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Theatre, Education and Performance – The Map and the Story (Book Review)

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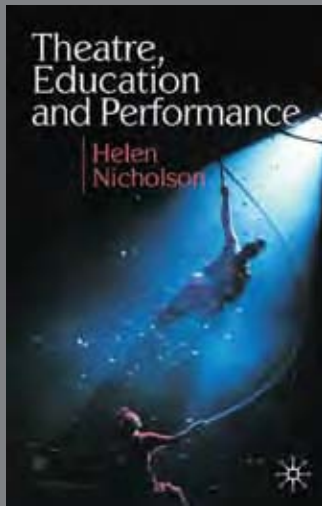
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BOOK

Theatre, Education
and Performance –
The Map and the Story

AUTHOR

Helen Nicholson

REVIEWED BY

Daphnie Sicre

Theatre, Education and Performance “The Map and the Story,” based its subtitle on Michel de Certeau’s book, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. In her latest text, Helen Nicholson, a professor of Drama and Theatre at Royal Holloway, University of London, creates a mapping metaphor where theatre weaves together practical scholarship and creative practices. For Certeau and Nicholson, the map and the story represent contrasting knowledge. The map is official and disciplined knowledge, whereas the story is creativity and spontaneous knowledge.

Nicholson opens this book by acknowledging the contributions professional theatre practitioners have made to the education of youth. She states that theatre matters: that its practices, principles and policies speak to different generations. Inspired by artistically innovative, socially engaging, and educationally-based youth theatre, Nicholson creates a map where one can discuss diverse cultural environments and learn how theatre and education have affected one another.

Within this text, Nicholson sweeps the landscape of the history of theatre education in the 20th century and demonstrates how theatre was interwoven with educational and social reform, and its affect on youth. Yet, the book does not stop exploring the contours of this historical map: it also reimagines and questions what theatre education should and could look like in our globalized 21st century. Nicholson’s research is a great historical tool for academics and young scholars aiming to learn what practitioners have been doing. While theatre artists and

educators might not consider this book a purely practical tool (it is not a how-to-book), they may want to engage in Nicholson’s discourse on where the field is headed.

Theatre, Education and Performance – The Map and the Story is divided into two parts. Part One, entitled “Looking Back: Histories and Landscapes,” takes a look at educational theatre work from the 20th century and discusses ideas and practices that inform today’s theatre education. Nicholson divides the historical accounts into three inter-related histories: the social, political, and educational narratives of theatre education, followed by social reform, the quest for finding a national identity, and seeking theatrical utopias in a rural artistic form.

In Part Two, “Moving On: Theatre Education in the Twenty-First Century,” Nicholson responds to several potential challenges presented by globalization. This section goes on to compile a thoughtful analysis of the ways in which the 21st century educational policies affect theatre education. Nicholson also introduces the possibility of a new landscape in theatre education that might address the need for national identity. Lastly, she explores ways in which theatre practitioners can encourage public engagement through politics of participation, including the use of science. Part Two weaves contemporary practices in theatre and education with Nicholson’s personal narratives and experiences within the historical stories. This back-and-forth makes Part Two very useful, but not necessarily engaging to read from start to finish.

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If these sections sound dense, they are. While some of the examples contextualize Nicholson's broad ideas of globalization and utopia, even the examples are hard at times to wade through as a reader. Yet, they are crucial for a discourse on where the field of Theatre Education is headed.

Throughout the book, Nicholson thoughtfully differentiates Theatre Education, Drama Education, and Theatre for Young Audiences from each other. Yet, her research does rely heavily on previously published work and some of the references are not completely accurate. For example, Professor Manon van de Water is referred to as a "he" instead of a "she." Also, when discussing commercialization and consumerism in America, she turns to The American Place, the familiar mega-store of the American Girl books and dolls. Instead of focusing on the theatrical aspects of the company, she focuses on how girls can get dolls that look just like them, which is not necessarily true since the company does not differentiate between certain skin colors, eye color and hair textures.

Despite these inaccuracies, one of the greatest strengths of this text is Nicholson's quest to challenge today's theatre norms and cultures and her call for a theatre that will transcend national borders. She argues that theatre education has always been used to reform social norms and develop new teaching/educational practices.

Nicholson covers historical ground-breaking educational theatre developments of the 20th century and explores ways in which current theatre practitioners uphold these practices. She does this well by including various examples that developed throughout the 20th century such as the evolution of Theatre-In-Education (TIE), the use of Shakespeare as national identity in the UK, or the work of Boal. Yet despite the breadth of Nicholson's research, it is impossible for her to cover every single ground-breaking contribution in educational theatre throughout the world.

Nevertheless, she does an exemplary job at gathering and mapping the histories of our fore founders in educational theatre. She also eloquently questions where the field is headed and how to incorporate globalization. In covering ground that is useful not only as a guide on historical accounts of educational theatre developments, but also a tool that could be used as a text in a Drama in Education course, Nicholson's book meets academic expectations and maps out work from all over the world in order to spotlight important contributions to the field. ■

Daphnie Sicre is a PhD candidate in Educational Theatre at New York University. She is also an adjunct instructor at NYU, Borough of Manhattan Community College and Marymount Manhattan College. When she is not teaching college students, she is working as a teaching artist at George Street Playhouse, NJPAC and Mile Square.