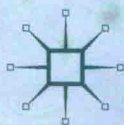


ARTISTIC LITERACY

THEATRE STUDIES AND
A CONTEMPORARY
LIBERAL EDUCATION

NANCY KINDELAN

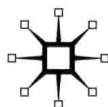


Artistic Literacy
Theatre Studies and a
Contemporary Liberal Education

Nancy Kindelan



palgrave
macmillan



ARTISTIC LITERACY

Copyright © Nancy Kindelan, 2012.

All rights reserved.

First published in 2012 by

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN®

in the United States—a division of St. Martin's Press LLC,
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Where this book is distributed in the UK, Europe and the rest of the world,
this is by Palgrave Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited,
registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills,
Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies
and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States,
the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN: 978-1-137-00850-3

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kindelan, Nancy Anne.

Artistic literacy : theatre studies and a contemporary liberal education /
Nancy Kindelan.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-1-137-00850-3 (alk. paper)

1. Theater—Study and teaching (Higher)—United States. 2. Education,
Humanistic—United States. I. Title.

PN2078.U6.K56 2012

792.071—dc23

2012003476

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by Newgen Imaging Systems (P) Ltd., Chennai, India.

First edition: August 2012

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed and bound in Great Britain by

CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham and Eastbourne

To C.E.C.

Preface

This book is a call to action. Educational organizations and undergraduate institutions are beginning to recognize the value of performing arts programs in preparing students for work and citizenship. They are especially interested in the notion of creativity and its relevance to a conceptual economy based on innovative thinking and entrepreneurship. However, it is likely that most college administrators know very little about how theatre programs develop intentional and responsible learners through analytical, cross-disciplinary, innovative, individual, and team-based problem-solving activities that promote both personal and social awareness. While theatre educators know otherwise, many educators from other academic backgrounds are operating under the perception that theatre programs are extracurricular—the providers of campus “entertainment.” As a result, many believe that theatre, as a discipline, is not on par with other academic fields and that the theatre curriculum and its concomitant activities lack the intellectual rigor and substance to cultivate the critical skills, creative capacities, and learning strategies that are the key components of a contemporary liberal education.

This work sets the record straight. Theatre programs *can* establish a higher standard for liberal education in the twenty-first century. But because theatre programs are often underrepresented in local and national meetings, it is not clear to administrators how this field of study develops critical thinking, analytical skills, and artistic literacy. Few educators outside the arts recognize that theatre programs play a valuable role in developing leadership skills

and social responsibility through their interdisciplinary, independent, and cooperative research activities, as well as their reflective pedagogies of engagement and their unique experiential practices in and out of the classroom.

The first step in rectifying this problem involves clarifying how the philosophy and distinctive pedagogy of theatre programs are congruent with current interests in inquiry-based learning and teaching. One way this can be accomplished is to involve theatre faculty in local curricular development to devise courses and experiential activities that support new methods of integrative teaching and learning. By learning how to “talk the talk” in committee meetings and “walk the walk” through becoming actively engaged in curricular change and implementation, theatre faculty can demonstrate how theatre courses and production programs support a liberal education that is both humanizing and practical. Further clarification can occur at educational conferences—a perfect venue for opening national discussions with educators outside the arts. Conferences and workshops provide opportunities for faculty from other disciplines to hear how theatre programs (courses and activities) enhance innovative collaborative learning projects, core initiatives, experiential endeavors, and service-learning missions.

The overall intent of this study is to break down institutional “silos” by encouraging local, national, and international dialogues among educators interested in learning how the performing arts, and especially theatre programs, can play a more significant role in the debate about the aims, learning outcomes, and pedagogies of a contemporary liberal education.

While this book advocates for arts education, I do not attempt to cover the manner in which all the arts serve undergraduate education. That worthy narrative is better left to my colleagues whose knowledge of visual studies, architecture, music, dance, and cinema studies is greater than my own. As a theatre professor, I will begin the discussion by focusing on my area of expertise, though certainly, I will, at times, consider the larger context of arts education. While my focus is on how theatre programs can play a stronger role in institutional curricular reform, my colleagues outside the performing arts will find this book helpful, as

well, since we often share educational philosophies and pedagogical approaches.

For many years theatre educators have presented eloquent arguments about the importance of theatre programs in undergraduate education. Rather than offering comprehensive summaries or critiques of prior examinations, this work builds on what has been presented and what many theatre professors believe to be the purpose of theatre programs in undergraduate liberal arts institutions. Its aim is to highlight how theatre's signature pedagogy augments the aims, purposes, and models of today's undergraduate education.

Hundreds of US colleges and institutions engaged in implementing curricular change and setting new strategies for teaching and learning have been influenced by the Association of American Colleges and Universities' 2002 report *Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College*. This publication recommends: (1) a new form of liberal education that invigorates, expands, and nourishes the minds of undergraduates who will face the reality of a fast-changing, complex, and pluralistic world; (2) a practical liberal education that develops "intentional learners" who are capable of adaptation, integration, and lifelong learning; and (3) learning goals that enable students to become "empowered," "informed," and "responsible" learners. Following the lead of *Greater Expectations*, new inquiry- and problem-based learning strategies (linked courses, learning communities, capstone courses, undergraduate research, and service learning) are designed to offer opportunities for undergraduates to become more actively engaged in moral reasoning, deciphering and synthesizing multiple perspectives, and negotiating diverse opinions.

In presenting numerous examples from specific case studies within a historical and theoretical framework, I illustrate how teaching theatre contributes to the integrity of a twenty-first-century liberal education—in particular, how theatre's curricula and activities develop analytical and creative thinking, social awareness, and transformative educational experiences, as well as integrative, collaborative, and practical problem-solving skills. This work strives to encourage cross-campus communication and

initiate innovative ways of teaching and learning that provide undergraduates with not only job skills but also with insights into how one faces complex pluralistic issues, where answers are not clear-cut.

I first became interested in the role of the arts in transforming general education programs in 1991, when I was a member of a four-person task force charged with developing a new college-wide core curriculum. My home university had received a National Endowment for the Humanities grant, for the project "Engaging Cultural Legacies: Shaping Core Curricula in the Humanities." We spent the year attending conferences on curriculum reform and participating nationally in discussions with other institutions that had developed new programs or, like us, were thinking about the relationship of the liberal arts to undergraduate education. At an Association of American Colleges (AAC) conference in Washington, DC, I was introduced to campus teams from across the United States who presented their new curricular models. The conference participants heard how diverse departments with different modes of learning had developed curricular and pedagogical strategies that focused on what today's undergraduates needed to know and experience. While I was busy deciphering the difference between the meaning of liberal education and general education, I was also being introduced to innovative models of teaching and learning. Throughout, an emphasis was placed on the development of *integrative* learning. Because I teach dramatic literature, script analysis, and dramaturgy courses and direct plays as well, interdisciplinary connections were familiar and important to me, and it was at this point that I began to recognize similarities between the learning goals of a contemporary liberal education and the pedagogy followed in theatre programs.

Since this session at the AAC conference focused on first-year curricular changes in general education programs, particularly on how linked courses from multiple disciplines involved different approaches to teaching the history of world civilization, I began to consider the role theatre courses and activities could play in these new teaching and learning models. I thought colleagues in theatre programs would immediately understand such a proposition, for

certainly, most of us agree that the study and viewing of plays, from those of the ancient Greeks to those of the present day, offers an excellent way for students to learn more about the psychology of diverse cultures. I looked around the conference room, searching for support from members of other fine and performing arts departments. I seemed to be alone. The arts were not part of the discussion. I stood up and recorded my concern to Carol Schneider, an administrator from the AAC (now president of the Association of American Colleges and Universities). She answered me by countering, “Are you planning to include the arts in your curricular plan?” I sat down, realizing my answer was, “No, I don’t think so.”

At that point I began to wonder: Were the arts a missing link in the undergraduate core? If artists were not advocating for the inclusion of the arts in general education programs, who would? I began my journey toward an answer by considering numerous books on educational theory that focused on the meaning, goals, aims, strategies, and philosophy of liberal and general education. I reviewed scholarship that traced theatre’s evolution in the academy. I consulted authorities in higher education and talked with educators who were in the forefront of developing new ways of teaching and engaging students in undergraduate research activities. I became actively involved in innovative curricular projects on my own campus. I presented papers at conferences. I published articles on how the experiential pedagogy of theatre speaks to the ideas and methods of a practical liberal arts education. Over two decades, I looked for ways to encourage local and national discussions.

This book provides the background and substance to engage in the conversation. It will be useful to theatre and fine arts professors who want to join campus-wide curricular discussions but are unsure about the historical development of undergraduate education and its reform strategies; administrators, leaders in higher education, and consultants who are curious about how theatre programs speak to the learning goals in higher education; and graduate students in education and the arts who need to know more about the history and purpose of undergraduate education before they join the ranks

of academe. To facilitate meaningful discussion, it contains information about the pertinent literature that influences the world of education reform, the philosophy and practices that inform many theatre programs, and the links between educational theory and theatre practice. For the theatre teacher who serves on committees involving curricular change, this book will help to demystify the language and complex history of higher education. For the educator who knows little about the philosophy and pedagogy of theatre programs, it presents examples, theoretical and practical, to illustrate how theatre courses and activities enhance the learning goals of a liberal—or liberalizing—education. Additionally, this book may serve as a model for faculty members outside of theatre programs who wish to develop innovative curricula and new teaching strategies.

Part I provides the reader with an overall awareness of the vast educational landscape that currently challenges reformers when they talk about the purpose and meaning of a contemporary undergraduate education. Part II is more specific and places theatre programs within the context of a practical liberal arts education.

By way of introduction, chapter 1 explores reasons why the arts (in particular, theatre programs) need to join the debate concerning the aims, learning outcomes, and goals of a contemporary liberal education. Chapter 2 offers brief summaries of the terms, ideas, and positions that affect curricular decisions at colleges and universities. I review the overall history of higher education and the philosophy that informs higher education, and examine why its meaning and purpose have changed over time. To place the study and the practice of theatre within the context of an evolving baccalaureate curriculum, chapter 3 outlines the history of theatre's entry into the academy, so that all educators might consider (or rethink) the role theatre programs have played thus far in the education of undergraduates. Chapter 4 discusses the goals, outcomes, and strategies of today's contemporary liberal education. Chapter 5 focuses on how theatre's signature pedagogy, the study of plays through the practice of theatre—based on a triad of traditional scholarship (dramatic theory, history, and literature)—is consistent with today's thoughts regarding the purposes, structures, and practices of higher

education. Chapter 6 considers how theatre programs help students become more “intentional” in their learning—by cultivating an “enlightened eye”; developing fundamental intellectual, communication, and literacy skills; considering moral and ethical dilemmas; experiencing diverse cultures and issues; and becoming socially responsible. Theatre teaches students to observe and experience the actions of characters involved in a play’s moral dilemma. Students perceive how social conditioning motivates characters to make specific choices that in the end affect their own lives and the lives of others. Chapter 7 is written for the educator interested in how the philosophy and pedagogy of theatre programs contribute to the development of what John Dewey calls “social intelligence,” the ability to see and comprehend social situations. This chapter suggests that democratic values—social awareness, moral growth, and civic responsibility—develop through theatre’s pedagogy of engagement. Chapter 8 demonstrates how the practice of theatre trains its participants to identify, understand, and evaluate human behaviors and moral dilemmas. In this chapter, I present case studies that show how immersive learning projects encourage teamwork, social thought, ethical decisions, and civic responsibility. The examples demonstrate how theatre’s creative process, which encourages the synthesis of information and imagination, occurs in a community of learners. In this environment, faculty and cohorts of diverse students (class members, creative and interpretive artists, and those in the audience) are involved in the analysis and realization of a play script. The final chapter provides readers with additional talking points and action steps to consider as they continue to think about curricular restructuring, innovative learning initiatives, and national assessment activities.

Over the past two decades, I discovered a plethora of worthwhile educational literature. At the same time, I realized how difficult it is to bring faculty together to discuss new teaching and learning strategies. I have accepted that discussions about college curricula are fluid, that they are subject to the needs of a changing workforce and new economic challenges. Educators realize that employers want higher education to place more emphasis on global cultures, ethical issues, and technological or scientific advances.

Employers want members of the workforce who can communicate and collaborate as well as think creativity and innovatively to analyze, integrate, and apply knowledge to unprecedented situations. While artistic literacy is a necessary part of undergraduate education, this book does not provide all the strategies by which this desirable outcome may be achieved. My purpose is not to prescribe solutions but to encourage ongoing discussions about how theatre can make itself central to a twenty-first-century liberal education.

Many arts educators know the value of artistic literacy in personal and academic development; nonetheless, it remains to be seen if the academy understands the value of theatre and the other arts in the overall liberal education of students. If theatre arts departments remain complacent and disengaged with the process of transforming undergraduate education, then it is likely that the study and practice of theatre will remain peripheral to local and national discussions on curricular reform, perpetuating the impression that the arts are little more than entertainment or decoration, capable of developing nothing more than “soft skills.” Conversely, by taking a more proactive approach, these programs may demonstrate how their courses and activities promote artistic literacy: the critical ability to recognize and reify complex social ideas in symbolic form—in a “language” of the arts that can be taught and learned. Because artistic literacy is such an important, but missing, component of a rich liberal education, it is time for theatre educators to sit at the curriculum table and discuss how the critical and creative activities of performing arts programs enhance the quality, substance, and integrity of the baccalaureate degree.

Acknowledgments

This book has been long in the making. As I look back on the process of bringing my manuscript forward, I am reminded that my interest in the role of the performing arts in higher education began in 1985 while teaching theatre courses and directing plays at Bradford College. I am grateful for my brief experience of working with Bradford's president, Arthur Levine, on his innovative practical liberal arts curriculum known as the "Bradford Plan." Shortly thereafter, I joined a four-person Northeastern University task force engaged in researching and developing a new Arts and Sciences College Core Curriculum. I would like to thank my task-force colleagues (Robert Lowndes, Ron McAllister, and the late Bill Faissler) for expanding my understanding of the internal challenges involved in curricular reform. I am thankful for the subsequent funding Northeastern University provided that allowed me to attend numerous conferences and workshops sponsored by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) and to observe learning communities at The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington.

I would like to thank my colleagues at Northeastern University, especially those individuals who challenged my ideas and encouraged me to pursue this project. In particular, I owe special gratitude to the Office of the Provost. I would like to express my appreciation to Mal Hill, who, as associate provost, provided me with the opportunity to serve as the faculty lead on a provost-sponsored university-wide first-year learning community project and to Sue Powers-Lee, also an associate provost, who funded the

Children of Drancy Advanced Academic Learning Community (AALC) project. I would also like to thank Bruce Ronkin, who, as interim dean, allowed conversations about AALCs to continue to flourish through the sponsorship of a yearlong Teaching Circle that involved faculty members from across the College of Arts and Sciences. To my colleagues (especially Mal Hill, Gerry Herman, Tom Sherman, Steve Zoloth, Jack Greene, Robert Futrelle, Richard Scranton, Kathleen Kelly, and William Wray) who served on the Special Committee on Academic Policy charged with developing a university-wide NU Core Curriculum, I offer my gratitude for the experience of hearing their various disciplinary perspectives as we worked on the critical task of what makes an educated person in the twenty-first century.

Collaborative conversations with Inez Hedges were invaluable to me throughout the creative process of directing her play (*Children of Drancy*) and during our work on developing the academic goals and outcomes of the accompanying AALC. I am grateful for our initial and ongoing exchanges as they continue to expand my views regarding the importance of theatre studies within the undergraduate curriculum. I would also like to thank Dennis Deal for offering his thoughts regarding the play's production and his willingness to compose the music for Hedges's original work. My undergraduates have played an enormous role in shaping my views about how theatre courses and activities help in developing responsible members of society. My thanks go to you, my Northeastern University students, who worked on *The Laramie Project*, *A View from the Bridge*, and the *Children of Drancy* AALC project. Your helpful comments, inspiring creative efforts, and thoughtful Honors theses influenced the development of my manuscript years after you graduated. I also especially thank Sara Heller, who, as a child of Drancy, provided the director and cast with living memories of her experiences during the French holocaust.

There have been many people who have read this book and offered suggestions. I am particularly thankful to my former Dartmouth College students, Kim Marra and Kal Alston, who, despite their incredibly busy schedules, managed to read an early draft of my work and provide me with carefully crafted suggestions

that affected the book's structure and author's voice. I am also grateful to Stuart Hecht, who in the final stages of preparing his own work for publication, gave my chapters a careful reading and offered keen observations and inspirational comments.

Various people have had a hand in bringing this work forward. I would like to thank Don Wilmeth, who introduced me to the editorial department at Palgrave Macmillan and my editor, Robyn Curtis and the editorial staff, who listened carefully to all my questions and concerns and provided me with prompt and helpful answers. To Naomi and Bob Kline, Danielle Kline, William Elwood, John Lutterbie, Marilyn Gardner, Julie Hagen, Victor Wallis, Katalin Mitchell, and members of the Northeastern University Theatre Department (especially Janet Bobcean, Antonio Ocampo-Guzman, Justin Townsend, and Carol Najarian), I would like to offer my thanks for their ongoing interest, guidance, or support.

Finally, I am fortunate to have a husband, Charles Combs, who shares my desire to advocate for the performing arts in higher education. I thank him for our innumerable and valuable conversations about the aims and purposes of a practical liberal education and the role theatre studies courses and activities play in today's baccalaureate degree. I am eternally grateful for his perceptive suggestions and lasting patience, especially when the process was particularly demanding.

Versions of some material contained in this book appeared in previous publications: chapter 5, in "A Missing Link in General Education: Making a Case for Theatre," *Journal of General Education* 48, no. 4 (1999): 265–79; portions of chapters 6, 7, and 8, in "Informed Imagination: The Pedagogies and Strategies of Theatre Studies," and "*Children of Drancy*: A Case Study on Inquiry-Based Intentional Learning," *New England Theatre Journal* 20 (2009): 85–103; 137–48.

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xvii
Chapter 1 Introduction: A Call to Action	1
Part I The Makings of a Contemporary Liberal Education	
Chapter 2 The Evolution of the Liberal Arts	21
Chapter 3 The Evolution of Theatre Studies Programs	51
Chapter 4 A Contemporary Liberal Education	61
Part II The Pedagogies and Strategies of Theatre Studies	
Chapter 5 Setting the Stage for Learning in the Twenty-First Century	77
Chapter 6 Intentional Learning through the Art of the Theatre	89
Chapter 7 Rehearsing for Participatory Democracy	105
Chapter 8 Artistic Literacy in Action	117
Chapter 9 Artistic Literacy and the Twenty-First-Century Workforce	135
<i>Notes</i>	145
<i>Bibliography</i>	165
<i>Index</i>	183

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: A Call to Action

Beyond these more practical issues, the most significant challenge facing our universities is to ensure that teaching and research continue to unleash the creative intellectual energy that drives our system forward. As the conceptual share of the value added in our economic processes continues to grow, the ability to think abstractly will be increasingly important across a broad range of professions. Critical awareness and the abilities to hypothesize, to interpret, and to communicate are essential elements of successful innovation in a conceptual-based economy...

...The challenge for our institutions of higher education is to successfully blend the exposure to all aspects of human intellectual activity, especially our artistic propensities and our technical skills.

Alan Greenspan (1999)

Economist Alan Greenspan's comments about working to develop the creative intellectual energies that drive our economy speak directly to members of the academy who are interested in helping undergraduate students see the importance of artistic literacy as a way to become productive and valuable members of the workforce.¹ Unlike other art forms, theatre principally deals in words and the examination of human experience; thus it serves as a special site to consider the broad range of dynamics and