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|  | **An interview with Sharon Hogan. Interviewed by Joan Cassidy.** |
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| Joan Cassidy: | Now, the first question is how and when did you come into drama education? |
| Sharon Hogan: | I probably started studying acting in 1983, 84, but prior to that I ... Drama wasn't a subject in schools at the time in Queensland. However, we had a very strong musical theatre arm within our school, and I grew up in a pretty working class area, and the Arts were an escape to be honest. The Arts were an amazing opportunity. We made records, we did all sorts of things, and the arts probably really ignited my creativity and got me thinking about alternative futures to what was probably the norm in the area where I grew up, hence why I went and studied acting. |
|  | After doing 18 months of acting, I realised that it probably wasn't the career for me. I was more of an introvert than I realised, and just at that time, the first ever Drama major teaching course was starting at Kelvin Grove, which was then the Brisbane College of Advanced Education, and it was being set up by John O'Toole. So I got really excited about that while I was studying acting in Toowoomba at the time, and so I decided to switch at about age 19, and I went down and auditioned and I got interviewed by Christine Comans of all people, who was a teacher in a school that day, but they'd seconded her to come in and conduct the interviews. So I started. I started in the first ever graduate diploma in Education three years, focusing on Drama Education. |
| Joan Cassidy: | What syllabus were you using at the time? |
| Sharon Hogan: | When we got out to schools, a lot of the speech and drama, the old speech and drama syllabus was being taught. However, it was right on the cusp, where some schools were either Speech and Drama or they were theatre syllabus, so it was around that time, it was around that transitional time, so by the time we left uni, and I probably graduated 84, 85, 86. So, I first started teaching in 1987, was when I graduated in Bundaberg, we were teaching a Speech and Drama syllabus. However, a lot of schools were doing both, or were in the transition to the theatre syllabus, and then dropping the speech and drama syllabus. |
| Joan Cassidy: | Right, and so that was a complete secondary focus, is that right? |
| Sharon Hogan: | Yes, it was. It was the first ever secondary focus, and we basically got to do the same course as the acting students, so it was almost like a fine arts course, but with a lot of education thrown in. We had Judy Pippen, we had Dianne Eden, we had Mark Radvan, and then we went off and did sociology of education and educational psychology. |
| Joan Cassidy: | Right, so you got to do what you really wanted to do. |
| Sharon Hogan: | I couldn't believe that I could study a subject like voice or movement and that the semester consisted of me doing exercises and creating performances, and that that could be my assessment. Yeah, it made it very hard to go and write an essay on the sociology of education. |
| Joan Cassidy: | What has changed in Drama education since you've commenced your career? |
| Sharon Hogan: | I think, to a certain extent, it's moved away ... How can I say? I think it's become more sophisticated. I will say that. I think the level of rigour, when I look at how the different syllabi developed over the years, the rigour of what students do now. We were probably still in the age of writing the historical essay, and I think the level of analysis, the level of synthesis, the sophistication of the Drama curriculum over that time really developed in Queensland, so I think that was the biggest change. I think the biggest change at the moment though is I probably came out in a Drama education boom time, in a heyday, and now I'm a little concerned that numbers a waning. I'm a little bit concerned that have we gone through our heyday, and now we're back in that space again where we have to advocate all over again? |
|  | So I feel like there's been a bit of a cycle where there was this huge advocacy in the 70s and the 80s by people like John O'Toole and Brad Haseman and Judith McLean, and you heard Sue Davies talk earlier today about the advocacy that had to happen to get Drama education on the map. |
| Joan Cassidy: | Yes |
| Sharon Hogan: | And then I wonder if we've become a little bit complacent, or it's the crowded curriculum. I think it's more a case of we've had ACARA come in, we've had the slicing of the school day is so pressured now that I still think drama and theatre and music will always thrive in schools, but we had our stake in the curriculum, and I'm wondering whether it's going to be pushed more and more into extra curricular, and that's where students are going to ... Like I did when I went through my schooling. It wasn't a subject, but that was what ignited my passion. That alarms me though at the same time. I really think that we need to maintain our foothold in the curriculum, but everywhere I go I'm hearing about dwindling numbers, and, yeah, whereas when I taught at Corinda High, I had four Year 11 classes and four Year 12 classes in drama, with over 20 students in every class. So I had 50% of the cohort doing drama through the Year 11 and 12. That was in the 90s. |
| Joan Cassidy: | Yes, I think there's a lot of people saying the same thing. Do you think that other subjects are being privileged? |
| Sharon Hogan: | I do. I think the age of accountability and neoliberalism. We've got the STEM push, the science, maths, engineering, technology. I think film and television has also risen along the same time as drama education, and perhaps has usurped us, in terms of numbers now I would say, not in terms of quality curriculum or teachers. I think there's still a lot of beautiful synergies there and still a lovely community in all schools around arts education, but I think in a crowded curriculum where students are being forced to make choices on a huge selection of subject areas Film and television's got a lot shiny things to play with, and students naturally too lean towards it. They are the digital natives, so it's their natural territory. |
|  | Having said that, and even when I taught lectures at QT, the best students I had, who were also studying film, were also really strong in drama and narrative. You look at the gaming industry now, it's still around the quality of the narrative and the quality of understanding relationships, and motivation, and tension, and I think your better film makes and your better engineers have got empathy and understand the human condition. They can actually design and create, drawing on that huge understanding of what ... And understanding that you actually get from the Arts that you get from literature, and you get from Drama, and you get from Music, and Visual Arts, so I think we need both, but ... This is a very rambling answer, but, yeah, you can see how my mind's making all these connections. |
| Joan Cassidy: | So what have you enjoyed most about your involvement in Drama education? |
| Sharon Hogan: | Creativity, community and curriculum. I've loved the opportunity to work in this drama education space. I've had the most diversity as a career. I was in the classroom. I worked as an education officer in a theatre company. I was seconded to work on Idea 95 for a year. I've worked at Queensland Studies Authority. I love that nexus between the creativity and the curriculum. I really love that space. Nothing has excited me more than creating a new unit for work. Call me a nerd burger or whatever I am, but, yeah, I love curriculum. I love the creativity that I've been able to have, but I think it's not just me, it's because I've been able to co-construct that with young people. I think the highlight for me is being able to see young people flourish and grow, find their voice, find agency through the arts in ways that I don't always see in other subject areas. |
|  | So, for me, that's probably been the highlight, and I think the community is, yeah, Drama educators are my tribe too, and there's nothing nicer coming to a room full of Drama educators, like even this afternoon, and I'd have to agree with Sue Davies today and just say, yeah, they're my tribe, and it's like coming home. So that's that community part. I think the nurturing I've had, as a young woman and now a middle-aged woman, but as a young woman coming into that professional community, wow, the people that I've been able to work with and rub shoulders with, they're people that ... They're spirit igniters. They're not spirit fuffers. They've gone, "What a great idea," and it's probably coming from my background, coming from where I grew up, being around drama educators, it's always possible. There are always possibilities. There are always ways to solve things. There's always a solution. It might be tricky, but life is a glorious struggle, and I think, yeah, that's what I've gotten from that Drama community, is a lot of love. |
| Joan Cassidy: | Yes, people looking out for each other. |
| Sharon Hogan: | Yeah, love and community, and people always asking how you're going, and mentoring that I've gotten from amazing people, who I would not be the person I am today without them. So I feel really lucky that I landed in Drama education world, however that happened. |
| Joan Cassidy: | Yes. Now, would XLD be an example of one of those projects? |
| Sharon Hogan: | Yeah, I was really lucky in that every few years I would get really exhausted in the classroom. These years when I look back now, and I go, "Why did I ever do this?" But I used to take, what I call, courageous years, and I would just go on leave, and I would just see what happened, and every time I did, I got to work on an amazing project. So often, I got to work on things like XLD, and I was a project officer on the ... The XLD I probably loved the most was the one that we put together for a national conference. So we had the national conference of Drama education in a QPAC, and I got to work with the committee, but I was the project officer there, and we had, I don't know, 17 schools from across Brisbane. We worked with Zen Zen Zo; we had sponsorship from QPAC, we used the *Main Inheritance* as a novel, as the stimulus. Just that nexus between artists, professional artist, the venue, Drama education. |
|  | I've been able to work a lot in that space by having these brave years where I didn't know how I was going to pay the rent, but those were probably my brave years, but they're also my stretch years, because I was totally out of my comfort zone, but, after doing that, I was always craving to go back to a classroom. So I'd have a year off, I'd go and do all these amazing things, I'd travel, if work on different events, and then I'd come back into the classroom and I'd be re-enthused, and then I'd teach for another three, four years, and then I'd have to go away again. So that was sort of my rhythm. That was what I did. |
| Joan Cassidy: | A kind of circuit breaker. |
| Sharon Hogan: | Oh, and every time I did ... I had one year where I worked at the Queensland Theatre Company. I created shows with Jennifer Flowers. We toured stuff on Absurd Theatre around the state. Judith McLean was on the board at the time. Robin Nevin was the artistic director. I got to go into rehearsal rooms and work ... Not work with, but observe and watch directors, and try and work out again, what were the access points for young people? I suppose that's been, when I think about it, the theme is, I've always been looking for where are the access points? How can we create pathways for young people? And it's not just into drama futures; it's into being able to collaborate and create and make something from nothing. I think, for me, when I watch what drama graduates get, it's the sense of resourcefulness that they can always make something from nothing. And when I think about the best students that come out of schools and high schools, it's always those kids that, by the end of Year 12, they could do anything. It's that confidence and that creative agency, I'm an agent of my own life, yeah. |
| Joan Cassidy: | A wonderful thing. |
| Joan Cassidy: | Can you explain the attractions to joining Drama Queensland? |
| Sharon Hogan: | Again, I was contacted, a bit like Sue Davies' story, I was tapped on the shoulder by Sue Elms, who was the principal policy officer for Education Queensland at the time I think for Drama education, and they had a project going where they were advocating again for Drama education, and they were for people to be on a subcommittee of Drama Queensland. And I was a young teacher. I'd been teaching about three years. I was teaching at Runcorn State High School, and she tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Come along," and I remember being scared as anything turning up. I would have been about 26, 27, and I'd been teaching three or four years, as I said, and I rocked up to this committee, and Shay was there, Debbie Wall was there, this powerhouse of women, and I remember just going, "Oh, my God," and they just took me under their wing, and from there on, it was like, "Wow, these people are the passionate educators, these are the passionate drama educators," and, yeah, from then on I just never looked back. |
|  | I was associated with them for about nine years after that. I was a vice president and I was a treasurer, and I just kept connecting, and, yeah, after nine years I was quite tired, but, yeah, when I look back, I actually did nine years on the committee all up, which was a long time. |
| Joan Cassidy: | Amazing. |
| Joan Cassidy: | Can you choose a highlight from your Drama education career? |
| Sharon Hogan: | There's probably two. One would be working on Idea 95. I was fortunate enough to be seconded to the festival. My wages were paid for by Education Queensland. I was a sponsorship, basically, a human sponsorship. I worked with Christine Comans, and John O'Toole, and Brad Haseman, Judith McLean, Sue Davies, all the steering committee for a year. I got to work with QPAC, and I got to set up the performance programme. So, I was liaising with theatre companies from 56 different countries and getting all their material, and meeting them, and doing all that work. I remember sitting in the theatre and there was a keynote address that done as a performance, and it was PETA from the Philippines, and they came and showed the work that they did with the children that lived, basically, on the rubbish tips in the Philippines, and how a lot of them were being exploited and so on, but through the arts and through drama they were setting up a space for these children to play and be children. |
|  | That was probably where my passion for Drama and social action really was ignited. I remember just sitting there watching that, and Judith McLean was sitting beside me and we just both started weeping, and it was then that I realised what the festival was about, that Idea 95 was really about leaders in Drama education from all around the world coming together and sharing the practice. |
|  | The second highlight is more recent. Since moving to the Sunshine Coast, I've, with a group of Drama teachers up here, we have set up the Sunshine Coast Schools' Drama Festival, and we've had our second year this year. We've got sponsorship from universities up here. We have 19 schools from across the coast. It's what I do as a volunteer up here in this community. The other night, we just had our highlights event at the Caloundra Events Centre. We had all the sponsors there. We had parents there. We had ... Basically, this was the finals evening, so all the best of classroom drama work from across the Coast was being shared and being celebrated, and, again, it's about advocacy for Drama education. And one of the schools, I won't say names, but one of the schools that won this year, which, probably, anyone can look up in the archives, but their school recently made a decision to close down their Drama education year 11 and 12, and they were the school that won the festival. |
| Joan Cassidy: | Oh, that's ironic. |
| Sharon Hogan: | And now this is the decision they have made for the following year, and it was a political move to start the festival on the Sunshine Coast in a time where Drama numbers are dropping. So, we decided to do this two years ago as a bit of a fightback, a bit of a pushback, a bit of a raising the profile of Drama education. So that's a highlight for me. We do a Drama Boot Camp, where we get artists to come up, and we get all the young people from across the coast. We do a full on day's workshop, and at the end of that day we get each of the groups to show what they have done, and some of that work that came out of one day was just amazing. So I can see the quality, too, of people that entered last year and then are entering this year. |
|  | They get feedback from the adjudicator and all that sort of stuff, and the quality of performance, so it's very performance based, but it's celebratory, it's standard base. So that's a highlight for me at the moment. It's my way of contributing still to drama education, even though I don't work in a school anymore, so, yeah. |
| Joan Cassidy: | Fantastic. Now, have you had any roadblocks in your career? |
| Sharon Hogan: | I think the fatigue that ... I think the burnout that you suffer as a teacher in schools. It's that relentless pace, and I think the roadblocks are probably being around energy levels and motivation, and I think as educators you're constantly giving, and so I think the roadblocks for me along the way have been how do you ... I don't know. How do you nurture yourself? How do you continue to feed yourself and your own creativity so that you can give your best to the young that you teach? And that was something I always took really seriously, so whenever I felt that I was lacking, or the kids were starting to irritate me, or I wasn't being the positive person I wanted to be, I would take a year's leave, as I talked about earlier. So I think that's been the major roadblocks. Nothing really, it's probably been of my own making, and even when I look back now, if there were any roadblocks, there were always ways around it, yeah. |
| Joan Cassidy: | Now, how do you keep your practise fresh and the flame alive? |
| Sharon Hogan: | Scholarship. For me, it's been scholarship and studying, doing my master's in that area, being constantly curious, working at QT. That was probably another career highlight, those six years I spent there in Teacher Education and training the next generation of ... Well, not training, but Teacher Education professional learning were amazing. So I think its scholarship, and I think we've already talked about that. It's that going in and out of the classroom, and feeding and bringing things together. I'm such a bowerbird. You can hear that the way I work. I've always been connecting things, so I think that's what's kept me alive. |
| Joan Cassidy: | So the connection between the theory and the practice. |
| Sharon Hogan: | Theory and the practice all the time. And we were lucky in Queensland. We didn't have the process product debates that other states had or even the way our assessment was set up. We came in at a time when we had school-based assessment, so it allowed us ... I think that's that question a bit later on, about what's unique to the Queensland context. I think we have seamlessly moved from process drama to product from performance, and that's part of our rehearsal process. That's part of our forming, responding, what's the other dimension? |
| Joan Cassidy: | Presenting. |
| Sharon Hogan: | Presenting. I've been writing about this in a PhD, but I can't remember. Yeah, but we just seamlessly move between those and we always have, and I thinks that's because in Queensland we've had this deep theoretical base thanks to John, and Brad, and Judith, and Christine, the leaders in the field. They were always articulating a theory of practice for us, and so we had this incredible platform that we could stand on. Yeah, so I think we've been really fortunate. |
| Joan Cassidy: | Hmm. If you leave your drama space in a hurry, what two or three resources would you grab? |
| Sharon Hogan: | Christine Comans *The Accident* was always a most beautiful piece that I always used to use. And I'm going to be a little bit naughty here and say things that I actually got to develop while I was at QT and we published. We put things out like explosions, and deep thinking, filling the void around absurdism, and the luxury of being able to develop that and then share that with schools, that is a resource that I went back to, but it was because it was made by working with artists. It was because it was co-constructed, yeah, so those two, those three. There you go. |
| Joan Cassidy: | What advice would you give to young Queensland Drama teachers? |
| Sharon Hogan: | Probably the same as Sue said earlier today, connect, network, look after yourself, sustain yourself, sustain your own creativity. Don't let the bureaucracy get you down might be a good one. Pursue your own scholarship. Look for mentors. Ask questions more, even in schools. Don't be afraid to have a voice, but I don't know if the Gen Ys have that problem, I think it was more a Gen X thing. |
| Joan Cassidy: | Would there be a particular resource that you would point them towards? |
| Sharon Hogan: | I'd say go to Drama Queensland. I'd say join Drama Queensland and join it early, and get in there and build your professional network, because you never know where it will take you. |
| Joan Cassidy: | Yeah, and what about publications? Is there anything you could think of that- |
| Sharon Hogan: | I really like that book called *Performance.* I can't remember whom it's written by. I love that book. I think it was written by a Victoria; I want to say Crawford, Crayford, Crawford. A lot of Bruce Burton's stuff was amazing and still is. Bruce's work was always really influential. His work on Artaud and how he translated the work of the greats and how he would craft those in his books, and give you exercises and access points. I think Bruce was just amazing like that. I really like *Fly-In, Fly-Out*. I love that play. I bought the DVD. I think we have amazing resources that are still being built today, and I think we're so lucky that we can get those audio/visual resources now that we didn't have. When you think back in the 80s and the 90s, we were ... What we've got now, there is a huge, amazing repertoire of stuff we can draw on. |
| Joan Cassidy: | That's right. With a resource kit to go with it. |
| Sharon Hogan: | Oh. We just didn't have that. We'd get the theatre notes in QTC and we'd be ecstatic. |
| Joan Cassidy: | Exactly. |
| Sharon Hogan: | What we get now is, oh ... Yeah, I miss the classroom. I'm sure you can tell sometimes, yeah. |
| Joan Cassidy: | Yeah. Now, how do you feel about that question? What is unique to Queensland context? You've already started on that one. |
| Sharon Hogan: | Yeah, I think that we school-based curriculum, and because we were school-based curriculum, we had the panel system, and because we had the panel system, that then reinvigorated and supported Drama Queensland. So it was because we just had all these networks that were working together. It'll be really interesting as we go into the external based assessment what's going to happen, and the new syllabus. I think the way that our syllabuses were developed in the past, with that six-year incubation period, we didn't try and rush things, but we're moving in new times now, so it's going to be interesting. Yeah, so definitely our assessment structures here have allowed art subjects thrive. It'll be interesting to see how that continues. |
| Joan Cassidy: | Yes. I'm just going to jump to some other questions before I do the last one. Do you have any memorable early teaching experiences? |
| Sharon Hogan: | Probably teaching in Bundaberg. It was my first teaching post, I remember arriving there and I was 23, and Brad sent me a postcard, so the first day I got there to the school, there was a postcard in my pigeon hole from him. I think he did it for all of the first graduates because we were the first graduates to come out, and that meant a lot to me. I had to remind him that he had done that, because he had completely forgotten. And there was a moment there where I was teaching in my first year, and you always felt like you were inadequate, like a first-year teacher, and I took the students down, we got up a 3 o'clock in the morning to come down on a bus, to come down and see Philippe Chanti. |
| Joan Cassidy: | Oh, yes. |
| Sharon Hogan: | And I didn't even know ... Can I be really honest? I didn't really know who Philippe Chanti was, I just wanted ... Theatre of the Illusion, we were doing Artaud, I just wanted something that was really visual. I didn't really know myself. I'd grown up in a pretty cultural desert myself. So we got on this bus, and I'm going, "Please let this be a great performance. Please, please," as we're travelling from Bundaberg to Brisbane. We get there, it's amazing. The visual, the effects, this music, the stunning ... And the students just loved it. And so for weeks after that, Theatre of the Illusion was just happening. Every time I'd come in the classroom, they had booby-trapped something or done something, or they were ... It had just sparked their creativity, and their work, they had to create a statement, a dramatic statement. Their work after that, it was just that, yeah, the power of osmosis, the power of touching shoulder with another artist, and coming down and getting out of our little patch, and just the influence that had on the young people up there. |
|  | So, yeah, it probably taught me the power of getting out of your comfort zone, but also, yeah, just that you can't beat models and exemplars and taking people to performance to enrich their own work. |
| Joan Cassidy: | Exactly, yes. Who would you name as your mentors? |
| Sharon Hogan: | I was really lucky, John O'Toole was the first lecturer I ever had at uni. I will never forget him starting a ... Didn't even tell us what Process Drama was, and we walked in and he did a process on Apartheid. So my first encounter with John O'Toole was him stood in hessian sack with a rope cord around his waist and a fake gun in his hand, and he did this whole thing about Apartheid, and we had no idea what he was doing. I was completely alienated. There was no talk about what it was, and it made me realise that we've come a long way since then, like how we negotiate Process Drama now, and that sort of 80s let's just throw people in the experience, let them sort it out. I think we take a lot more care now than we did back then. |
|  | So John O'Toole, then I had Brad for the next two years, which was just amazing, because he'd come fresh out of State High. Judith McLean, who I then had as a boss. Christine Comans, who became a really beautiful colleague. Sue Elms, when I worked in Education Queensland, just was the best mentor ever. Robyn Thomas taught me a lot about assessment and criteria. I was so lucky to have her. Who else has really mentored me? Sandra Gattenhof. That's probably a mutual thing. So I think we've mentored each other. We were colleagues, but now, yeah, she takes me in directions now through our friendship that I probably not being as connected to theatre as I used to be, so that's great. |
|  | Who else? Judy Pippen. Hello, two years of movement with Judy Pippen. The stuff she was doing with us, the Feldenkrais stuff she was doing, the Laban. The work that she did with us, she really formed my practice as an educator to move through the body, to learn through the body, and I think, actually, I learnt the most from her about the type of educator I wanted to be. So it was always from the experience, and then into the theory. And then, of course, from Brad, I went on to do my master's in Process Drama. Process Drama at QT, so, yeah, I have been so lucky that I got to hang out with luminaries. |
| Joan Cassidy: | Yes. |
| Sharon Hogan: | Yeah, yeah, very lucky, yeah. |
| Joan Cassidy: | So our last thing. What would you like to say? Anything else? |
| Sharon Hogan: | Thank you. Thank you to you for interviewing me. Thank you to Drama Queensland for all that they have given to me, and, yeah, it's been the right profession for me, and now I do Drama work and Process Drama incorporate. It's what I'm doing lots of now, working four ways at the moment. I'm working with leading architectural firms around Australia. I'm working with city councils, I'm working with people, and we use Drama, and that's really exciting. I'm working as a facilitator now, and I facilitate in schools all the time, and, yeah, I think once a Drama educator, always a Drama educator. It just stays with you. It's a way of thinking. It's a way of seeing the world. Yeah, and thank goodness that I flipped into Drama education. |
| Joan Cassidy: | What an amazing career. So exciting, so creative. Thank you, Sharon. |