

Peer Review

TITLE: *Drama for Schools and Beyond*

Aims, scope and focus

Please outline the overall subject and objectives of the manuscript?

This manuscript describes in comprehensive detail a major and very complex international drama in schools project that has been effectively taking place for the last decade, and continues to expand and sustain itself. The book defines the 'drama-based pedagogy' and 'arts integration' philosophy and the teaching, learning, administrative and contemporary research structures that are at the project's centre and drive the project.

The first part of the book describes vividly the artistic, administrative, contextual and educational needs, demands and teaching/learning perspectives that emerged from a pilot project with Alaskan - mainly native American – students and teachers. This is used as a springboard to parts two and four, where the book defines and describes the project from its origins, through virtually all its current manifestations and into the most exciting and challenging successes of the project, envisioning basically a future driven by student-directed co-learning through drama and the arts. In the third part, of extended case studies, readers are given exhaustive accounts, mainly first-hand and verbatim, of about thirty spin-off projects (from thirteen teams of practitioners) in America, South Australia and several countries in central Europe.

Do you believe the scholarship to be sound?

The scholarship is meticulous and comprehensive, delivered in a very democratically accessible way, revealing candidly all the steps taken, scholarship consulted and dilemmas faced by the authors... and all the other co-contributors.

Are you personally interested in the content and ideas discussed in this title?

Yes, very interested, as philosophically and pragmatically it chimes in with work I am currently involved in, as well as themes, practice and techniques that have long been at my own centre of praxis.

Do you consider the manuscript to have an original focus?

Yes and no. The philosophy and the practice are all part of one current mainstream of drama education practice in schools. What distinguishes this project is the amount of detail, analysis and

recognition of the challenges over a long period of time, giving strength to the book's claims of sustainability (one of the usually unattainable pipe-dreams of drama projects).

What do you believe are the strongest elements of the manuscript?

As indicated above, the meticulous description and analysis and the imaginative scope of the whole project, particularly recognizing its ability – keenness – to adapt and take on board the ideas of co-contributors, teachers, administrators, and particularly the students. Part 4 vividly evokes this tendency, through first-person conversation transcripts. I appreciated the systematic and methodical approach throughout to analysis, identifying and focusing on a finite number of well-defined themes for each section. I enjoyed and appreciated too the overall imaginative arrangement of the book in four parts, based on key themes and considerations; everything immaculately signposted throughout. This book will be a vital and important addition to the growing literature on humane, democratic and constructivist alternative approaches to education.

Readership

In your opinion, what sort of readership will this primarily appeal to?

A progressive education readership, interested in radical innovation in school systems, curricula and pedagogy. Most readers are likely to be drama-cognizant or specialist. With the changes suggested, it could have quite a wide readership among graduate students and teacher-educators, especially as a valuable library reference book; this is likely to be strongest in the US, UK and Australasia.

Does the manuscript have any other potential readership beyond this?

Properly promoted, the book could also be a valuable handbook of practical guidelines for experienced progressive-minded teachers anywhere looking for ways to humanize their schools' systems, curricula and classroom constraints.