Theatre in Education in Britain

Chapter Summaries and Questions for Consideration

Roots

Chapter One:

Society, Theatre, Education and the first TIE experiments 1965-1966

This chapter traces the underlying political, social and theatrical developments that informed changes in education during the twentieth century. The particular mix of these influences, it is argued, gave rise to the new ideas of drama being used in schools, developing into a fledgling TIE movement which sought to bring together new approaches to theatre and to teaching against a backdrop of a society hungry to create a better world for children and for their parents.

Pedagogically, consideration is given to theoretical reformers from Rousseau to Freire noting the contribution of Pestalozzi, Froebel, Montessori, Dewey and Illich. Particular importance is given to the ideas of Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner, alongside Freire.

Theatrically there was a new wave of writing from the 'angry young men' of the fifties and sixties (including Bond who was to become increasingly important to TIE in later years. Additionally Brecht's ideas on theatre and politics were making an impact, and later the theatricalisation of Freire's pedagogy by Boal with his Theatre of the Oppressed.

Drama practitioners are another important part of the mix and the use of drama in schools is traced from the beginning of the twentieth century, with descriptions of the work of Caldwell Cook, Harriet Finlay-Johnson and, post-Second World War, Peter Slade, Brian Way and Dorothy Heathcote.

It was TIE though, that took these ideas of child's play, child drama and theatrical performance to create a hybrid that enveloped both feeling and rational responses in a new approach to fusing teaching and theatre in educational programmes built upon the human's innate need to learn through play.

The chapter ends with some early examples of TIE projects undertaken by Coventry Belgrade TIE team.

Questions for consideration

- The chapter argues that a desire for change was constantly growing during the twentieth century. What was behind the desire for change? Where do such drives come from?

- This chapter argues that developing TIE methods were a more effective way of encouraging analysis of issues in society. Do you agree? Were the seminal new playwrights of the 1950s and 1960s doing the same thing more effectively?

- Discuss the role of 'play' as a way of learning for human beings. Is there a link between the actor's playing and the child's?

Chapter Two:

The Development of the Theatre in Education Movement 1966-1976

The second chapter traces the development of these early experiments in their complexity and sophistication and in their number. The successful outcomes of the work in Coventry were quickly emulated by cities and regions all over the UK.

The economic context was one of a developing consumerism and a political determination to create a better world for the new generation. Socially, alongside the growth of youth culture and an apparent affluence many liberal reforms were undertaken affecting a major shift in British social attitudes. Parallel to this were increasing tensions between trades unions and governments even though there was an underlying status of the capitalist economic model that had been bought into after the War.

Having considered the economic and social developments of the period the chapter goes on to document some of the projects of this period. These show a developing maturation of approach, by also an increasingly willingness to address issues related to the social and political events of the day. The chapter also notes that, at this time, TIE was working and developing very much by intuition and there was little awareness of the pedagogical philosophies of Freire, Vygotsky, Bruner and others, although the work was showing the same educational instincts.

Questions for consideration

- Is there a contradiction between aspiring to wealth and consumerism, and valuing the concepts of working-class solidarity?

- Should working people have been more insistent on public ownership? Were they right to seek to pursue consumerism whilst allowing others to own business and industry?

- Should TIE be addressing such issues with young people? What are the 'suitable' subjects for a TIE programme? At what age?

Chapter Three:

Pedagogical Maturity 1976-1990

The philosophy of education began to creep into TIE work in the next fifteen years. Certain directors, and others, found in the theorists mentioned a validation and structure for the work that was being created. It is pointed out that, although such ideas were not always common currency within teams, there was a growing acceptance that theoretical underpinning would advance the work.

One of the quiddities of TIE was becoming its use of participation – involving children in the performance – an approach derived from educational drama and the children's theatre of Brian Way. Growing awareness of educational theory allowed this work to develop in its sophistication, but also led to further ways of working that were more appropriate to older age-groups using 'frame' rather than full integration in the programme. In this chapter I note three programmes about fascism which were presented to secondary schools in the late 1970s and which are very much performance based, but I then go on to describe programmes in which the provision of a frame allowed for a more immediate engagement with the material by the young people.

Key to the theoretical advancement of TIE work was the development of the Standing Conference of Young People's Theatre into an organisation that undertook not only the sharing of work, but also the dissemination of theoretical ideas. Through SCYPT came knowledge of Heathcote and Boal to most companies for the first time and at Conference companies were able to give and receive workshops on their own approaches and developing techniques. The way in which the ideas of Heathcote, Freire and Boal impacted on TIE is considered in some depth in this chapter, along with Vygotsky and Bruner. TIE was placing itself firmly alongside the educational approaches proselytized by these thinkers.

The end of the period in question was marked by the impact of the right-wing education policies of Thatcher and the fragmentation of the post-War consensus.

The effect of the 1988 Education Reform Act re-structured the relationship between government (local and national) and schools both in fiscal and curriculum terms. The devolving of monies to schools and the institution of a National Curriculum controlled from London was to have a devastating effect on TIE companies in their governance, their relationship with schools and their choice of material.

Questions for consideration

- This chapter describes three projects about Fascism. Do you think TIE can help challenge such ideologies? If so, how should it try to do this?

- Why do you think it was that TIE was developing a similar approach to educational theory even though it was generally not aware of many of the most radical ideas coming from Freire, Bruner and Vygotsky?

- Discuss the different way in which participation works in TIE compared to projects that use frame or performance alone.

- Why do you think the nature of education came under such scrutiny from the 1970s and 1980s?

- What is the purpose of education?

Afterword by Warwick Dobson

In his Afterword to the first section Warwick Dobson amplifies aspects of my analysis concerning the tight control that has been traditionally maintained over the content of the curriculum and access to education by those in power. He traces these establishment instincts back to the early nineteenth century and demonstrates how TIE fits into the radical tradition that challenged 'ownership' of education and knowledge. He also stresses the importance of SCYPT, and Geoff Gillham in particular, in encouraging companies to develop concept-based work that allowed pupils to grasp the essence of issues rather than just the appearance.

Questions for consideration

- Who should decide who gets educated and what education should consist of?
- What is the relationship between ownership of knowledge and power?

Fruits

Chapter Five:

Case Study: *Careless Talk*

This chapter is devoted to a description and analysis of a Theatr Powys TIE programme from 1986, which represents a highlight of participatory work. In it I take the reader through the daylong programme indicating where various techniques have been employed and how they work in terms of the educational theory previously outlined. We see the children carefully inducted into role as children in 1939 where they are faced with increasingly demanding social decisions. The material is not easy involving, as it does, questions of prejudice, bullying, family argument, contradictory emotional demands and even bereavement. To this welter of emotions the children are facilitated to bring their own understanding of the personal issues and apply them to consideration of the universal implications. By the end of the project they have assisted the family reconcile itself having, unguided by any adult overseer, agreed on a course of action to help explain the issues to the family. The programme uses performance by the actor/teachers, role-play, depiction/gestus, discussion in and out of role, and reflection.

Questions for consideration.

- In a project such as this are children learning? How?

- Are children more prepared to 'suspend their disbelief' at this age than when they get older? If so, why?

- Think of examples when young adults and adults also 'suspend their disbelief' in order to undertake an experience.

Chapter Six:

Case Study: *When Sleeping Dogs Awake*

This case study considers a programme relying much more upon performance in a consideration of racism. Unlike previous programmes on this subject discussed in Chapter Two this piece avoids a historic approach to the issue and instead offers a conceptual analysis of 'systemic racism' through the theatrical metaphor of an underclass of stray dogs on the streets. It is a challenging piece of theatre, which is aimed to start a thought process in the minds of the audience about why human beings tend to act against their own interests. The stray dogs have common interests but are kept from solidarity by a lack of analysis of their own situation. The audience can see what the dogs cannot. The young people observing the piece are not placed in role or frame but rather, in creative workshops following the play, are empowered to deconstruct the implications of what they have seen by creating an exhibition warning other dogs of the perils they face. Again the methodology at work here is analysed in terms of the pedagogies of Vygotsky, Bruner and Freire.

Questions for consideration.

- This project involved a metaphorical play and a workshop. What are the learning processes at work?

- Are these different from those employed in the *Careless Talk*?

- The workshop attempted to 'give voice' to less verbal pupils. Is this a good approach? Can you think of any other approaches that might be successful?

Chapter Seven:

The Aesthetics of TIE

I have found it necessary at this point to meet head-on the prejudice that often is laid at the door of TIE that the pedagogy overwhelms the aesthetics. This chapter argues that TIE has its own highly complex aesthetic, which involves high artistic standards and a range of modes of performance from Naturalism to facilitation in role. The argument that TIE must necessarily have low standards is soundly rejected arguing that for the 'education' to work the 'theatre' must be of the highest standard. The problem has emerged, it is argued, when TIE has sought to transmit messages rather than engender thought and this, it is argued, is bound to lead to poor, polemically orientated performances that lack both theatrical and educational value.

As well as considering performance, the chapter also looks at the nature of design in TIE programmes and the careful use of minimalist indicators, which have both theatrical function but can also serve the educational drive of projects by offering historical context and opportunity for symbolic interpretation.

Questions for consideration

- Does having an educational purpose mean that aesthetic values will be compromised?
- In what ways is acting in TIE the same as, or different from, acting in other genres?
- What does TIE acting share, and in what ways is it different from acting in other media?

Chapter Eight:

Making it and Making it Work

The way in which companies worked in creating TIE has been undervalued and less considered by previous commentators. This chapter looks in detail at the idealistically inspired approaches to creating TIE that were a hallmark of companies' working practices through until the early 1990s. Picking up from the argument about aesthetics, it begins by considering the balance of 'acting' and 'teaching' in the actor/teacher role. We see how the two disciplines gradually merged as experience and praxis developed.

   Central to the working practices was the attempt by most companies to employ democratic, and even cooperative, working practices in creating the work. The chapter notes the difficulties that this can cause against a background of different job roles, different contracts and even different abilities, interests and political standpoints. It also points out the creative joy that can come from developing work in this way. The young actor/teachers were seeking a new working paradigm, which did not sit easily within the traditional and hierarchical structures of the theatres, education authorities and funders with whom they worked. The nature of the different contractual arrangements is considered together with the advantages and disadvantages that different arrangements offered.

   Consideration is also given here to the nature of devising within these companies and the delicate balance of power that often existed. Of particular delicacy was the role of writers who have particular needs and expectations placed upon them and yet who have to be a conduit for the expectations of the company and their own artistic imperatives.

Questions for consideration

- Theatre is a collaborative art form involving many disciplines. Can cooperative working ever work in such circumstances?

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of working with hierarchical structures in theatre?

- How would you prioritize the value of different roles in the TIE-making process? Should all company members receive the same remuneration?

- Should directors have the overall decision-making responsibility?

- Who should have the responsibility for research and theoretical study?

Chapter Nine:

International Perspectives and Influence

The optimism of the post-War years gave rise not only to theatre within education but also children's theatre more broadly. l'Association Internationale du Théâtre de l'Enfance et la Jeunesse was set up around the same time as TIE was beginning in Britain but with a very different brief – that of producing theatre for children rather than of using theatre to involve children in educational processes. This chapter begins by considering the inception of ASSITEJ and how it continued to resist any links with creative drama or TIE methodologies, regarding them as amateur and inferior.

More hopeful, as an international voice for drama and TIE, was the setting up of The International Drama/Theatre and Education Association. SCYPT companies had been central to the formation of this group which seemed to offer a real opportunity for international recognition of the pedagogical centrality of the theatre arts at a time when the effects of ERA were seriously undermining TIE's ability to develop in the UK. Divisions soon emerged however, and there was a growing sense that IDEA was moving away from its originating precepts to becoming a networking and sharing forum rather than a cauldron for theoretical development. The chapter describes the bitter dispute that emerged in 1988 amidst accusations of homophobia, bullying, voting rights and the representation of emergent nations.

Whilst IDEA has survived, SCYPT has not. There was an attempt to revitalize SCYPT in an international context of training with the formation of the International Centre for TIE. This chapter explains how, after a strong beginning the project faltered after the death of Geoff Gillham in 2001.

Questions for consideration

- What are the key differences between children's theatre and TIE?

- What are the links between TIE and DIE?

- Why do international organisations often suffer from in-fighting?

- How do you respect the legacies of different cultures in trying to forge new ideas? Is it possible to prevent one cultural perspective from dominating? Should we try?

Afterword by Chris Vine

Chris Vine's view of how TIE works and what it should seek to achieve varies from my own in key respects. In his Afterword he stresses that the 'conscientization' sought by Freire would include a rousing to action and thus move beyond empowering the young to think. He states his preference for programmes in which the participants are the ones 'making it happen'. He is also more confident of older children's willingness to engage in programmes in a participatory way and he gives examples from his own experience of such projects where active control was passed to the young people. Vine also raises an interesting debate around the role of theatrical metaphor and the extent to which such symbolism should be capable of direct or general interpretation.

Finally Vine interrogates the nature of the ways that TIE methodology was developed including influences prior to, or outside, SCYPT. In contemporary terms he argues strongly for TIE to be seen as an aspect of Applied Drama, one of a range of progressive theatre practices

Questions for consideration

- Chris Vine has reservations about projects like *Careless Talk* in that they can lack the ability to rouse the participants to action. The participants are not the ones 'making it happen'. Discuss this analysis and how this project could have been developed in this way.

- Do you agree that fully participatory projects are possible with older children and young people?

- Discuss the use of metaphor in Theatre in Education. How explicit should the metaphor be? Is it necessary, or limiting, to offer a clear interpretation of the metaphor offered?

Shoots?

Chapter Ten:

The Legacy of ERA: Funding and Programme Content

This chapter considers the changes – indeed the decline – that TIE went through in the aftermath of ERA and subsequent right-wing educational reform. As well as the educational reforms imposed by ERA which made it so difficult for schools to afford or use the work, the government also encouraged new funding strategies from the Arts Councils that prioritized main house and mainstream work that reflected accepted cultural values. Theatre companies which could be seen to have a political agenda (whether TIE or alternative touring companies) found it increasingly difficult to access investment.

The chapter thus approaches the vexed question as to whether theatre can ever be politically neutral. With reference to Bruner, Freire and Gillham it is pointed out that theatre either supports or challenges the political ideas it reflects. At this time (and since) the idea of teaching children 'how' to think was regarded as political as if they were being told 'what' to think.

We see here how companies either lost their funding for political reasons (though it was often coded within references to affordability or artistic value) or were forced to change their working model and produce performances that served the new agenda by creating work that helped teachers delivery the new Personal, Health and Social Education curriculum. Honourable mention is here made of those companies that managed to survive during this period, some of which are discussed in detail in Chapter Thirteen.

Questions for consideration

- This chapter argues that education and arts policy had a direct effect upon TIE praxis. Who should decide on arts funding priorities?

- Who should decide on educational priorities and, indeed, on the nature of education?

- Why do you think that the need for a PSHE curriculum grew in the 1990s?

- How should TIE have responded to this need?

Chapter Eleven:

Adapting to Survive

Before considering some more positive examples of TIE practice in Britain and internationally, I have outlined in Chapter Eleven what I consider to be more questionable applications of the TIE legacy.

First amongst these is Theatre in Health Education which I see as an attempt by companies to use some of the tropes of TIE to survive – with the best of intentions – in the new educational environment. Since the 1990s there has been a plethora of programmes offering to deal with all manner of social issues which teachers are required to teach but often find difficult to deal with. To use a TIE company to come in and 'give the message' can be a useful way of covering this problematic material but the tendency is to compartmentalize and simplify the issue to a matter of behavioural responses rather than truly giving young people the opportunity to forensically examine what is happening from a socio-political point of view.

The chapter also expresses similar concerns with some Theatre for Development, where the needs and cultural traditions of the target audience may not always been considered. Rather the governments or NGOs sponsoring such programmes will be expecting a tight message to be transmitted and a measurable outcome achieved. Prison Theatre is also briefly considered, raising the question as to whether offenders should be socialised to enable reintegration in society or, in Freire's terms conscientized.

The way in which Heritage or Museum Theatre has also borrowed from TIE is considered, but again, the question is raised as to whether historical events are offered up for an analysis which will inform our understanding of contemporary issues, or whether a rose-tinted view of the past predominates which makes us nostalgic for the certainties of a former social structure.

More valuable are the uses of drama as therapy that have grown up alongside processual drama and TIE in the twentieth century. The work of Boal is especially

resonant in this respect as we see a movement from the political to the personal in his own theoretical development.

This chapter also considers the changing nature of funding policy and the closer involvement of government with Arts Council criteria. The affect of the system of National Portfolio Organisations is noted and the insistence on measurable outcomes. This chapter goes on to look at an example of trying to quantify achievement in a TIE project that dealt with 'joy riding'. It notes that different sponsoring agencies will have different requirements and that measuring outcomes is highly problematic.

Alongside educational philosophers already mentioned the ideas of Giroux are cited at this point to demonstrate that the drive to implement radical and authentic education remains an issue despite the immutable educational hegemony. We return briefly to consider the role that training should be playing in preparing teachers and actor/teachers for their role as true educators of the young. Britain still has a reputation as the cauldron of TIE thinking but this is no longer justified by the facts.

Questions for consideration

- What is the place of TIE in helping deliver Health Education?

- How can it do more than an informational video or the teacher alone?

- Should TiHE programmes offer a 'message'? If not how can they avoid this and still be welcomed into schools?

- What are the political issues surrounding Theatre for Development projects?

- What are the cultural implications of using TIE approaches?

- Does TIE have a role in the teaching of history in the context of museums and heritage sites? What approach should be taken to the material?

Chapter Twelve:

Some Contemporary International TIE Programmes

A brief selection of companies is considered in this chapter which claim a legacy from British TIE. The work of CAT in New York is briefly described, in particular the projects of Helen Wheelock who feels restrained by funding limitations but strives to offer support to 'stressed' teachers who are trying to meet complex curriculum demands. Theatr Espresso is considered and some of the links with British TIE are identified, though the educational climate, the funding and resource regimes mean that the genus has had to adapt to particular environmental circumstances. As an example the project *Justice at War* is described and analysed.

The situation in Canada is also briefly reported upon where Warwick Dobson reports on the difficulty of creating work within the TIE legacy. In Australia there are similar limitations, though Applied Drama Consultants in New Zealand are creating some interesting interactive work using some TIE ideas though they prefer to describe their work as Applied Theatre. An example of their work is described here

Estella Wong reports on work going on in Hong Kong and again we can see how key British practitioners, past and present, are feeding the work.

More directly related to British TIE is the work going on in Hungary and Albania. Three strong projects are described in which many of the tropes of TIE are observable and their use dextrously developed by these companies.

Questions for consideration

- Should we expect TIE in other parts of the world to 'look like' British TIE? If not why not?

- When you have considered the examples given, discuss to what extent traditional TIE methods have been used and the extent to which they have been developed.

- Should the critical questioning values of TIE always be present? How can TIE be used in political situations where critical thinking can be dangerous?

Chapter Thirteen:

Some Survivors

As indicated in Chapter Eleven, there have been some survivors of the changing nature of education and arts policy, though this survival is often fragile. The city of Leeds has become a centre for TIE work with a range of companies from those working in children's 'message' theatre to those using traditionally derived TIE methodologies to offer programmes both in schools and, interestingly, in the community at large. This chapter describes a range of these projects from Theatre Company Blah Blah Blah and Leeds TIE. Of these, the 'Blahs' currently enjoy NPO status whilst Leeds TIE has to rely on a series of projects funds from a variety of sources.

The work of Big Brum in Birmingham, and the collaboration with Edward Bond, gets particular attention in this chapter. Big Brum has become a powerhouse for the protection and the development of authentic TIE and its then director, Chris Cooper, has been mentioned by many of the companies cited in earlier chapters as a key influence. As an example of this work, the 2015 production of Bond's *The Angry Roads* has been described together with an analysis of the accompanying workshop.

Questions for consideration

- Discuss the two pieces of work of 'The Blahs'. In what ways are they similar and different? In what ways do either or both of them reflect TIE methods?

- Discuss *Bad Mammy* in the same way. What are the connections and the departures from other TIE programmes discussed?

- Big Brum has developed a tradition of working with Edward Bond. To what extent do you think the writer should have a central role in developing a piece of TIE?

- When working with a writer who should decide on the workshop elements of a project?

- In what ways is *The Angry Roads* related to traditional TIE programmes?

Afterword by Anthony Jackson

I am aware that my interpretation of where TIE is and where it is going is somewhat pessimistic. Anthony Jackson, in his Afterword to this final section tries to redress the balance somewhat. He is less pessimistic, arguing that what is at issue is less whether the transmission of messages is paramount in a programme, but rather whether genuine opportunities for exploration and creative engagement are offered. He goes on to consider the place of creativity in the new curriculum.

In developing his argument he cites two programmes that he feels offered compelling theatre in which issues were raised in ways that 'would not be dropped'. The M6 project he describes offered no prescribed answers, he argues, but rather invited the students to articulate their own solutions. His second example was of a piece of museum theatre dealing with the Slave Trade. He describes how the structure of the piece facilitated a tackling of the arguments, not only at the time, but also allowed the audience to make connections with the present.

Questions for consideration

- Anthony Jackson is slightly more optimistic about the value of current TIE programmes. How would you assess the success of the projects he describes?

- To what extent do you feel that the importance of creativity is respected in the National Curriculum? What is meant by 'creativity'?

Conclusion:

The Last Fifty Years of TIE

My final analysis and summary is not, it must be acknowledged, very positive. I argue here that the educational ideas of all the theorists mentioned are still relevant. Indeed, they are even more crucial as education and society in general is faced a by a more and more rigoured hegemony. My fear is for the future of authentic education which TIE at its best served so well. I write at a time of austerity when the wages and living conditions of so many are being pressured whilst those with plenty continue to thrive. There seems to be no will to challenge this, and the function of education to offer critical analysis of the world and to envisage and pursue positive change has been written out of teaching. Some lip-service is paid to the importance of creativity, but even that seems to be couched solely in serving entrepreneurship.

My hope is that the importance of the social and pedagogical ideas, as exemplified by TIE practice, will survive in theory (and in pockets of practice) and may once again come to be recognized when the evolutionary wheel has turned again. But I am not sure that the social conditions that engendered TIE will ever be repeated.

Questions for consideration

- How do you think education will develop in your lifetime?
- What will be the role of direct communication with teachers?
- How much education will be technology-based?
- Can you envisage a system in which critical thinking is enabled by digital media?
- Does it matter?