



Public forum: 'What role does social action theatre play in making spaces for change in the lives of participants?'

Presented by the Cultural Development and the Taking Up Space Project
October 2, DanceHouse, Carlton



This event was an exploration of Theatre For Living methods and their application in communities, and the learnings of communities who engage in critical dialogue through theatre. Featured speaker was David Diamond, the award winning Director of Headlines Theatre, Vancouver, Canada and a panel of local practitioners; theatre worker Xris Reardon of Taking Up Space project, research and policy advisor, Dr. Kathy Landvogt from the Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service, family therapist and researcher, John Bamberg from the Centre for Adolescent Health and family worker, Jacqui Sundbery, from the Reconnect Program at Youth Substance Abuse Service.

The forum was attended by a diverse audience of theatre workers and other performers, as well as local government and community workers from non-government organisations, therapists, counsellors, activists and academics. David spoke about his practice in a range of communities across Canada, with people from all walks of life. Audience members found his presentation 'inspiring' and 'exciting'. One person commented that the talk helped her think in a new way about issues of our own power and ways we behave. The other speakers described their work in a variety of settings; Kathy Landvogt speaking about her work with Good Shepherd, where outcomes of a theatre for a living project are informing her research and policy development around issues of women and money. John Bamberg spoke of the personal challenges for him applying forum theatre techniques for the first time in his work with young people and families, especially as a therapist and counsellor experienced in verbal methodologies.

Lively discussion followed the presentations, on topics including therapeutic experiences through the arts versus 'arts therapy', quality of participation versus quality of outcomes and challenges of sustainable practice. Evaluation comments indicated that attendees found the session very worthwhile, with one theatre director for example, influenced to rethink his company's mission statement. There were many comments like this: 'Very worthwhile- so glad I came!'



Photo 1: David Diamond and participants

Photo 2: Presenters (L to R) John Bamberg, Kathy Landvogt, Jacqui Sundbery

Photo 3: Forum participants express an issue



David Diamond, BFA D.Litt. Artistic and Managing Director/Joker, Headlines Theatre

Since 1981 David has directed over 300 community specific theatre projects on issues such as racism, gender roles, violence, addiction, self-esteem, First Nations' Residential Schools, globalization, language reclamation and many, many others. David has directed workshops throughout BC, Canada and the USA, as well as in Namibia, New Zealand, Germany, Austria, Italy, Singapore and Finland. www.headlinestheatre.com

Headlines Theatre was founded in Vancouver in 1981. Directed by David Diamond, the company uses **Theatre for Living**, which has evolved from Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed to help living communities tell their stories. **Headlines Theatre's** work is a worldwide leading example of healing art, with projects in collaboration with First Nations and multicultural communities through hundreds of theatre workshops, Power Plays and Forum Theatre events around the world on issues such as violence and suicide prevention, anti-racism workshops, youth empowerment, bullying and community development.

John Bamberg is Family Programs Coordinator at the Centre for Adolescent Health and a Research Manager at the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute. His background includes many years of substance user counselling and family therapy, psychiatric nursing and evaluation. He is also the leader of the Best Plus parenting program.

Dr. Kathy Landvogt works in the Social Policy Research Unit of Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service as a social policy and research officer where she is engaged in action research, policy research and system advocacy on issues related to living on low income. Kathy's PhD was in the area of community-based feminist groupwork, based on the work of Paulo Freire.

Xris Reardon, Facilitator, Theatre for Living, Taking Up Space Project, has worked in community development for more than twenty years, specializing in the last five years in community action theatre, facilitating many projects. She has trained with world leaders in Theatre of the Oppressed, Theatre for Living and Forum Theatre including Augusto Boal and David Diamond.

Jacqui Sundbery is a Family Support Worker with Youth Substance Abuse Service Reconnect program based in Box Hill. Jacqui's application of forum theatre practice in her work with young people and families builds on her previous career as a community based artist.

Taking Up Space Project seeks to explore and utilise creative means to generate insight and dialogue around the cultural splits between mind and body, spirit and matter....to validate silenced knowings and literacies.

Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service is a community services agency that has been helping people in Melbourne battle poverty and need for more than 140 years, working side by side with people who are disadvantaged or oppressed. www.goodshepvic.org.au

The Cultural Development Network generates new ideas and new connections for governments, organisations, communities and individual practitioners around issues of cultural vitality. CDN works towards a society in which local communities, in all their diversity, have resources and support to make and express their own cultures. Join us!

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