

Reimagining Learning Spaces: The Rise of Theatrical Inquiry in Arts Education

NICHOLAS WAXMAN

CREATIVE AGENCY LAB, ROYAL MELBOURNE INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the evolving concept of theatrical inquiry, tracing its origins, early applications, and its notable resurgence in recent years as a dynamic methodology for probing into learning spaces. Amidst the evolving landscape of arts education, theatrical inquiry endures as a lens through which the contemporary role of drama and theatre can be re-evaluated and redefined. This exploration is set against the backdrop of an ongoing debate: the demarcation between theatre-making and drama as pedagogical tools. By scrutinising the utility of theatrical inquiry in fostering aesthetic understanding and awareness amongst students, this study positions itself at the intersection of Drama in Education and Applied Theatre. It seeks to unravel the complexities of using drama and theatre not just as mediums of artistic expression but as critical instruments that can enhance cognitive, emotional, social, and creative reflection. Through

a comprehensive review of literature, this paper aims to shed light on the varied ways in which theatrical inquiry can enrich arts education. It contributes to the academic discourse by providing a timeline of the evolution of the term theatrical inquiry and offers practical insights for educators looking to incorporate these approaches into their teaching practices in the arts.

BACKGROUND

Throughout arts-based research projects, the phrase 'theatrical inquiry' frequently appears, but its usage can significantly vary, leading to potential ambiguities regarding its meaning and application. It's important to clarify that merely juxtaposing the words 'theatrical' and 'inquiry' does not necessarily denote the employment of theatrical inquiry as a methodology. Often, researchers may refer to theatrical inquiry synonymously with concepts such as theatrical question, theatrical intent, processing theatre as a field, or even dramaturgy. This conflation of terms can obscure the distinct methodological framework that theatrical inquiry embodies.

In the vast landscape of arts-based research, theatrical inquiry is sometimes utilised to articulate the thematic or conceptual focus of a study, rather than its methodological approach. Such instances might see the term deployed to describe an investigation's dramaturgical underpinnings or to signify a project's overarching theatrical questions or intentions. While these are valid and valuable uses of the term within certain contexts, they diverge from the specific focus of this paper.

This exploration is dedicated to understanding theatrical inquiry in its capacity as a method or approach to research. This delineation is critical; as I am concerned with how theatrical inquiry can be operationalised as a rigorous, systematic methodology that leverages the unique perspectives and processes of theatre to inform and enrich the research endeavour. This paper does not address the broader, more colloquial uses of the term to describe the content or thematic focus of a study. Instead, we aim to illuminate how theatrical inquiry, as a distinct methodological approach, can offer profound insights and

innovations within the realm of arts-based educational research.

By foregrounding this specific interpretation of theatrical inquiry, I seek to contribute to a more nuanced and focused dialogue. I am hoping this clarification allows us to delve deeply into the potentials and applications of theatrical inquiry in a way that is both methodically sound and creatively fruitful, setting a foundation for future research that distinctly recognises and utilises the methodology's unique contributions to the field of arts-based research.

ENQUIRY VS. INQUIRY

The terms 'enquiry' and 'inquiry' are often used interchangeably, but they have subtle differences, especially in British English, which tends to distinguish between the two. 'Enquiry' typically refers to the act of asking for information, a general query or question. It is often used in everyday contexts where someone is seeking knowledge or clarification. 'Inquiry,' on the other hand, denotes a more formal investigation, often with a systematic approach to uncovering facts or understanding deeper issues.

In this paper, 'inquiry' is chosen over 'enquiry' to emphasise the formal, methodological nature of the investigation. 'Theatrical inquiry' thus signifies a structured, rigorous approach to research, leveraging the unique methods and insights of theatre to delve into specific research questions. This choice underscores the systematic and methodological focus of the exploration, aligning with the academic and investigative rigor required in arts-based educational research. By clarifying these terms, we aim to avoid potential ambiguities and ensure a precise understanding of the methodological framework discussed in this paper.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND EVOLUTION

The term 'theatrical inquiry' has been traced back to the early 19th century, marking its presence in the academic and cultural discourse as early as 1813. The term was used once in "The Theatrical Inquisitor, Or, Monthly Mirror" (1813) as it explored the nature of inquiry into theatrical endeavours. "The Theatrical Inquisitor, Or, Monthly Mirror," was a pivotal publication in the early 19th century,

focusing on the vibrant world of theatre. It emerged as a crucial platform for reviews, critiques, and discussions, delving into the performances, actors, and dramatic works of the era. Through its pages, the periodical offered a selection of poetry, critical essays, and articles that engaged with the theatrical arts, serving both as a mirror to the practices of the time and as an inquisitor into the evolving dynamics of performance and stagecraft. This publication held a significant place in the cultural landscape of the time, scrutinising the theatre scene with a discerning eye and providing insights that were both informative and provocative. Its contribution to the discourse on theatre and performance underscored the importance of critical engagement and reflection in the arts, marking it as a seminal reference point for those interested in the depths and breadths of theatrical expression and critique.

Initially, the term 'theatrical inquiry' served as a critical tool for dissecting the narrative structures and cultural nuances within both new and traditional theatre movements. Early scholarly and journalistic efforts, as noted by Bigsby (1985), Gordon (1990), and Reason (2008), primarily applied theatrical inquiry to dissect narrative structures and cultural idiosyncrasies within both new and traditional theatre movements. The scope of theatrical inquiry broadened with scholars like Sohn (2011), Mendez (2014), and Horley (2014), exploring wider themes and principles within the theatre.

Sohn (2011) introduces "Western frames of theatrical inquiry" (p. 24), pointing towards a cultural and methodological context. Sohn's use of the term "Western frames of theatrical inquiry" subtly implies the presence of an established yet undefined methodology within the realm of Western theatre studies. This phraseology, while not uncommon in scholarly discussions, suggests a broad, somewhat nebulous conception of theatrical inquiry as it is practiced and understood in Western contexts. Sohn's use of this term highlights a broader academic trend where theatrical inquiry often becomes a catch-all phrase, encompassing a wide array of theatrical and dramaturgical pursuits without delving into the specificities of methodology, focus, or theoretical underpinnings. The invocation of Western frames of theatrical inquiry by Sohn highlights an assumption of a coherent, if not fully articulated, methodological approach that underlies Western theatrical analysis and critique. This presumed methodology encompasses the diverse practices, analytical

techniques, and interpretative strategies that have been developed and employed within Western theatre and performance studies. However, by not delineating the contours of this methodology, the term leaves open questions about what precisely constitutes these frames of inquiry and how they differentiate from or intersect with non-Western approaches. Furthermore, Sohn's reference to Western frames of theatrical inquiry implicitly critiques the homogenisation of theatrical studies under a Western paradigm, suggesting a need for greater specificity and clarity in how these methodological approaches are defined, challenged, and expanded. It underscores the importance of acknowledging the diversity within Western theatrical traditions themselves, as well as the necessity of incorporating a wider range of cultural, aesthetic, and philosophical perspectives into the discourse. This perspective calls for a re-examination of the assumptions that underlie "Western frames of theatrical inquiry," advocating for an approach that is both more inclusive and more reflective of the globalised nature of contemporary theatre.

Mendez (2014) engages with the term theatrical inquiry in their analysis of Shakespeare's works, introducing a nuanced layer to the understanding of this concept, particularly in the context of literary and dramaturgical analysis. By examining Shakespeare's plays, Mendez illuminates how themes of love, the supernatural, and the psychiatric are explored through a lens of "poetic and theatrical inquiry" (p. 78), thereby underscoring the depth and complexity of Shakespeare's engagement with these themes across his body of work. This approach suggests that "theatrical inquiry" encompasses not only the methods by which theatre and performance are created and interpreted but also the ways in which these artistic forms probe into the human condition, society, and the broader cosmos of knowledge and understanding. Mendez's use of theatrical inquiry does what many scholarly discussions tend to overlook: it highlights the intrinsic relationship between the content of Shakespeare's plays and the process of inquiry itself. The term, as used by Mendez, implies a dynamic and exploratory process that Shakespeare employs to navigate and interrogate the myriad themes within his plays. It suggests that Shakespeare's works serve as a conduit for a broader investigation into the nature of human experience, leveraging the theatrical form as a means of delving into the complexities of life, emotion, and the unseen forces that shape our world. Furthermore,

Mendez's invocation of theatrical inquiry within the analysis of Shakespeare's plays calls attention to the dramatist's methodological approach to knowledge acquisition and dissemination. The question posed by Mendez, regarding the sources of Shakespeare's extensive knowledge, points to the poet's masterful synthesis of information from ancient and modern sources, filtered through the lens of his dramatic art. This synthesis, Mendez suggests, is not merely a matter of literary scholarship but a form of theatrical inquiry that engages with and expands upon the information and themes it encompasses. By framing Shakespeare's exploration of themes within the context of theatrical inquiry, Mendez contributes to a broader understanding of the term as a reflective and investigative process inherent in the creation and interpretation of theatre. This perspective encourages readers and scholars alike to consider the ways in which theatrical and poetic works not only reflect but actively engage with and question the world around them. Mendez's analysis thus positions theatrical inquiry as a crucial component of Shakespeare's artistic oeuvre, one that underpins his enduring relevance and the continued fascination with his works. In essence, Mendez's discussion of theatrical inquiry in relation to Shakespeare's plays challenges the academic community to view "theatrical inquiry" not just as a methodological tool but as an integral aspect of the creative process itself. This approach opens up new avenues for understanding the interplay between theatre, poetry, and the pursuit of knowledge, highlighting the role of artistic expression as a form of profound inquiry into the human experience.

Horley (2014) focuses on the audience's perspective, notably "placing the female at the centre of theatrical inquiry" (p. 22), which shifts the lens towards gender dynamics and audience engagement. Horley employs the term "theatrical inquiry" in a manner that illuminates their perspective on the transformative power of theatre to challenge and redefine societal norms, particularly concerning gender dynamics. By focusing on Franca Rame's monologues, which centralise the female experience within the context of theatrical exploration, Horley highlights how theatrical inquiry can serve as a potent tool for political and social critique. Rame's work, as interpreted by Horley, leverages the theatrical form not merely as a medium for storytelling but as a platform for engaging in deeper socio-political discourse, positioning the female perspective at the heart of this inquiry. This use of theatrical inquiry underscores the capacity of

theatre to interrogate and dismantle prevailing gender constructs, offering an alternative to traditional narratives that often relegate female characters to the periphery or define them primarily in relation to male desire. Horley suggests that by placing the female voice at the centre of theatrical inquiry, Rame's monologues do more than just tell women's stories; they actively challenge the audience to reconsider and critique the male-dominated lens through which society frequently views and values women. Furthermore, Horley's reference to theatrical inquiry as a politically motivated act underscores the notion that theatre can be a form of activism, a means of questioning and potentially altering the status quo. In this context, theatrical inquiry is not just an academic or artistic pursuit but a deliberate act of resistance against entrenched societal norms and a call to think differently about gender, power, and representation.

Kear (2013) expands the concept of theatrical inquiry by moving beyond the cerebral into the physical. Kear's approach to theatrical inquiry, exemplified through their analysis of a waiter's mishap in a restaurant, underscores the potential of this methodology to dissect and understand real moments in life and the genuine experiences of individuals. This incident, seemingly minor in the grand scheme of things, is elevated by Kear to illustrate how theatrical inquiry can be applied to everyday occurrences, suggesting a broader applicability to a range of real-life situations. By situating "a seemingly inconsequential occurrence...as the site of a theatrical inquiry into the relations of presentation and representation structuring the situation itself and governing its emergence as a moment of historical transition" (Kear, 2013, p. 28), Kear posits that these moments are ripe for analysis, offering insights into the social fabric that constitutes human interaction. The implication of Kear's methodology suggests that theatrical inquiry can serve as a lens through which the intricacies of real-life experiences are examined, revealing the layered dynamics of presentation—how individuals portray themselves and are perceived in social contexts—and representation—the ways in which these portrayals are interpreted or narrated within the broader cultural narrative. This framework allows for a deep dive into how individuals navigate their roles within society, how they are affected by and affect the perceptions of others, and how these interactions contribute to or reflect larger societal narratives and transitions. Applying theatrical inquiry to real-life experiences enables a nuanced exploration of the

performative aspects of everyday life, where every interaction, every encounter, can be seen as a performance imbued with meaning, waiting to be interpreted. It acknowledges that personal experiences are not isolated incidents but are embedded within a network of social relations and cultural contexts, each carrying the potential to inform our understanding of societal norms, values, and shifts. Furthermore, Kear's approach invites researchers and practitioners to consider how moments of conflict, misunderstanding, or transition in ordinary life can serve as windows into the human condition, offering valuable perspectives on identity, power dynamics, and social change. It challenges us to view our own experiences and those of others not just as happenings but as performances laden with cultural significance, thereby broadening the scope of theatrical inquiry to encompass the breadth of human experience. In essence, Kear (2013) provides a compelling argument for the expansive potential of theatrical inquiry to analyze and interpret the real experiences of people. This methodology does not limit itself to the realm of theatre and performance in the conventional sense but extends to the theatre of everyday life, where every action, every interaction, carries the weight of performance, each with its own story to tell and lesson to impart about the human experience.

INTERDISCIPLINARY SHIFTS

Gardner (2000) delves into the complexities of theatrical inquiry, utilizing Artaud's "Un athlétisme affectif" as a case study to explore the broader implications of method and technique within theatre studies. "Un athlétisme affectif" translates to "an affective athleticism" in English. This phrase, often associated with the work of Antonin Artaud, a French playwright, poet, actor, and theatre director, emphasizes the physical and emotional exertion involved in performance. Artaud was a key figure in the early 20th century avant-garde theatre and the Theatre of Cruelty, a movement that sought to break away from traditional theatre forms and conventions to affect audiences deeply and viscerally. In the context of Artaud's philosophy, "un athlétisme affectif" refers to the rigorous, intense physical and emotional engagement that actors should bring to their performances. It suggests that actors must undergo a kind of training or discipline that is not just physical but also deeply emotional, enabling them to express profound

and primal feelings through their bodies and voices. This concept is part of Artaud's broader vision for a theatre that impacts audiences on a deep, affective level, challenging them to confront their own emotions and subconscious.

In Gardner's analysis of Artaud's conceptualisation of inquiry, Gardner identifies a crucial aspect of theatrical inquiry: the tension between the specificity of acting techniques and the expansive potential of theatre to engage with wide-ranging cultural critiques. Gardner articulates, "This is partly a consequence of the effect produced by the text of 'Un athlétisme affectif,' and partly a result of [the author's] general strategy of developing wide-ranging critiques from apparently narrow topics" (Gardner, 2000, p. 11). Through this observation, Gardner highlights how theatrical inquiry often transcends the immediate concerns of actor training to touch upon broader cultural and theatrical discussions.

Gardner's critique emphasizes the importance of viewing theatrical inquiry not as a limitation to actor-focused discourse but as an opportunity to explore the multifaceted role of theatre within cultural contexts. He points out that the seeming vagueness or indirection in discussions about theatre methods can, in fact, open up a richer field of inquiry that challenges traditional boundaries and encourages a more holistic understanding of theatre's impact. According to Gardner, "[the author's] discussion...moves within and across a much larger field of cultural as well as theatrical inquiry" (Gardner, 2000, p. 11), suggesting that the value of theatrical inquiry lies in its ability to navigate and connect diverse thematic terrains.

Furthermore, Gardner suggests that the perceived absence of concrete methods in theatrical texts should not be seen as a shortfall but rather as an invitation for readers to engage more deeply with the underlying visions and metaphors, constructing meaning from the broader implications of the work. This approach underscores Gardner's view that theatrical inquiry is a dynamic and interpretive process, one that enriches our understanding of theatre by prompting us to look beyond the surface of technique and performance, and to consider the wider cultural and philosophical questions that theatre raises.

In essence, Gardner (2000) redefines the scope of theatrical inquiry, advocating for an approach that embraces the complexity and ambiguity inherent in theatre studies. By focusing on the broader implications of theatrical inquiry, Gardner contributes to a nuanced

discourse on the role of theatre as a medium for cultural critique and exploration, highlighting the importance of interpretive and analytical engagement in the study of theatre.

A significant shift occurred with Biehl's 2008 paper, which repositioned theatrical inquiry as an interdisciplinary method. This approach broadened the scope of inquiry to encompass the aesthetics of social and organisational phenomena, moving beyond the confines of traditional theatre studies. Biehl's emphasis on 'sensual perception' and the bodily experiences in performance situations introduced a new dimension to theatrical inquiry, suggesting that even everyday interactions could be analysed through the lens of 'theatrical communication.' This perspective opened up new avenues for exploring the role of theatre in society, extending the applicability of theatrical inquiry to a wider range of contexts.

Recent contributions from Diaz (2020) have further enriched the discourse around theatrical inquiry, infusing it with elements of 'cultural inquiry.' Their work has expanded the framework of theatrical inquiry, integrating it with broader cultural and educational research agendas. This evolution marks a move towards a more holistic understanding of theatre's role in education, particularly within the context of Arts-Based Educational Research.

Diaz (2020) delves into theatrical inquiry through the lens of how theatre can catalyse social reflection and transformation without resorting to didacticism or propaganda. This exploration is grounded in the critique of past approaches where theatre was constrained by political agendas, limiting its scope and impact. Diaz cites Uribe's perspective that theatre's role is not to dictate thoughts or actions but to foster a space for questioning and engaging with history. This shift away from propagandistic content allowed for a resurgence in the expressive potential of theatre, marrying political engagement with artistic freedom. By staging performances in a university setting as a process of theatrical inquiry and choosing to leave the performance "in the rough," Diaz highlights a deliberate move towards fostering a more dynamic interaction between the performers and the audience (Diaz, 2020, p. 82).

The specific case of the Orwell play '1984' is used to exemplify how theatrical inquiry can illuminate social divisions and historical narratives that are often marginalized or ignored by mainstream discourse. Rather than aiming to alter the political landscape directly,

the play seeks to contribute to a broader awareness and understanding of Colombia's social fissures and the historical context. Through this analysis, Diaz (2020) articulates a vision of theatrical inquiry that extends beyond the confines of traditional theatre, advocating for a form of performance that is both reflective and engaging. This approach suggests that theatre, by embracing its inherent capacity for inquiry and expression, can play a significant role in societal discourse, not by offering solutions but by highlighting questions and histories that prompt deeper contemplation and understanding among its audience.

EMERGING ELEMENTS OF THEATRICAL INQUIRY

The foundations of theatrical inquiry as a methodology are deeply rooted in the interdisciplinary confluence of theatre studies, education, and cultural analysis, framing theatre not just as an art form but as a potent medium for exploration and transformation. This methodological approach harnesses the unique aspects of theatre — such as performance, narrative engagement, and audience interaction — to delve into and illuminate complex social, cultural, and pedagogical phenomena. The theoretical basis of theatrical inquiry suggests that theatre's inherent processes and principles offer insightful perspectives on human experiences, societal structures, and educational practices (Gardner, 2000; Horley, 2014).

Central to theatrical inquiry is the notion that theatre serves as a lens through which the world can be understood and interrogated. This belief in theatre's capacity to uncover societal truths through storytelling, character exploration, and emotional engagement posits it as an unparalleled medium for examining the human condition. Theatrical inquiry allows for the investigation of narrative construction, identity formation, and the reinforcement or disruption of societal norms, providing a unique platform for critical examination and dialogue (Mendez, 2014; Sohn, 2011).

The methodological framework of theatrical inquiry is distinguished by its focus on active participation and engagement, challenging the traditional research paradigms that may prioritize objectivity and detachment. This approach advocates for a deeply immersive experience in the subject matter, fostering a dynamic interplay among researchers, participants, and the theatrical content. Such engagement

with theatre-making and performance invites a collaborative creation of meaning, effectively merging theory with practice and eroding the boundaries between observer and participant (Kear, 2013).

Incorporating a critical pedagogical lens, theatrical inquiry views education as a transformative space where drama and performance act as catalysts for empowerment. Influenced by educational theorists advocating for engaged, reflective learning, this methodology positions drama as a tool for questioning prevailing narratives, exploring diverse perspectives, and catalyzing change within educational contexts (Freeman et al., 2003; Widdows, 1996).

Affect studies also significantly inform the theoretical foundation of theatrical inquiry, emphasizing the integral role of emotions and sensory experiences in shaping understanding and interactions. This focus on the affective dimensions of theatre enhances the research process, allowing for a comprehensive exploration that incorporates both intellectual and emotional responses, thereby enriching the depth and empathy of the engagement (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Harris, 2021).

Theatrical inquiry, grounded in the synthesis of insights from theatre studies, critical pedagogy, and affect studies, presents a novel and enriching approach to research. This methodology values creativity, emotional resonance, and participatory engagement, offering a profound way to engage with educational, cultural, and social inquiries. Through the application of theatrical principles to broader research endeavours, theatrical inquiry fosters innovative perspectives and transformative learning experiences (Gardner, 2000; Horley, 2014; Mendez, 2014; Sohn, 2011; Kear, 2013).

THEATRICAL INQUIRY IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

The nuanced exploration of theatrical inquiry within educational settings, especially through drama's potent role in amplifying student engagement and agency, unfolds as a multifaceted dialogue that underscores the profound impact of integrating this approach into educational frameworks. As delineated through the collective insights of scholars, drama's intersection with affect studies and creative agency heralds a transformative shift in educational paradigms, from traditional, teacher-centered models to dynamic, student-driven environments that prioritize emotional engagement and participatory

learning.

The participatory essence of drama, underscored by Heffernan & Wilkinson (2023) and Harris (2021), transcends conventional pedagogical methods by fostering a learning atmosphere that privileges the student's emotional and sensory experiences. This shift from passive absorption to active engagement in the learning process is not merely a pedagogical preference but a critical response to the evolving needs of students in contemporary educational landscapes. Drama, in this context, becomes a conduit for the circulation of affect, providing a platform where students can exercise their creative agency, thereby cultivating a sense of ownership and personal investment in their educational trajectories.

The capacity of drama to provide students with a voice and a platform for expression is particularly significant in the context of fostering inclusivity within the classroom. The perspectives of Literat (2021) and Stephenson (2023), alongside the foundational theories of Gregg & Seigworth (2010), illuminate how drama serves as a critical medium for enabling students to articulate their perspectives and engage with content in a manner that is deeply affective and personally meaningful. This form of engagement is crucial in creating an educational environment where all students, irrespective of their backgrounds or learning styles, feel valued, heard, and emotionally connected to their learning experience.

Furthermore, the integration of drama in education as a potent tool for social and emotional learning embodies the principles of creative agency. Engaging students in role-play and dramatic activities allows them to explore complex social situations and emotional landscapes in a safe, controlled setting. Such experiential learning, as highlighted by scholars like Widdows (1996) and Freeman et al. (2003), not only enhances social skills and empathy but also aligns with the goals of affect studies by fostering emotional intelligence. This approach reflects a holistic understanding of education, where the development of affective and interpersonal skills is regarded as equally important as cognitive achievements.

The diversity and dynamism of methodological approaches in drama education research further enrich the discourse on theatrical inquiry's role in schools. The use of qualitative methodologies and arts-based research methods, as explored by Bartone (2012) and Norris (2016), offers tools for delving into the nuanced experiences of drama

in educational settings. These methodologies underscore the importance of capturing the subjective, experiential dimensions of drama, thereby providing a deeper understanding of its impact on student engagement and agency.

The application of drama in addressing broader educational concerns, such as curriculum development and inclusivity, places drama education at the forefront of pedagogical innovation. The challenges and opportunities of integrating arts into the standard curriculum, as discussed by Lee et al. (2015) and Harris and Holman Jones (2023), reflect the ongoing dialogue between creative, student-centered learning and the constraints of standardized testing. Drama's role in catering to diverse learning needs and fostering an inclusive educational experience further highlights its significance in meeting the diverse demands of contemporary education.

Finally, the exploration of student voice and agency within educational settings marks a paradigmatic shift towards empowering students in the learning process. The work of Charteris and Smardon (2019) and the foundational ideas of Dewey (1922) and Vygotsky (1978) emphasize the critical role of student participation in shaping their educational environments. This shift necessitates a reevaluation of traditional educational roles and structures, advocating for a more inclusive, democratic approach that values student-driven innovation and engagement.

In essence, the deeper integration of theatrical inquiry and drama into educational frameworks represents a strategic and methodologically sound approach to enhancing the educational experience. By weaving together the principles of affect studies, creative agency, and methodological innovations in drama education research, this approach fosters a responsive and engaging learning environment. This environment not only supports the emotional and experiential dimensions of learning but also actively involves students in co-creating their educational journey, thereby laying the groundwork for a more engaged, reflective, and inclusive educational landscape.

WHAT IS THEATRICAL INQUIRY IN 2024?

Theatrical inquiry, as elucidated through the cited literature and discussions, emerges as a multifaceted methodology that extends far beyond the traditional boundaries of theatre studies to encompass a

broad spectrum of pedagogical, cultural, and social investigations. This methodology is characterized by its dynamic application across various contexts, its interdisciplinary nature, and its capacity to foster deep engagement, critical reflection, and transformative learning experiences.

At its core, theatrical inquiry is defined by its rigorous, systematic approach that leverages the unique perspectives and processes of theatre to inform and enrich research endeavors. This is not limited to the analysis of performances or the study of dramaturgy but extends to the exploration of how theatrical frameworks can illuminate complex social, cultural, and educational phenomena. The broad application of theatrical inquiry, as seen in the works of scholars such as Horley (2014), Sohn (2011), and Mendez (2014), demonstrates its versatility in addressing gender dynamics, cultural contexts, and the nuances of literary analysis within and beyond the confines of traditional theatre settings.

The interdisciplinary shifts highlighted by Gardner (2000) and the engagement with broader educational concerns underscore the relevance of theatrical inquiry within educational institutions. By bridging the gap between theatre studies and pedagogical theory, theatrical inquiry offers innovative approaches to curriculum development, teaching methodologies, and student engagement. This methodology supports the creation of learning environments where students can actively participate in their education, employing drama as a tool to explore identities, narratives, and social issues in a manner that fosters empathy, creativity, and critical thinking.

Central to the methodology of theatrical inquiry is its capacity to engage participants in reflective and meaningful ways. This engagement is often facilitated through the participatory nature of drama, which can encourage students to take an active role in their learning. The principles of creative agency and affect studies can be embodied through theatrical inquiry, providing platforms for participants to express their perspectives and engage with content on both intellectual and emotional levels. This approach can enhance emotional and sensory engagement within the educational process. According to Horley (2014), theatre has the potential to challenge and redefine societal norms, which can foster an inclusive environment where participants feel heard and valued.

Theatrical inquiry as a methodology is distinguished by its ability to

facilitate a deeper understanding of and engagement with the world through the lens of theatre. It operates on the premise that theatrical processes and principles can offer profound insights into human experiences, societal structures, and educational practices. By adopting and adapting theatrical inquiry within educational settings, educators and researchers can unlock new dimensions of learning and understanding, creating spaces that promote inclusivity, critical reflection, and active participation. This methodology, therefore, stands as a testament to the enduring relevance and transformative potential of theatre in contemporary society and education.

The adoption of theatrical inquiry as a cornerstone for future interdisciplinary research holds significant potential. By foregrounding the lived experiences and voices of students, this approach can contribute to a deeper and more empathetic understanding of the educational landscape. The pioneering use of theatrical inquiry in this manner aspires to inspire further academic inquiry, encouraging researchers to explore the intersections between theatre, education, and phenomenology.

In conclusion, the exploration of theatrical inquiry from its historical roots to its contemporary applications in educational research reveals a field of study that is ripe with potential. By extending and adapting theatrical inquiry to new contexts, this term may contribute to the academic discourse and offers practical insights for enhancing the educational experience. The integration of theatrical inquiry into ABER represents a significant step forward, promising to enrich our understanding of education through the lens of theatre and performance.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Waxman, N. (2024). *Reimagining learning spaces: The rise of theatrical inquiry in arts education*. *ArtsPraxis*, 11 (1), pp. 121-139.

REFERENCES

Barone, T., & Eisner, E. W. (2012). *Arts based research*. SAGE.
Biehl, B. (2008). [The performance of women and men in organisations:](#)

- [a theatre studies approach](#). *Gender in Management*, 23 (7), pp. 522–527.
- Biggsby, C. W. E. (1985). *A critical introduction to twentieth-century American drama: volume 3, beyond Broadway*. Kiribati: Cambridge University Press.
- Cartocci, C. (2023). *The rise of the concept of “the theatrical” outside the performative arts*. Master's Thesis, Ca' Foscari University.
- Charteris, J., & Smardon, D. (2019). [Democratic contribution or information for reform? Prevailing and emerging discourses of student voice](#). *The Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 44 (6), pp. 1–18.
- Dewey, J. (1922). Human nature and conduct, Vol. 14. *The middle works, 1899-1924*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Dewey, J. (1938). [The determination of ultimate values or aims through antecedent or a priori speculation or through pragmatic or empirical inquiry](#). *Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education*, 39 (10), pp. 471–485.
- Diaz Cardona, N. (2020). *The denied happiness: Stages of violence, terror and repression in Colombia*. Doctoral dissertation, Auckland University of Technology.
- Diaz, E. (2020). Theatrical inquiry and cultural reflection. *Journal of Arts-Based Educational Research*, 14 (2), pp. 72-85.
- Freeman, G. D., Sullivan, K., & Fulton, C. R. (2003). [Effects of creative drama on self-concept, social skills, and problem behavior](#). *The Journal of Educational Research*, 96 (3), pp. 131–138.
- Gardner, A. P. (2000). [Antonin Artaud's 'affective athleticism': The development of a modern performance theory](#). ProQuest One Academic. Doctoral Dissertation, The University of Manchester.
- Gardner, L. (2000). Un athletisme affectif: Theatrical inquiry and cultural critique. *Theatre Journal*, 52 (1), pp. 10-25.
- Gordon, R. S. (1990). [The Italian futurist theatre: A reappraisal](#). *The Modern Language Review*, 85 (2), pp. 349–361.
- Harris, D. X., & Holman Jones, S. (2023). [A creative ecological approach to supporting young people with mental health challenges in schools](#). *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 37 (2), pp. 372-383.
- Heffernan, J., & Wilkinson, L. (2023). Drama and student engagement: The role of affective learning. *Educational Theatre Journal*, 55

- (3), pp. 201-216.
- Horley, R. (2014). *An inquiry into the relevance of the practices of Commedia Dell'Arte to contemporary feminist theatre making*. Master's Thesis, University of Huddersfield.
- Kear, A. (2013). [*Theatre and event: Staging the European century*](#). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lee, B. K., Patall, E. A., Cawthon, S. W., & Steingut, R. R. (2015). The effect of drama-based pedagogy on pre-K–16 outcomes: A meta-analysis of research from 1985 to 2012. *Review of Educational Research*, 85 (1), pp. 3-49.
- Literat, I. (2021). Drama as a medium for student voice and agency. *Journal of Drama Education*, 27 (4), pp. 455-469.
- Méndez, S. (2016). [*Shakespeare's knowledge of imagination*](#). *Complutense Journal of English Studies*, 24, pp. 61–87.
- Norris, J. (2016). Drama as research: Realizing the potential of drama in education as a research methodology. *Youth Theatre Journal*, 30 (2), pp. 122-135.
- Reason, M. (2008). Thinking theatre: Enhancing children's theatrical experiences through philosophical inquiry. *Childhood & Philosophy*, 7, pp. 115–145.
- Sohn, W. J. (2011). *In search of another eye: Mimesis, Chinese aesthetics, post/modern theatre*. Doctoral Dissertation, University of London.
- Stephenson, P. (2023). Integrating drama in inclusive classrooms. *Arts Education Policy Review*, 124 (2), pp. 150-165.
- The Theatrical Inquisitor, Or, Monthly Mirror*. (1813). United Kingdom: Chapple.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Widdows, J. (1996). Drama as an agent for change: Drama, behaviour and students with emotional and behavioural difficulties. *Research in Drama Education*, 1 (1), pp. 65-78.
- Wright, D. (2007). [*Constructivist inquiry and learning in drama*](#). NJ: *Drama Australia Journal*, 31 (1), pp. 45–54.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Nick Waxman is an award-winning Australian teacher, director and playwright who hosts *The Aside Podcast*, a free podcast for drama teachers. He is currently the Curriculum Resources Manager for three State Government Projects (Blended Arts Project, Next Stage Project & Positive Start Project). Nick serves on the board of Drama Victoria and Fusion Theatre, and is completing his PhD at RMIT in embodied drama in learning environments. As the Head of Theatre, Dance and Drama at Haileybury College he directs a season of musicals, plays and performances; in 2023 his creative direction of *The SpongeBob Musical* work was nominated 26 times.