) can be enriching. However, for those who try to use the handbook as kind of a "recipe book", and simply read the descriptions of the conventions without understanding how these conventions can be organised, the mere application of stand-alone conventions in order to achieve a curriculum learning objective might result in a stockpile

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 77.

of empty forms. Sadly, the book offers little help on how conventions could and should be organised.”<sup>20</sup>

While the chapter above focused on the conventions and the forms used in drama lessons, Eva Hallgren’s research concentrates on the value of the process in drama and the significance of the fictional role in relation to agency. She analyses the interaction in and out of role through the use of visually representing the communication of the participants of the drama, and finds that the students in a lesson based on the story of *The Seal Wife* use their fictional roles to alter the classroom hierarchy even when the teacher moves out of role. She argues that the “student’s use of the role could be perceived as a powerful protest against the teacher’s input, but was created entirely in accordance with the aesthetic expression and performed in several rounds and added new layers of content. The teacher-in-role did not meet these actions, and, instead, ignored the in-role actions and went out of role. The student’s actions lost their agentic power.”<sup>21</sup> This research offers important and practical evidence of the social impact of drama, something that Dorothy Heathcote also points to in her seminal *Signs and Portents*<sup>22</sup>, though not using these terms.

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<sup>20</sup> CZIBOLY Adam, Mette BØE LYGSTAD and Sisi ZHENG, “The influence of the ‘conventions approach’ on the practice of drama in different cultures”, in MCAVOY and O’CONNOR, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Drama in Education*, 94–109, 96.

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<sup>21</sup> Eva HALLGREN, “Drama in education and the value of process”, in MCAVOY and O’CONNOR, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Drama in Education*, 45–52, 50.

<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003000914-4>

<sup>22</sup> Dorothy HEATHCOTE, “Signs and portents”, in *Collected Writings on Education and Drama*, ed. by Cecily O’NEILL and Liz JOHNSON, 160–

In the first chapter of the book, Kelly Freebody looks at the concept of social change and also discusses her own different readings of Heathcote’s work in different stages of her life. Her self-examining piece explores the relationship between drama and social change through examining her own bookshelf and ideas, the thoughts and theories perched on the shelves, in a seemingly meandering but actually highly structured way. The four reference points she builds her writing around – the significance of youth; knowledge leading to change; drama being prosocial; and that schooling is inherently political – offer useful theoretical reference points for the analysis of our field,<sup>23</sup> and also allow us to recognise how theories outside the world of drama can become formative for our discipline.

Mindy R. Carter’s chapter explores which “specific drama strategies (...) could be used to best teach Canadian Indigenous topics to pre-service teachers”.<sup>24</sup> The study examines courses across Canada. Perhaps the starting question of the investigation, aiming to connect specific drama strategies with specific topics, is not productive, because of the complexity of how “the multilayered and sometimes contradictory relational assemblages of our individual and collective identities are always becoming”.<sup>25</sup> Reflecting on the context in Canada, Carter finally suggests

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169 (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1984), 161.

<sup>23</sup> Kelly FREEBODY, “A personal genealogy of the idea of drama education as a force for change”, in MCAVOY and O’CONNOR, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Drama in Education*, 9–17, 10.

<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003000914-3>

<sup>24</sup> Mindy R. CARTER, “Pedagogical assemblages exploring social justice issues through drama education”, in MCAVOY and O’CONNOR, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Drama in Education*, 32–44, 32.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 41.

that for “settlers who seek to teach Indigenous topics, this may mean that before we consider how we want to teach, we need to ask for help or partner with Indigenous people(s), and/or to ‘unsettle’ ourselves before coming to this work by understanding white privilege, intersectionality, positionality, and that we need to start social justice work from a place of openness where we listen more than we speak.”<sup>26</sup> While the suggestion to listen to those who are in a socially unjust position can be wholeheartedly embraced, this chapter also raises some concerns for me. Though it is only present implicitly, the chapter seems to discuss drama strategies as tools to convey stories and morals, rather than as a possible artistic form that allows participants to critique the narrative’s underlying messages. I believe that the latter is a more appropriate understanding of drama’s relationship to narratives. Also, compartmentalising culture and art within ethnic boundaries might lead to losing the possibility of understanding the common points of differing practices that communities have created to understand, reflect on, and engage with the human situation. Differing contexts define which aspects of human existence were engaged in and which forms were found the most appropriate by members of various communities to engage with them, but discourse around appropriation – from an East-European perspective – seems to be creating fear in teachers of engaging in what is different and also what the common human points of connection among different people living in different worlds are. While the acknowledgement of historic injustice is a crucial process that we, drama practitioners, have to surely connect with, the fear of engaging in certain narratives and art forms for cultural-political reasons needs to ring the warning bell for those who believe we are in the business of understanding the relationship of the individual and the social ele-

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 42.

ments of the human condition with our student-partners.

Stig Eriksson’s chapter examines the topos of distancing in process drama, distinguishing three orientations within distancing: protection, aesthetic principle, and poetic–didactic device.<sup>27</sup> Eriksson discusses the differences in detail and also offers profound theoretical background examining distancing in relation to its roots in theatre practices, particularly Brechtian theatre and the concept of *alienation*, which Eriksson argues, was translated misleadingly and *defamiliarisation* would be a more appropriate term as the translation of *Verfremdung*. While alienation has often been juxtaposed to the ‘being’ in the fictional world of process drama, defamiliarisation stands closer to theories aligned to opening gaps from within the fiction.<sup>28</sup> Eriksson offers useful practical examples of frame distance that is related to the main task of the role offered to participants in relation to the main events focused on in the drama. While the chapter is a really important summary and clarification of the concept of distancing, I believe it would have been useful to explore the concept of frame independently of role in more detail. For example, when Heathcote started a drama lesson with the question “what would you like to make a play about?”, she framed the participants as artists, who are collectively creating a play. She offers the task that frames the participants’ point of view without giving them a specific role. She also offers them a role later, putting them in the position of

<sup>27</sup> Stig A. ERIKSSON, “Distancing as topos in process drama”, in MCAVOY and O’CONNOR, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Drama in Education*, 18–31, 19.

<sup>28</sup> David DAVIS, *Imagining the Real: towards a new theory of drama in education* (Stoke on Trent, UK: Trentham Books, 2014); BETHLENFALVY Ádám, *Living Through Extremes in Process Drama* (Budapest: KRE – L’Harmattan, 2020). <https://doi.org/10.56037/978-2-343-20662-2>

Prisoners of War in the famous Three looms waiting video, but the frame distance of the POW role and the frame of artists creating a drama remain independent entities to some extent. Hopefully, Eriksson will discuss the relation of these concepts further in future publications.

As this review is published in the leading Hungarian journal for Theatre Studies, concluding this piece by referring to Moema Gregorzewski's proposal to discuss Drama in Education in the theoretical framework of postdramatic theatre seems cogent. She argues that the "reconceptualisation of DiE practice as PDT performance events provides us with a contemporary lens through which to explore the notion of metaxis, a DiE participant's sense of simultaneous belonging to fiction (a fictional narrative) and reality (her existence in her own lifeworld)." The article does not refer to, but connects in some ways to Gavin Bolton's argument in his late paper that "it's all theatre", to perceive the different approaches and methodologies in our field within the framework of the genre of theatre.<sup>29</sup> Gregorzewski's argument is con-

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<sup>29</sup> Gavin BOLTON, „It's all theatre", in *Gavin Bolton: essential writings*, ed. by David DAVIS, 163–175 (Stoke on Trent, UK: Trentham Books, 2010).

vincing and she concludes by explaining that "such an expanded theoretical framework can offer emerging guidelines and compelling provocations for future DiE practice. It can further our understanding of the potential of DiE to catalyse learning experiences that foster critical thinking and critical empathy in the complex and often contradictory hypertechnological world of the twenty-first century."<sup>30</sup>

I have only been able to offer a brief reflection on this colossal compilation of theory, research, and practice. It is hard to imagine the amount of thought, work, and energy that Mary McAvoy and Peter O'Connor, the editors of this milestone publication in drama in education, put into creating this volume. It will surely be an important reference point in our field for a long time.

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<sup>30</sup> Moema GREGORZEWSKI, "Reimagining drama in education: Towards a postdramatic pedagogy", in MCAVOY and O'CONNOR, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Drama in Education*, 80–93, 88.

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