Organizational Aesthetics 7(1): 67-68
© The Author(s) 2018
www.organizationalaesthetics.org

"Learning is initiated by interest"

Book review of *A Theatre Laboratory Approach to Pedagogy and Creativity: Odin Theatre and Group Learning*. By Tatiana Chemi. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan (2018)

Rannveig Björk Thorkelsdóttir
University of Iceland

A Theatre Laboratory Approach to Pedagogy and Creativity: Odin Theatre and Group Learning is part of Creativity, Education and the Arts book series published by Palgrave Macmillan and edited by Anne M Harris. The series emerges out of recent rapid advances in creativity and arts-informed research in education and seeks to reposition creativity studies within education as a multi- and interdisciplinary field, bridging a historical gap between "science" and "art"; that is, between "theoretical" and "applied" approaches to research.

A Theatre Laboratory Approach to Pedagogy and Creativity: Odin Theatre and Group Learning explores the pedagogy of the theatre laboratory, focusing on the seminal theatre group Odin Theatre. The structure of the book is organised in thematic areas which appraise the theatre laboratory as a learning space, the actors as learners and educators, and the ensemble's creative processes. In the concluding chapter (chap. 8) the author, Tatiana Chemi, outlines some findings from her research, envisaging possible applications in higher education settings, reflecting on third spaces (the in-between spaces), as well as examining critical approaches to education and pedagogy. In addition, the book offers a number of tools and ideas for group learning in higher education and short biographies of all the participating artists; this being a highly appreciated aspect.

This book is very personal and relies on a range of insightful sources among members of the Odin theatre group and auto-ethnographic notes based on Chemi's long-term relationship with Odin theatre. The episode describing Chemi's first encounter with Odin Theatre and the missed opportunity is both interesting and instructive to the reader and, in a certain sense, sets the tone for the narrative ahead. The reader learns about the history of Odin theatre through Eugenio Barba's learning trajectory (p. 92), on which Grotowski had a deep and lasting impact, then shifts to behind the scenes of the theatre laboratory where the actress Roberta Carreri gives talks about her approaches to techniques and creative processes (p. 203). The reader is also given an insight into Odin actors' learning journeys, both as learners and educators, group learning through creativity and leadership, peer learning and learning to learn. The flow through the chapters is clear and straightforward, with the idea of rethinking higher education gaining strength with every chapter.

This book raises the question as to whether arts instruction in higher education, still remains traditional – albeit with exceptions – and relatively unchanged in spite of Robert Barnett's critique in 1990 where he spoke of the crisis in higher education (p. 216). The book offers the reader a range of possibilities and suggests several critical perspectives for future studies. On the basis of her journey as a learner, spectator and researcher, Chemi suggests that within theatre laboratories education can be seen as a hybrid space of possibilities where opposites may co-exist (p. 223) in the shape of informal and formal elements within the same learning environment; that is, a third space, the space of possibilities, a critical space in higher education.

This book is really enjoyable to read, especially for me as a drama teacher and a strong believer in using drama and theatre as a form of pedagogy. It is about learning in a theatre laboratory as opposed to the limitations of traditional school education. The reader finds himself going back and forth in the narratives reading some chapters again and again for learning purposes. The reader also looks at clips from YouTube on Odin theatre to fully understand the learning process and the pedagogy of the theatre laboratory. While reading the book, I found myself formulating the following questions as a drama and theatre teacher in higher education and a researcher of theatre and drama pedagogy: How can theatre laboratory and drama in general, be used as a framework for meaning making processes in a 21st century educational context, both in higher education and in education in general? How can we rethink and revitalize ways of teaching and learning in and through drama within teacher education at university level? To rethink education, and hopefully change it, can be a challenge for some teachers and calls for innovative teaching practices. But this can also be a challenge for the students as they need to be interested and acknowledge the purpose of learning. The students must be active participants in the process of understanding, knowing, and achieving through creativity and critical thinking. Rethinking education also asks questions such as: How do innovation and creativity develop within the framework of arts education? When does arts education promote innovation and creativity? In rethinking education Chemi looks at the actors in the theatre laboratory as the centre of the creative process, their understanding of learning through their minds, bodies and experiences. In theatre laboratories new knowledge is produced through spaces, places, experience and experiential learning. Furthermore, theatre laboratories are about research in the making of the theatre. While reading the book the reader becomes a learner and a researcher of the Odin theatre, an experience which changes the reader's perception of theatre training and arts education.

This book should speak to experts in drama and theatre, both in academic and non-academic settings, offering insightful knowledge into group learning, peer learning and the purpose of learning in higher education. The reader is left with a strong wish to change education through creativity, innovation and artistic practices by means of which the gap between science and art could be overcome.

About the Author

Rannveig Björk Thorkelsdóttir, Ph.D., is assistant lecturer in drama and theatre education at the University of Iceland, School of Education. She has been involved in curriculum development in creativity and introducing drama in compulsory schools and higher education. She is an author of many published articles and reports, such as: *What are the enabling and what are the constraining aspects of the subject of drama in Icelandic compulsory education?* (2017), *Drama and theatre in a Nordic curriculum perspective – a challenged arts subject used as a learning medium in compulsory education* (2016), and *Analysing the Arts in the National Curriculum in Compulsory Education in Iceland* (2016). She is currently involved in a research project that aims at changing arts instruction chiefly by means of artist-led learning in higher education.