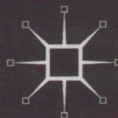




**NEW DIRECTIONS IN  
TEACHING THEATRE ARTS**

**EDITED BY ANNE FLIOTSOS & GAIL S. MEDFORD**





Anne Fliotsos • Gail S. Medford  
Editors

# New Directions in Teaching Theatre Arts

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## The Entrepreneurial Actor: A Study of Training Programs in Anglophone Countries Abroad

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Over the last decade entrepreneurialism has become a significant learning outcome for training actors. Institutions worldwide are exploring pedagogies that offer student actors the skills, knowledge, and empowerment to “undertake entrepreneurial activities” towards professional achievement and fulfillment. What methodologies are being deployed in this vein and who are the leaders in training the entrepreneurial actor? What is today’s marketplace for actors and how can trainers and teachers customize their pedagogies accordingly? In what ways can we forge a new direction towards training the twenty-first century actor? In this essay, I address these questions by exploring current methods at conservatory-styled acting courses in Anglophone countries throughout the world.

My ethnographic research led me to visit fifteen such training programs, including Australia’s four drama schools, the national drama schools of New Zealand and Ireland, and seven leading acting programs in

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the United Kingdom.<sup>1</sup> My onsite fieldwork at these schools included researching institutional archives, observing classes and productions, and conducting personal interviews.

Despite some advancements over the past decade, training worldwide continues to lag behind the pace and development of the acting industry. Student actors and those who teach them should reconsider existing models in favor of progressive ones based in entrepreneurship. In doing so, teachers and students can shape a new direction for theatre and performance pedagogy towards redefining their participation within the profession.

Webster's dictionary defines an entrepreneur as "one who organizes, manages, and assumes the risks of a business or enterprise." While the entire definition is applicable to the work and career of an actor, the latter part is especially apt. "Enterprise" connotes an undertaking that is purposeful yet conceivably flexible, an endeavor that could pertain to a specific activity (e.g., a given project) or a broader characterization of something or someone, such as an "enterprising" person possessing initiative and skill relative to a career path. While entrepreneurship is often associated with capitalism and the pursuit of wealth, I am deploying the term in the context of actors taking ownership of their educations, careers, and by extension, their lives. Innovative and calculated risk-taking conjoined with creativity, imagination, autonomy, and personal responsibility are crucial for the twenty-first century actor. Initiating original projects, starting a theatre company, and diversifying one's skillset towards employment both in and outside the conventional sectors of the profession are needed. An entrepreneurial approach affords actors the knowledge, confidence, and courage to adapt to the profession while simultaneously shaping its future.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>With the support of four grants, I completed research trips in 2015, 16, and 17 to Australia's National Institute of Dramatic Arts, Western Australia Academy of Performing Arts, Queensland University of Technology, and Victoria College of the Arts. I also travelled to New Zealand's National Drama School: Toi Whakaari. This financial support likewise underwrote my visits to the Royal Welch College of Music and Drama, Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts, and London Academy of Dramatic Arts, among other UK-based drama schools. Finally, I spent three days in residence at Ireland's National Theatre School (The Gaiety), during which time I also visited Dublin's Lir Academy. For the sake of this chapter, I also studied Arizona State University's Pave Program in Arts Entrepreneurship.

<sup>2</sup>I am defining the "conventional sectors of the profession" as employment in film, television, and theatre.

A 2016 *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, "The New Performing-Arts Curriculum," criticizes "conservatories in performance programs" for graduating students "with narrowly focused career paths that cannot be realized" (Goodstein et al. 2016). The article references the grim statistics associated with having a career in the performing arts while accusing conservatories of "luring" students into "programs that provide little promise for a sustainable career," a conceit that is as accurate as it is cynical (2016). To be sure, the majority of trainers in the performing arts are invested in their students and doing their best to prepare them for a challenging profession. Yet the fact remains that what worked forty years ago is outdated and in need of reconsideration. Insofar as acting is concerned, the Saint-Denis pedagogy of integrating the actor's vocal and physical instrument with a Stanislavsky-based approach to literary drama was designed for a repertory model that was ubiquitous during the 1960s and 70s but has since declined. While this approach remains both fundamental and important, it should be handily supplemented with curricula that develop skills necessary for professional sustainability and personal fulfillment. Thus, coursework in devising and executing independent projects, on-camera acting, and negotiating today's experiential economy might be considered and implemented accordingly. Most importantly, graduating students with a keen sense of their artistic identity and how they apply it socio-culturally is crucial in training the twenty-first century actor.

The first acting conservatory in an Anglophone country was the London Academy of Music and Drama (LAMDA), which was founded in 1861. Herbert Beerbohm Tree started its principal rival, the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA) in 1904, while their United States counterpart, the American Academy of Dramatic Arts (AADA) opened its doors in 1884. Following suit in pedagogy and practice were Australia's National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) in 1958, New Zealand's National Drama School (Toi Whakaari) in 1970, and Ireland's National Theatre School (Gaiety School) in 1986. A ubiquity of programs has likewise emerged in these countries, thereby forming an educational industry onto itself. In the US alone, for example, there are over 300 private or university-sponsored conservatories. The number of graduates from these institutions relative to the market demand for stage actors suggests an overabundance of programs, a point that is sobering when considering the investment of money and time that students make to complete them.



While LAMDA started the drama school model, they have not been a leader in training actors for the twenty-first century. Steeped in the tradition of exclusively preparing actors for the stage, LAMDA's curriculum and pedagogy consists of four separate departments: acting, movement, voice, and music. Faculty member Penelope Cherns describes it as "a highly textured and structured program" training actors to "find [their] character and serve the story in the context of the play's world."<sup>3</sup> To be certain, LAMDA's conventional approach is among the very best of its kind in the Anglophone world, as exemplified by the presence of alumni at the most prominent theatres throughout Britain and its membership in the Conservatoire of Dance and Drama. Its ethos is captured in the words of alumnus and former Associate Director, Stephen Jameson: "The skeleton of drama training at LAMDA and the UK is strong with a traditional classic-based approach. Ours is a linguistic tradition, whereas much of the rest of Europe tends to be more imagistic and spectacular."<sup>4</sup> Jameson is currently the Director of London's Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts, where a classical tradition is contextualized within a focus on musical theatre, the latter presumably being chosen to fill a niche in an overcrowded market of drama programs. Another LAMDA graduate, Tom Cornford, states that tradition-based programs are "overly conservative with attention given to a highly specialized sector of the profession (stage), which though extremely competent as such, are lagging in [pedagogical] diversity and progressivism."<sup>5</sup>

Currently on faculty at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (Central), Cornford works in the Acting CDT (Collaborative Drama Training) program, which is distinct from the school's more traditional BA Acting offering. The CDT's "Course Leader," Catherine Alexander, describes her program as "not necessarily an acting course" in that multidisciplinary guides students to become "innovative makers of their own work," as opposed to passive seekers of employment in the conventional sectors of the industry as defined by the West End, regional theatre, and film/television.<sup>6</sup> While a number of CDT actors have success in these sectors, they learn skills empowering them as artists and individuals that

in the words of alumnus, Fisayo Akinade, "nurtures the versatility of an actor" towards "adapting to almost any situation."<sup>7</sup> Unlike the standard Acting course, the CDT deploys a range of activities that includes "writing, shooting, and editing a short film," creating voiceover demos and show-reels, and devising and distributing original work—theatrical and otherwise.<sup>8</sup> Like their counterparts in the Acting course, students receive core training in body/voice and acting that consists of an amalgam of approaches ranging from Linklater and Lecoq to Stanislavsky and Chekhov. Similar to standard conservatory-styled programs, they work on canonical dramas, collaborate with guest directors, and have an industry presentation in their final term. Yet they are also exposed to verbatim theatre, radio performance, screen training, and devising, the sum of which provides a comparatively rich and balanced learning experience yielding graduates as aesthetically diverse as they are enterprising and entrepreneurial.

Given her background with London's theatre company, Complicité, it comes as little surprise that Alexander is leading a course that trains versatile actors with strong artistic voices, a learning outcome fostered through devised performance and theatre-making. Founded as a theatre collective dedicated to the creation of original work, Complicité is an excellent model for the devised performance bent of the CDT course. Identifying traditional approaches as "conservative" to the point of training actors to be "subservient to directors and writers," Alexander proudly acknowledges what distinguishes the CDT from Central's straight Acting course:

There is a conservatism among most aspirant actors and current drama school training crushes what I would call a maverick sensibility by creating carbon copy types that all sound and look alike (the repertory theatre model). Initially, we got the mavericks, the oddballs, the marginalized; we were automatically diverse. We wanted to bring choice, individuality, and rigor to the training experience. All the faculty have bought into it.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Quoted from *Royal Central School of Speech and Drama 2016 Prospectus*, 23.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted from *Royal Central School of Speech and Drama 2016 Prospectus*, 22.

<sup>9</sup> Catherine Alexander, interview with author, 4 April 2017; also see, Maria Kapsali, "Training in Cold Climate: Edited Transcript of Roundtable Discussion with Catherine Alexander, Alison Andrews, Tom Cornford, Matt Hargrave, Struan Leslier, Kylie Walsh," 8 August 2014. *Theatre, Dance, and Performance Training* 5.2: 219–32.

<sup>3</sup> Penelope Cherns, personal interview with Peter Zazzali, 19 March 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Jameson, Personal interview with Peter Zazzali, 9 February 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Tom Cornford, Personal interview with Peter Zazzali, 20 March 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Catherine Alexander, Personal interview with Zazzali, 4 April 2017.



The diversity Alexander references is multifaceted, pertaining to artistic and personal identities alike, with the latter proven by the CDT's population consisting of roughly 45 percent non-white students; the average is 16 percent for UK drama schools. With artistic and personal diversity as the program's grounding principles, CDT graduates possess the agency, adaptability, sociocultural awareness, knowledge base, and skillset to take ownership of their lives and careers. They are empowered entrepreneurs prepared to jointly engage and transcend the profession in ways that appear lost on their counterparts in more traditional acting courses.

One of the challenges facing all acting programs is negotiating limited resources, the most significant of which is time. With a benchmark of thirty contact hours a week over thirty weeks per annum for a three-year course, conservatories must grapple with the breadth and depth of their training. Because of the CDT's diverse pedagogy, for example, it cannot match the level of detail in voice/body and technique training of Central's Acting course. Nonetheless, the current state of the profession requires actors who are as diverse and adaptable as they are technically skilled and experienced in conventional stage work. While esteemed acting programs such as Central's and LAMDA's offer first-rate training in the classical sense, their content and delivery have not changed much over the past century. They tend to produce proficient yet obliging young actors inclined to formulaically follow a director's vision—a worthy skill in certain contexts—or an agent's admonition, as opposed to an enterprising individual with the courage and creativity to forge her own career path.

The challenge of time management is especially pronounced at The National Theatre School of Ireland's (NTSI) professional acting course, which lasts only two years. Otherwise known as the Gaiety School of Acting, the NTSI is the country's oldest drama school, founded in 1986 for the purpose of training actors for the repertory stage. Founder Joe Dowling remained the School's director until 1993, when he appointed his successor, Patrick Sutton, who has been at the helm ever since. Despite the course being only two years, Sutton and his staff of predominantly adjunct hires have packed as much as they can into the training.<sup>10</sup> Spanning over six semesters, the student's work week runs Monday to Friday (8:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.) and consists of a crosspollination of classes in voice (stage and singing), movement (Laban, Viewpoints, Suzuki, stage combat,

<sup>10</sup>With the exception of Sutton, the staff is entirely adjunct instructors. I raise this point because it is a challenge facing drama schools and acting programs throughout the world.

mime, tap), dramaturgy (text analysis, sight reading, theatre history), and acting (Stanislavsky and Chekhov technique). There is no production element until the final semester of Year Two, when students rehearse and perform a "Graduation Play."

Perhaps the most distinguishing offering of the School is its Manifesto initiative, a devising component within which students generate their own work in conjunction with identifying their artistic voices. Describing the Manifesto as "the heart of the Gaiety program," it begins in Year One and consists of "triggers"—prompts—in a laboratory environment by which students explore and create work that culminates in a public showing.<sup>11</sup> While projects do not have to be a solo piece, each student must undertake a prominent role performing in the project and facilitate its conception, organization, and execution. Moreover, students are responsible for assuming the role of producer, stage manager, writer, and technical designer towards mounting what in Year Two is a moderately resourced production. Thus, the Manifesto process mixes individual work with in-class sharing of constructive feedback from the cohort and instructor, the latter being a specialist in devising hired for this very purpose. Both years of the course involve the Manifesto component, which best represents the NTSI's attempt at entrepreneurialism, as noted by Sutton:

We have a responsibility to our actors not to leave them sitting around waiting for the phone to ring. We want them to find their own artistic identities and forge a career that accounts for who they are and what they want to say through their work: 'This is who I am, this is what I stand for, and this is how these ideas are expressed in my art. Whether a student starts a theatre company or creates a solo piece, the purpose is to plant the seeds for generating new work.<sup>12</sup>

Seemingly, Sutton's goal has been largely successful, as a significant number of NTSI graduates have found work in both the conventional sectors of the profession (film, TV, stage) as well as in creating new work and forming their own companies.

Ireland's other significant training program is Dublin's Lir Academy, otherwise recognized as the country's "national academy of dramatic

<sup>11</sup>See the NTSI's Two-Year Full Time Professional Actor Training brochure at <https://gaiety.school.com/two-year-full-time-intensive-professional-actor-training/> (Accessed 25 June 2017).

<sup>12</sup>Patrick Sutton, Personal interview with Peter Zazzali, 26 January 2016.



art.”<sup>13</sup> Founded in 2011 with funding from Ryanair heiress, Danielle Ryan, the Lir is a conservatory offering a balance of skills classes (movement/voice/speech), Stanislavsky-based technique, and participation in multiple productions drawn from contemporary and classical Western drama. An alumna of RADA, Ryan wanted to create a similar school in her native Ireland and used her inheritance to do so. She states:

The story of the Lir started around 2004, at the beginning of my second year attending RADA in London. During my first year, the trips home and small bouts of homesickness left both me and my father grumbling at the kitchen table over the absence of a “RADA-style” academy in Ireland. Predictably, as always with my family, this was an itch that wasn’t going to go away (Keating 2013, 15).

In addition to its classically oriented model, the Lir has embraced some of RADA’s pedagogies in screen acting, devising, and generating new work. According to the Academy’s Director, Laughlan Deegan, the Lir offers an Acting for the Camera course in Year Two and requires students to conceive and create a short film in Year Three, initiatives that teach students how to execute a self-test, perform on-camera, and generate their own work.<sup>14</sup> The self-test is becoming increasingly important for actors, with the majority of screen auditions—and a handful of theatre calls—now being transmitted as homebrewed videos shot on a smartphone. A select skill, videography requires managing camera angles, lighting, audio, and editing. This point is underscored by Edward Hicks, RADA’s Head of Film, TV, and Radio, who states, “If a student leaves drama school and is not comfortable in front of a camera they will have a tough go of it. There are practical elements of the craft of screen acting that are necessary to learn to execute auditions, get cast, and successfully deliver the role.”<sup>15</sup>

Hicks represents RADA’s attempt to provide necessary skills for the twenty-first century actor as part of what is otherwise a theatre training degree. Working under the sensible assumption that most employment for actors will come from screen assignments, students take Acting for the

<sup>13</sup>The homepage of the school’s website self-references the LIR as Ireland’s “national academy of dramatic art,” an echo of RADA, the institutional model and muse for the LIR. See <http://www.thelir.ie/about> (Accessed 30 June 2017).

<sup>14</sup>Laughlan Deegan, Personal interview with Peter Zazzali, 29 January 2016.

<sup>15</sup>Edward Hicks, Personal interview with Peter Zazzali, 19 September 2016; also see Edward Hicks, “An Audience of One,” *The Guardian*, 9 May 2009.

Camera courses in years one and two, with a guest director of photography joining in the latter instance to advise second year students how to shoot a short film. As Hicks states, “They learn how to be a screen actor and a filmmaker all in one go,” a learning outcome that will invariably pay dividends in year three, when students create their own short film, and moreover, when they enter the profession thereafter.<sup>16</sup> This approach is consistent with RADA’s Director of Actor Training, Lucy Skilbeck, whose vision is to “marry tradition with moving forward and leading the profession.”<sup>17</sup>

Ironically, one of the oldest and most classically oriented drama schools in the Anglophone world is undertaking screen training. Yet RADA—like its sister school the Lir—is responding to the current marketplace. In truth, making a living solely through stage work is as unlikely in Britain and Ireland as it is in the US, Australia, and New Zealand. Actors today must learn to be self-motivated artist entrepreneurs possessing a flexible and varied skillset that they can adapt and apply to a range of professional contexts. Knowing how to produce a self-test, being capable of adjusting a performance for the camera, and having the moxie and training to devise and execute independent projects are all crucial.

Similar measures are being taken by Australia’s leading drama schools. The National Institute of Dramatic Arts (NIDA), for example, has a screen acting component for each year of training, with students undertaking different production roles (e.g., cinema photographer; first AD; continuity person) in conjunction with performing before the camera. Taking place in a TV studio, this work is a laboratory experience consisting of shooting short scenes drawn from television and play scripts. This approach is likewise practiced at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA), where students in the Acting Course collaborate with those from the WA Screen Academy, both of which are located on the campus and operate under the auspices of Perth’s Edith Cowan University. A former director of Australian TV, Andrew Lewis, heads the Screen Academy and oversees the Acting Course, thereby facilitating “great contact between the two.”<sup>18</sup> In addition to classes in on-camera performance, students spend part of their third year acting in a short film, an activity that is

<sup>16</sup>Edward Hicks, interview with Peter Zazzali, 19 September 2016; also see Edward Hicks, “An Audience of One,” *The Guardian*, 9 May 2009.

<sup>17</sup>Lucy Skilbeck, Personal interview with Peter Zazzali, 19 March 2017.

<sup>18</sup>Andrew Lewis, Personal interview with author, 17 June 2016.



the capstone of their screen training. Like other preeminent acting schools, WAAPA has only recently included on-camera training, a development that is intended to expand students' skillset relative to the profession without "discrediting theatre training" because in the words of Lewis "that is what makes you an actor."<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps the most substantial screen training at Australian drama schools is occurring at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT). Located in Brisbane as part of the School of Creative Industries, the BFA Acting Course is undergoing significant changes under its Head, Mark Radvan, who is attempting to "marry film and stage training" by balancing core skills such as voice and movement with an equal emphasis on screen work.<sup>20</sup> Appointed in 2014, Radvan has revised the course's curriculum to prepare actors for success in film and television. While employment in theatre is still important, there is no mistaking Radvan's commitment to placing his students in the industry's comparatively lucrative sectors. Roughly half of QUT's coursework consists of screen training, and moreover, numerous guest artists come from the film and television industry. In June of 2017, for example, the venerable TV and film director/producer Ted Emery was in residence working with the course's second-year actors, an experience that Radvan claims, "had the students taking over the studio with increasing confidence and creativity."<sup>21</sup>

QUT actors are required to minor in film and take workshops in digital performance such as motion capture, automated dialogue replacement (looping), executing self-tests, and working off a "green screen." Moreover, they are exposed to casting directors and agents who impart knowledge about the industry and launching a career in film and TV. A commitment to the stage remains, but the contact hours therein have been decreased to accommodate the shift to screen training, thereby inviting the curricular conundrum of weighing breadth against depth, a challenge facing most acting courses today. Radvan's colleague, Sean Mee, addresses this matter with entrepreneurialism and the balancing of "hard" and "soft" skills offering the actor a "toolbox" with which he can build a career. Thus, a combination of the former (e.g., acting technique; project management; executing a self-test) with soft skills ranging from ensemble-building and creative problem solving to critical thinking and text analysis

provides an outcome that best prepares students for current and future professional trends:

It is clear that you can't just train an actor anymore. The actor has to have knowledge about the business, the means of production (e.g., self-test). The idea is to make our actors open, self-reliant, adventuresome, generous, and curious. To have a confidence in their literal and metaphorical voice and to be able to engage intellectually with other artists.<sup>22</sup>

Mee's recommendation for the entrepreneurial actor of the twenty-first century suggests one who is self-motivated and fearless in creating original work, as evidenced by theatre-making and devised performance. QUT's Acting Course, however, has no such initiative; contrarily its relative opposite, the QUT Drama Program, is broader in its pedagogical scope and places a premium on experimentation and generating new projects. The question remains then, how to balance depth and breadth in a course that is inherently vocational, such as the BFA in Acting, an admission that Creative Studies Discipline Leader, Sandra Gattenhof, forthrightly makes:

We are not quite there yet. The current model still has flaws and can create passivity. But I think we'd be silly not to acknowledge that in Australia live theatre is shrinking and the growth sector is in screen. And I'm not just talking about film but MoCap (motional capture performance), as well as skills both before and behind the camera. We are at the very beginning of a process that will not see fruit for 5–10 years.<sup>23</sup>

Similar changes are underway at the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA). Operating under the auspices of the University of Melbourne, the VCA was founded in 1972 with a commitment to "cultivating" the artist's "individual voice" while "preparing [him] for [his] vocation" (Pascoe 2000, 23).<sup>24</sup> The VCA's School of Theatre has a rich history of balancing classical training in the spirit of the UK model (e.g., RADA or LAMDA) with a cutting edge approach to theatre-making that has echoed and served Melbourne's experimental theatre scene; this cutting edge approach

<sup>22</sup> Sean Mee, Personal interview with Peter Zazzali, 1 June 2017.

<sup>23</sup> Sandra Gattenhof, interview with author, 15 June 2017.

<sup>24</sup> The School of Drama was established in 1975. Modelled after the California Institute of the Arts, the VCA is a multidisciplinary arts academy with schools in Dance, Drama, Music, Film and Television, and Visual Arts.

<sup>19</sup> Andrew Lewis, Personal interview with Peter Zazzali, 17 June 2016.

<sup>20</sup> Mark Radvan, email correspondence with Peter Zazzali, 30 June 2017.

<sup>21</sup> Mark Radvan, email correspondence with Peter Zazzali, 30 June 2017.



was particularly vibrant in the late 1960s and early 1970s when the VCA emerged. This pedagogical balance is documented by former faculty member, Richard Murphet, in his provocative essay “The Fall and Rise of the VCA.” Murphet explains the school’s unique trajectory, stating, “In some sense it has swung in focus between classical training and new approaches ... It began with a *carte blanche* vision that paralleled not the British and European models, but the radical theatre scene then existing in Melbourne” (Murphet 2011, 15). The VCA’s training was such that while it prepared actors for a career onstage and screen, it simultaneously produced independent theatre artists possessing the courage, will, and capability to identify their artistic voices and collaborate with others. One of the School’s first heads, the celebrated actress/director Lindy Davies, developed a curriculum coined “The Autonomous Actor,” which trains students to become flexible and virtuosic theatre artists who are as socio-politically curious as they are technically proficient. They could deftly analyze text, speak with vocal power and distinction, move with supple grace, and collaborate in an interdisciplinary context. Whether working on a film set, rehearsing a play, or devising a theatrical piece, they were “Autonomous Actors” with variegated skills empowering them “to evaluate their work without judging it; demonstrate an awareness of social and political responsibility; work within an ensemble and hierarchical situations; and contribute to the development of new work in Australia” (Davies 2003).

The VCA produced some of Melbourne’s most significant theatre artists in the concluding decades of the twentieth-century, including Rinske Ginsberg, who graduated in 1979 and has had a successful career making theatre and training actors ever since. She continues to relish the program’s halcyon days stating, “We formed a politically provocative troupe called the Common Clown Company—based on physical theatre and devising. It was so fantastic. We were at the heart of the burgeoning theatre and performance scene in Melbourne at the time.”<sup>25</sup>

Ginsberg currently teaches part-time at her alma mater alongside another VCA alumna, Melanie Beddies, who has likewise had an illustrious career working with Australia’s most prominent theatres (e.g., Melbourne Theatre Company) as well as a wide range of experimental houses. A protégé of Lindy Davies, Beddies exemplifies the Autonomous Actor and subscribes to its ethos claiming, “actors have to be versatile in building a career. No one can rely on one part of the industry to make a

<sup>25</sup>Rinske Ginsberg, Personal interview with Peter Zazzali, 29 April 2016.

living, especially when it comes to theatre.”<sup>26</sup> Ginsberg and Beddies are part of a faculty of professionals from distinct pedagogical and professional backgrounds, thereby creating a cohort that is as flexible as the training itself. Robert Walton, for example, is a theatre-maker trained in the UK, who like Beddies, has a scholarly background in actor training. Walton is committed to giving students “the tools in their belt in an age of emerging media platforms,” rather than solely “focusing on existing platforms,” towards paradoxically working within and transcending the conventional sectors of the industry.<sup>27</sup> As such, Walton teaches a theatre-making course requiring students to devise and develop a project that is ultimately “pitched” to a panel of producers and directors from the Melbourne professional theatre scene. Before an invited audience, the students have three minutes to present their case to the panel in the hope of getting their project produced. The activity is entrepreneurial in the richest sense of the word.

New Zealand’s National Drama School, Toi Whakaari (Toi),<sup>28</sup> has emerged as a pedagogically distinguished institution. Founded in 1970, Toi was predictably modelled after UK schools such as RADA, but today flourishes by offering world-class training to theatre designers, technicians, and most especially, actors while claiming a New Zealand identity. Like Australia’s NIDA, Toi is state-funded and thereby has greater flexibility in implementing its acting course than counterparts aligned with a university. As such, its actors graduate with a variance of skills ranging from screen and stage training to producing their own projects. In the course’s third and final year, for instance, students perform in a film directed by an industry professional, create and deliver a devised piece, and participate in a repertory of dramas. The former is a capstone activity that follows two years of on-camera training culminating with the Toi Film Festival, when “students collaborate with screen industry professionals” towards “showcasing” their talent while gaining “professional-equivalent experience on high quality productions.”<sup>29</sup> According to the head of Toi’s acting program, Heather Timms, every student will graduate with agent representation, a key criterion for seeking employment in

<sup>26</sup>Melanie Beddies, Personal interview with Peter Zazzali, 27 April 2016.

<sup>27</sup>Robert Walton, Personal interview with Peter Zazzali, 27 April 2016.

<sup>28</sup>Toi Whakaari is Māori for performing arts. Māori cultural traditions, philosophy, and practices are integral to Toi’s training and community of learners.

<sup>29</sup>See Toi Whakaari website at <http://toiwhakaari.ac.nz/toi-whakaari-welcomes-2017-toi-film-directors/> (Accessed 1 July 2017).



film and television.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, Timms asserts that the course is intended to “graduate actors who have agency and can pitch their own projects,” a goal that appears to be met judging from a recent study about Toi claiming, “now more than ever, acting graduates are their own producers, writers, and managers,” a conceit that underscores Toi’s entrepreneurial ethos.<sup>31</sup>

While Toi is as impressive as any drama school, its pedagogical philosophy is its most distinguishing element. In contrast to places like NIDA and the Lir molded in the tradition of a UK drama school, Toi is dedicated to having a New Zealand identity realized through the customs, precepts, and practice of the nation’s indigenous peoples: the Māori. Over the past eight years Toi has implemented the Māori concept of *Tūrangawaewae* as the pedagogical framework for all its courses. Translated as the positioning of one’s feet into a “place to stand,” *Tūrangawaewae* facilitates the development of one’s artistic (and personal) identity in the context of collaborating and coexisting with others. Negotiating difference and its numerous manifestations is therefore fundamental to building ensembles and creating work. *Tūrangawaewae* implies a keen connection to one’s position and identity in relationship to those of others, thereby resulting in a degree of listening that is as corporeal and spiritual as it is cerebral and analytical. This ethos permeates all aspects of the Toi community. For example, every Monday and Friday the entire drama school meets to share in Kōiwi, a 90-minute session in which participants take turns leading activities ranging from shared singing and theatre games to project presentations and group discussion. Kōiwi literally translates as “skeleton,” which like other concepts and practices of the Māori, provides the scope and spine of Toi’s training and the discovery and development therein of each participant’s artistic identity. Lutz Hamm, a 2017 graduate, underscores this very point: “We have a creative environment where we are empowered to discover our artistic identity and speak to our artistic and personal truth. We practice locating and communicating our creative voice.”<sup>32</sup>

Having such a rich connection to one’s artistic and personal identity is essential to entrepreneurship and the twenty-first century actor. Toi models some of the best practices for today’s acting conservatory. Their

<sup>30</sup> Almost without exception, agents and casting directors operate out of New Zealand’s largest city, Auckland, home of the entertainment industry and professional theatre scene.

<sup>31</sup> Heater Timms, Personal interview with Peter Zazzali, 12 June 2017.

<sup>32</sup> Lutz Hamm, Personal interview with Peter Zazzali, 12 June 2017.

approach includes independent projects, screen training, and remaining connected to the industry while providing the technical skills necessary for stage work. This pedagogical balance is being attempted at some of the other case studies referenced in this chapter, namely RADA, Central’s CDT course, and to a lesser extent QUT. The twenty-first century actor must be able to collaborate across disciplines and have the confidence and knowledge to create and execute original projects. She must be a visionary whose skillset allows her to adapt and respond to professional situations both in and out of the conventional sectors of the industry. Most importantly, she needs to take ownership of her artistic identity towards building a career that jointly shapes and serves the profession. In a word, such an approach is entrepreneurial, and it is incumbent upon today’s trainers to forge this new direction in our teaching and curriculum.

#### BEST PRACTICES FROM CASE STUDIES

- **Independent Student-Led Projects:** A significant majority of the case studies in this chapter have a theatre-making component. While they vary in scope and practice, each program allots at least 15 weeks of curricular time to engage students in the creation of a non-text-based project that they devise. These process-oriented pedagogies involve triggers to prompt creative concepts, rehearsals used as a laboratory for exploration, adjunct faculty who specialize in devising, regular sessions for sharing work and receiving feedback, and an emphasis on ensemble building, peer review, and student-centered learning.
- **Screen Training:** As noted in the chapter, a more concerted effort is underway to train actors for screen work. The leaders in this pedagogy are WAAPA, RADA, QUT, and Toi Whakaari. While the amount of curricular time dedicated to screen training varies, each institution spends at least a full year requiring coursework in this vital area. WAAPA shares an alliance with the Western Australia Screen Academy by having third-year actors collaborate with the latter’s students in coursework and then a short film. RADA and QUT spend considerable time training actors for screen, and moreover, they employ guest filmmakers to direct students in shorts. Additionally, QUT infuses its curriculum with workshops in motion capture performance, executing a self-test, and building a portfolio of screen work. Toi hires established film directors to complete six shorts with



third-year students, all of which are presented at the Toi Film Festival each spring. The Festival serves as a showcase of student work for industry professionals.

- **Entrepreneurialism:** A number of the case studies contextualize the theatre-making component of their curricula as a way to train students as independent producers, an approach that has led to the formation of theatre/performance companies. A useful offshoot of this is the National Theatre School of Ireland's "Manifesto" initiative requiring students to clearly and concertedly declare their goals in writing as part of a two-year process towards graduation. Nonetheless, all the case studies lack training in the business of producing work. Perhaps they might consider the groundbreaking work of Arizona State University's Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Program, which, under the leadership of Linda Essig has implemented strategies in self-producing that include workshops in grant writing, fundraising, and managing an arts budget.
- **Creating an Empowered Workspace:** Toi Whaakari's bi-weekly practice of Kōiwi promotes a supportive learning environment that has tangible and intangible advantages. Toi's students, staff, and faculty share in an amalgam of creative activity, group discussion, and theatre games that jointly contextualize and underscore the School's commitment to diversity and openness. It is a highly effective ritual that could be applied to a number of learning communities.

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