

Theatre space: Accessing the Cultural Conversation

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The first decade of the 21st century has seen a renewed understanding of the potential for engagement and participation in the Arts to foster the development of creativity and imagination and to facilitate social change (e.g. Catterall, 2009; Gadsden, 2008; Hunter, 2005; Deasy, 2002). This paper reports on the major findings of the *TheatreSpace* project. *TheatreSpace: Accessing the Cultural Conversation* is a four year large scale, longitudinal Australian Research Council (ARC) linkage project* in which three universities (Melbourne, Griffith and Sydney) worked in collaboration with 13 major industry partners (Arena Theatre, Malthouse Theatre, the Arts Centre – Melbourne, Melbourne Theatre Company, Bell Shakespeare, Sydney Theatre Company, Sydney Opera House, The Brisbane Powerhouse, Queensland Performing Arts Centre, Queensland Theatre Company and funding bodies Arts Victoria, Arts NSW and the Australia Council for the Arts). The central research question aimed to investigate young people's access, participation and responses to flagship performing arts companies and cultural venues in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. It examined the relationship between engagement, arts participation and familial and group participation to current and sustained arts attendance through questionnaires, in depth case studies and follow up interviews.

The paper will also consider a number of other important issues related to young people's access to and engagement in theatre, including:

- The role of educators, caregivers and theatre makers
- The impact of theatre literacy
- Access, entitlement, engagement and future attendance
- Involvement of young people in performance making
- The impact of diverse cultural backgrounds.

*The research team is led by Professor John O'Toole with Chief Investigators Professor Bruce Burton, Professor Robyn Ewing, Associate Professors Penny Bundy, Angela O'Brien, Kate Donelan and Michael Anderson, Drs John Hughes, Christine Sinclair, Madonna Stinson and Mr Noel Jordan and Senior Research Coordinators : Dr Clare Irvine and Dr Ricci-Jane Adams.

Key Words

SIG: Arts education, practice and research