This lecture will be a bit playful, and I hope that it will be a bit artful too.

For most of my career I’ve been a teacher, much of it in working-class inner-city schools. From that experience I learned that in teaching, dialogue is a lot better than monologue. I’ve also spent some years as an actor and writer for theatre in schools. From that, I learned that if you are going to involve the audience in active participation, you have to do it early, before they get settled – and you have to make it unthreatening, painless and simple. So if I want to break up this monologue and make it the tiniest bit dialogic, I’d better do it now! I’m going to ask you in a very tiny way to experience and analyse two moments from Australian school classrooms (I wasn’t the teacher in either of them). You don’t have to do this, but if you don’t, you’ll miss the very tiny taste of experiential social learning, which is what this lecture is talking about.

Would you be kind enough to get into pairs or threes with the person or couple around you – introduce yourselves if you haven’t met. I’m going to ask you to read aloud with each other a short piece of script, transcribed from two lessons in the same subject, which was SoSE (what they call HiSE in NSW, and what we used to call geography and history). Both lessons are doing much the same thing, identifying and defining what the children know about the important elements of their community. Both deal with knowledge in an ordered, systematic way. The first involves year six children, eleven year olds.

The script alone is a poor record of the complex event that is a classroom, but you don’t need a lot of contextual background here. It’s a very ordinary lesson, there’s nothing special or unusual about it, and you can
probably imagine the classroom quite easily. Will one person please take T, the teacher, and the other or others, in turn, read P, which is the pupils’ part of this dialogue. Just ignore the other groups, and in your own time, go.

T: [sarcasm] Isn’t that amusing! So we need a town, and what’s a town, Lyn?
P: People living together, roads, houses and shops.
T: OK, so the Company has to build a town for the people to live in. But if your parents were to go there what would they need? Sit down, Neil!
P: A car.
T: Yes.
P: Shops.
T: Yes.
P: Water supply.
T: What else would be needed, Mara? What do you have to say that’s so important to be rude, Chris?
P: [giggles] I just said he’s cute.
T: Carry on Mara.
P: Place to live, place to shop.
T: Are there any other things… I’ve spoken to you twice, Chris! Is there anything else?
P: Schools.
T: Yes.
P: Transport.
T: Yes. What do you think would be the main transport?
P: Railway.
T: Yes. Hands up those who think rail would be the major form.
P: Planes?
T: Hands up those who think planes… yes so we need an airport too. Do you have any other needs.
P: Schools.
T: Yes.
P: Toilets.
T: Right. But there’s one very essential need no-one’s mentioned.
P: Clothes.
T: No, another one.
P: Petrol pumps and things.
T: No. It starts with ‘R’, the one I’m thinking of. Edward?
P: Rivers. [Audible sigh from the class.]

Now, together just discuss your impressions of what’s going on. I’d like you to look at two things: the quality of the children’s language, and the level of their thinking.

It would be interesting to hear your analysis, but we won’t stretch the dialogic possibilities of a one-hour lecture that far.

Now try this lesson. For this one, a little background is necessary. These children are year 2, seven year olds. For a few days, there have been rumours that a dinosaur is loose, lost in the school. The children have discovered enormous dinosaur footprints around the grounds. The teacher is wearing a large green and yellow spotted dinosaur tail, made by the
children, who helped him put it on to become Dino the Dinosaur. There was then a great dinosaur hunt round the school grounds, where they discovered Dino, their class teacher, with his green and yellow tail, cowing, very frightened, behind a tree. They rescued him, brought him back to the classroom, where they are now reading to him from a big book they have written and illustrated for him, about the school. Again, T is the teacher and P are the pupils.

Ps: We all go to Baytown State School. It’s a big school.
T: [as Dino] Do all little children have to come to school?
Some Ps: Yes.
Some Ps: No.
P: When they get bigger, but not when they are two and five and six. And Mr Dino, some… not when we’re babies, not when we’re smaller than this – we have to grow up to big children.
Ps: [Reading together] At school we have a playground, a library, a swimming pool, a dental clinic…
T: I don’t understand – what’s a playground?
P: It’s a sort of park with swings in it and we play.
P: Remember, when you first met us, you got frightened and you ran out there. That was the playground.
T: What’s a swimming pool?
P: It’s like you lay in it and it’s got water in and there’s a teacher – we’ve got a man teacher – and the teachers tell us how to swim. You’ll find out who the teacher is. Tomorrow you’ll find out. We have swimming tomorrow.
T: Now what’s a dental clinic… thing?
P: It’s where you go to the dentist and have your teeth fixed.
P: These are teeth.
P: They make sure your teeth are clean and that.
P: They pull them out if they are bad… and fillings, you get fillings. But I haven’t got any.
T: Is it good to have fillings, or bad to have fillings?
P: Bad!
P: Good! If you’ve got holes in your teeth, that is.
T: Where do holes come from - the dentist?
P: No! They come from bacteria in your teeth. If you eat too much sweet things, and you don’t clean your teeth properly you get holes in your teeth.
P: That’s probably what happened to dinosaurs. They got holes in their teeth and died out.
T: When did dinosaurs die out? Before people or after people?
P: Before, when there’s no people.
P: Millions of years.
P: And now there’s just little tiny bones.
P: No, BIG bones!
P: Fossils.
P: Hundreds and hundreds of years ago.
T: Would dinosaurs have had big swimming pools and schools?
P: No, they just had swamps.
P: Would you like to come with us to the museum next week and see some dinosaur bones?
T: I’m not sure.
These children are four years younger than the first class, so if school is working effectively to develop language and thinking you might expect both to be more limited. Just together, again discuss and analyse the quality of the thinking, and the language. Now, four quick questions about the two lessons.

- Which lesson demonstrated more deep understanding and creative thinking?
- Which one had the more elaborated language from the children?
- Which one was the more artistic?
- Which one was the more playful?

Talking of play, and plays, there’s a famous review of a production of Shakespeare’s Scottish play that describes the actor in the part of Macbeth ‘playing the king as if he momentarily expected someone to play the Ace’. This elegant mix of metaphors juxtaposes the quests and conquests in dramatic literature with those in games and in real life – all are evanescent and to some extent fictional: we construct our reality through partly-experienced metaphors. That’s part of the enduring fascination of the Alice books of Lewis Carroll. The relevance of arts education to a house of cards was well made by Brad Haseman here in Melbourne in his reflective keynote to the Australia Council symposium on arts education last September.

As one of Shakespeare’s most famous clichés has it: “To hold, as ‘twere the mirror up to nature” might indeed be the purpose of drama and all the arts - but Shakespeare as usual only told part of the story. Drama and art aren’t a mirror to beam back an exact likeness, but as Alice found out on her second quest, they are a looking glass to step through into a provisional space. In this case the game is a chessboard. Here Alice discovers that all is not as it seems, and given wisdom is constantly being destabilised for examination, occasionally reassuring, nearly always disconcerting. In the looking-glass world, just as in her first trip to a fictional dream-world, she finds another world of deadly serious power-games where everything has a logic and a meaning but makes no sense to her.

The practice of stepping away from experienced reality into a looking glass of new, fictional possible realities is not confined to dreamers, artists and children, of course. Plato did it in his Republic. And as do modern day generals and military strategists in their simulation games, moving whole armies of real soldiers through elaborate and often elegant games of ‘let’s pretend’. Plato was most ungrateful to the artistic inspiration that created The Republic, incidentally, as he banned
playwrights and poets from his ideal republic, because they tend to destabilise things.... A theme I will come back to.

Nor is the creation of artificial worlds limited to fiction, worlds where reality is turned on its head and that make little sense to their inhabitants. Let’s look at Western schooling. Before they go to school, usually unhelped by any professionals, just their entirely amateur parents and family and friends, children have already learned lots and lots. Let’s look at how young children learn:

- Through all the senses
- Through brain, body and emotions all working together
- Through exploring and testing, trial and error
- Taking risks - learning by getting it wrong first, so you can get it right next time
- Through creative leaps and humour, playing with juxtaposition
- By scaffolding on what is already known
- Through copying and social interaction
- By learning from everybody around, including peers & playmates, television, the people they see and meet, their surroundings
- By discovering the external world together, through the worlds of social relationships and personal feeling & expression
- Above all, through PLAY ... experimenting through the artistry of play – musical, linguistic, visual & design, dance, dramatic play

Around five or so, we take them and pitch them for about half their waking life into a new game of chess called schools, where we:

- Leave play outside in the playground ‘Stop playing around’
- Focus on the brain and ban the emotions ‘no tears’, ‘stop laughing’
- Restrict or ban movement and the body ‘stop fidgeting’
- Restrict or ban language ‘a quiet classroom is a good classroom’
- Restrict or ban social interaction ‘Stop talking and listen to me’
- Replace their normal surroundings with a single room with specialised equipment and closed doors called ‘the classroom’
- Replace exploring with THE curriculum ‘This is what you’re learning today’
- Replace playmates, television and the people round them with a small number of grown-up strangers called ‘the teacher’
- Replace trial and error with right answers ‘the teacher knows’
- Replace the excitement of risk and failure without penalty with caution and penalties for failure
• Discourage creative leaps, imagination, and jokes: ‘that isn’t funny’, ‘that’s silly’.
• Transmit knowledge as ‘new’ not scaffolded
• Marginalise the arts ‘that’s messy/noisy/disruptive

“Curiouser and curioiser,” said Alice.

Of course, all of these looking-glass conventions are really nothing to do with educating for life, but they have their purpose, the same as when they were devised for the needs of nineteenth century industry – to create an efficient workforce and a compliant populace.

This is a cruel and unrealistic parody of contemporary education, you may say. Outdated, too, as most of the education profession, you and my other colleagues and me, try to give children and young people the very best education we can. Or is it? Might one speculate that some children do learn to be nuclear scientists and Melbourne University graduates partly because, like Alice, they relish the curious. Partly, too, because generations of dedicated teachers, together with parents and all the forces of the educational systems themselves, which are on the whole well-meaning and have merely inherited those oppressive structures, do provide a relentless focus on learning. So children do learn lots, in spite of the obstacles that schooling puts in their way. To be fair, schools are well-structured to teach some very useful things – social skills for instance, and how to like and live with weird people. And it teaches a lot about power, and how power works.

Many of us remember our schooling with pleasure, pride, and gratitude to the imaginative and passionate teachers who conquered and subverted all these obstacles on our behalf. Well, some of us, some children… and we despair at that alarming and not decreasing proportion of school failures… or rather those whose needs the schools fail to provide, whose voices are drowned out and who fall out of the game, the hapless pawns for whom the eighth square is out of reach and only the lucky and privileged become queens. We still don’t really know what to do about them, other than blame the victims or more and more desperately try band-aids. Did you know that in the UK there are about half a million support staff in schools, roughly half the number of teachers themselves? Then we focus even more relentlessly on pushing the others up the board to be successes and win.
Living ourselves in the world of education, behind the looking-glass, we still believe it is possible to change it. The white queen believed six impossible things before breakfast every day. The problem with virtually all our attempts to change the looking-glass world to fit our real needs is that like Alice, we look for the answer inside the glass, in the unreality of the classroom, where teachers and children courageously and imaginatively pursue learning in spite of the grandiose nonsense of the single curriculum devised by the red queen, where sometimes it takes all the running you can do to keep in the same place.

Suppose instead, we were to climb back outside the looking glass, and find what was left at the classroom door with the fresh air and the bags of sandwiches – and the body and the emotions. Among the other things we’ve left behind are: Art and Play. Play is seen as the province of the playground, or the fill-in time between matters of more importance. Art, somewhat more uneasily, is so often relegated to the margins and the co-curriculum.

And, fortunately, art is also bequeathed to the marginal and marginalised. These days, the arts are often turned to as a last resort. More and more the arts are being acknowledged as a therapy, as a form of empowerment, as a way of helping the dispossessed to find or regain their identity. The growing research is affirming this –. This University’s impressive Risky Business project and conference last October highlighted numerous examples, local and national, of this use of the arts. Stanford Professor Emeritus Shirley Brice Heath, who gave a memorable lecture at that conference, is herself an example of a surprised advocate of the arts, when she engaged in a ten year study of the language of deprived adolescents, and discovered that what gave them more linguistic confidence and therefore agency and power in their lives than anything else was an arts-rich program of activities. Here are a few more examples:

In the so-called developing world, many millions of dollars are being invested in arts for development, like this example of an arts-based approach to HIV-AIDS in South Africa. It starts with a theatre-in-education program in a school, but the real primary targets are the parents, adults who would be resistant to health messages purveyed by outsiders. With the artists’ help, the young people create their own multi-arts exhibition and performance about HIV for the school open day. In this structure, the agency, the knowledge and the persuasive power are in the hands of the young people.

[Here a video clip was shown]
Here’s some more work for you, in pairs with your long-suffering neighbour. Look at this photograph… which was designed as a Valentine’s Day card.

[Here a photograph was shown]
Look at the composition and discuss what you see. This photograph is the work of one of a group of long-term high-security prisoners, with a severe literacy problem, who three months earlier could barely hold a camera, and who has been taught the technical rudiments of photography.

Here’s another, which for those who remember Oscar Wilde’s *Ballad of Reading Gaol* powerfully brings home his line about ‘this little tent of blue we prisoners call the sky’.

[Here a photograph was shown].

Thirdly, and many of you already know about this, Bruce Burton and I have been involved in a ten-year action research project on trying to deal with conflict and bullying in schools. We wondered whether the looking-glass world of orthodox schools was the best place to tackle conflict and bullying. For one thing, young people know that adults are hardly the people to do the teaching – many young people face constant conflict in their home lives, and they see daily images of adult conflict and bullying. We analysed some of the anti-conflict programs in schools and noted that nearly all of them are:

- top-down, driven by the grown-ups – the worse the conflict, the higher the source of appeal.
- They concentrate on the victim, and implicitly or explicitly blame and demonise the bully.
- They are extra-curricular – conflict is not something that is supposed to occur in the classroom, let alone as content to be studied
- Methods from the margins – the arts, outdoor education, pastoral care – are often invoked, but usually in ad-hoc or short-term projects

On the other side of the looking-glass, we reasoned, the image would be the opposite. Starting with our belief in the capability of kids, our aim became to democratise the process – to give the students themselves control over their conflict and bullying agendas. Most of all, and this may seem strange, we wanted to remove the morality, and replace it with cognitive, cool understanding and the tools for action.

We came up with a combination of drama and whole-class peer-teaching, embedded in the curriculum. The older students use drama to learn about conflict, then they peer teach younger students, who themselves then peer
teach younger students through drama, from upper secondary to lower primary. They learn what we called conflict and bullying literacy: understanding of the structures of conflict and bullying: like the latent, emerging and manifest stages, that can escalate or be de-escalated. They like, and quickly make sense of the terminology. In peer teaching they reinforce what they have learned themselves from the drama, as nothing reinforces knowledge so well as having to teach it to other people; for the peer learners, they are learning from students just a bit older than themselves, whose knowledge of their own problems they can trust – Year nine students know that their Year eleven mentors have only recently survived Year nine themselves, so they must know something useful. For both groups, an opportunity to get to create new networks of friendship and respect, between the ghettos of schools’ artificial age-barriers.

Does all this fiction translate to real-life change? Incontrovertibly, yes. Often in small ways, like the Year 8 student, who had been taught the program three years earlier in Year 5, by year 8 students. He poked his head into the teacher’s staff-room, saying ‘Miss, you’d better come – there’s a conflict down at the swimming pool’. Then as she hastily rose to deal with it, he counselled, ‘Don’t hurry, Miss, it’s only emerging – hasn’t escalated to manifest.’ Quite impressive, when you think about it – he was using words he’d learned three years ago to give a teacher considered advice about a real-life conflict.

The ongoing, intransigent problem is that the structures of schools make it very difficult to operate sustainably. Try fitting peer teaching into secondary school timetables, where both timing and available time operate so arbitrarily and erratically - as the White King said: ‘you might as well try to catch a bandersnatch’.

Fine, so at last the Arts are finding a useful job in the community, picking up the debris of ‘real’ education, and those whom it has not yet reached. Is that it? How does that tie in with the curious fact that in the professional world of the Arts, the vast majority of time, money, skill and talent is not expended on the jetsam of society, but on its cream – giving artistic pleasure, usually passive, to those who have the background to appreciate and the means to pay for opera, theatre, fine art and concerts of classical or rock music – or a bit less to be a passive audience for film and television.

If you think about it, it’s the converse in schools, where in the looking glass world, authorities are more willing to spend the small bits of
available money on the arts if they are picking up and healing the wounded and the victims rather than on the privileged – those who are prospering in the Red Queen’s world. For those, little money and time can be spent on the arts, because we have to spend more than ever of both, running on the spot with literacy and numeracy to keep in the same place. But pouring more and more money and time into literacy and numeracy programs may indeed be a looking-glass way of going about these crucial skills. A recent global study of arts in education suggests that arts-rich schooling, particularly drama, does not harm literacy, but actually increases it by up to twenty-five per cent; and arts-rich schooling, particularly music and visual arts, increase numeracy by six per cent. This merely confirms almost exactly statistics that keep being re-confirmed from forty years ago (Alec Clegg), twenty five years (Felton and Little), fifteen years (Project Zero), five years (Champions of Change). Some brave schools, like FACE in Montreal and the growing number of art-specialist schools and senior programs in Australia, are living proof of it, and parents, if not systems, are taking notice. Montreal’s FACE centres its curriculum on the arts. It has been going for thirty-one years, and at the last school registration day, two-hundred parents queued up in tents for three days to try to get their child registered for four years hence. The school has a waiting list of a thousand, it always figures in the top band of literacy and numeracy results, though the socio-economic status of the children’s families certainly does not. Only Tweedledum and Tweedledee could say ‘Nohow’ or ‘Contrariwise’ to the arts, surely. In fact, the growing demonstrated successfulness of arts as a learning tool has caused alarm in some artistic circles, who believe it is traducing the real place of the arts in education, devaluing real art and artistry, particularly ‘elite’ or heritage art.

There is a battle going on in academia that is focused on a quite unreal and unnecessary polarity between ‘elite’, ‘heritage’ arts and ‘popular’ arts, which I see no reason to buy into tonight. Instead, I’ll now spend a few minutes showing a rather more fundamental connection – the dialectic between Play and Art, which is structurally the strength of art, but in the culture of the western world, its weakness. Both play and art are serious business – the business of the human imagination, defining reality through new possible realities, models of human experience, new angles and perspectives, creating order from chaos and also disturbing order to imagine new orders, finding harmonies and previously unheard melodies. Long ago in the first half of the twentieth century the visual artists were the first to perceive the sophisticated aesthetic of very young children’s play – their management of form and space combined with the boldness and freedom of discovery – and very grown-up artists like
Picasso, Paul Klee and Joan Miro were among the host of elite artists humble enough to acknowledge the debt they owed to the art of ordinary children and learn from it for their own art. Over a hundred years ago John Dewey was urging exactly the same thing in education. From him there is a line of theorists and educators demonstrating and proving that children’s play and art are inextricably linked, from Herbert Read and Louis Arnaud Reid to Eisner, Golomb and John Matthews in visual arts, Swanwick and Reimer in Music, Huizinga, Slade and Heathcote in dance and drama, and across all the arts Maxine Greene, Malcolm Ross, Peter Abbs, David Best and now Ken Robinson, Nick Rabkin, Eric Booth, Shirley Brice Heath and Madeleine Grumet, and hundreds more of us.

Here is how I think Play and Art work together. And I particularly want you to look right in the middle of the diagram, when we get there, because that may be where this lecture is heading.
Both Play and Art are about IF.
Play starts from the dimension of curiosity:
and asks the question ‘What if…’
Art finishes with the dimension of control:
and creates the statement ‘As if…’.
Here are some of the characteristics of those dimensions.

Of course none of these pairs of concepts are binary opposites, as they look on this two-dimensional diagram, but just at the opposite ends of an interplaying continuum, where players and artists, and player-artists - every piece of art and every piece of play - find their own places, moving along the continuum between the more playful forms of art and the more artful forms of play. Hard-core art is at the right side of the diagram, and hard-core play is at the left. Both ends of the dimensions are open, as there is an element of play and negotiability in nearly all artworks, just as there is a strong component of art in nearly all play.
There is, you may notice, a very large area of common ground in the middle, the territory of neither hard-core artists nor players.

The phrase ‘common ground’ is doubly significant, as this is the territory of not just artists and players, but everybody, the social and personal places where our lives intersect with:

- the aesthetic of everyday life (the emotional and cognitive understanding of how we design, perform, story and sing our lives) and
- the playfulness of everyday life (the pleasure, the humour, the ironic subversion of our observation and wit and social intercourse. Paul Willis coined the phrase the ‘grounded aesthetic’ to denote part of this, and I’m going to use the phrase ‘common aesthetic’. There is a major unrecognised aesthetic dimension in almost everything about contemporary life. I’m not devaluing the word aesthetic by making it so broad as to be meaningless, or merely a simile for ‘beautiful’ or ‘nice’. I’m actually referring to the formal shaping of media to create a fusion of emotional, sensory and cognitive impact in our lives:

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• from visits to art spaces like theatres, cinemas, concerts and galleries;
• to the pleasure we take in sketching, gardening and decorating our walls;
• the meticulous design of adverts and the performance art of the whole promotion industry aimed at grabbing both our conscious and our subliminal attention;
• the music and dance we hear and make at parties, on iPods, in karaoke bars;
• the muzak that insinuates itself into our subliminal minds in lifts and supermarkets;
• the chants that lift us in religious and spiritual contexts, and the marches that equally inspire us into battle and slaughter;
• the hours we watch television fictions;
• or perform to each other the stories of our day and the strange encounters that happened to us
• and then there’d all the aesthetic of sport and many other of our pastimes
• and the festivals.

You’ll no doubt have had very differing approval responses to this list of examples. Some of them you may very likely have shuddered at, like the subliminal ads, the supermarket muzak and the military marches. We need to remember that art and play are neither of them in themselves civilising or ethical, but powerfully neutral. This makes another overwhelming case for the arts in education – nobody could call that list unrelated to our real life, and unless we help to give young people the tools to understand, to manage for themselves and to critique the forms and media of these ubiquitous arts, our young people will be unable to make their own ethical decisions, or wrest the power of art from the hands of those who do manipulate it for their own ends.

In other words, we need to give the students the holistic thinking – including understanding of the emotional, sensory, performative, kinaesthetic and embodied parts of cognition that are so often left out of what passes for cognition in the classroom – to make sense of the good and bad artistry in the real and virtual worlds we are all part of. We must also give them far greater access to the skills of these arts, the technical and aesthetic skills, for them to have agency in these worlds.

How much of that aesthetic of everyday life can be found in our schools and in our faculties of education, or even our arts-training conservatories?
We are fortunate in Australian looking glass schools to have now established the arts as a more or less key learning area, and have been developing a skilled specialist workforce of arts teachers. Some of you may not agree, but I think that having the Arts as a single Key Learning Area has far more advantages than disadvantages. For one thing, we have been forced to look at our commonalities, as well as our differences, and to mount a strong, unified case. I know the danger here, and for many of us the terror that seems to lurk in the imprecision of curriculum documents like the Victorian Essential Learning Standards, or VELS: that the Red Queen, who controls the timetable, will immediately lump us all together and schedule us as ‘integrated arts’ or arts porridge. However, across Australia all our curricula and syllabuses show that inside this holdall each art-form is quite distinct, and I think we have got quite an important role to help the whole curriculum to integrate. In Arts as in multiculturalism, ‘integration’ does NOT have to mean assimilation. We know that the arts serve all three purposes in learning that VELS identifies

The arts are the most lasting parts of the cultural heritage of all societies: our dreaming – that which makes us understand who we are as humans, like the most recent chroniclers of the older part of Australia’s dreaming: gifted artists like Johnathan Jagamara Ross – a child artist, by the way. [Here a painting was shown]

Of the newer part of our dreaming, my part and that of most of us here, artists have brought and made their own heritage, like Tuan Vanh Tranh’s haunting painting ‘Farewell to Saigon’, of the moment he set off for Australia. [Here a painting was shown]

Though VELS does not explicitly acknowledge this, the Arts are of course crucial to physical, personal and social learning. As we’ve seen, nothing provides personal and social agency better, as even a rather surprised Queensland Board of Senior School Studies report acknowledges, admitting that in teamwork and social skills, the arts and physical education were about the only subjects with positive ratings!

The arts are now a fully developed pedagogy, where subjects across the range of all KLAs can be brought to life as realistic models of real life contexts which can transform the classroom and its inhabitants to places and people beyond. Teaching is much more than a practice, or a method. Teaching is an art – and I don’t just mean a craft. It actually demands artistic skills and knowledge of quite a high order – what Eisner calls connoisseurship, though I prefer the word artistry. Those skills are needed
right across the art forms, and pre-eminently in drama, the most likely art-
form to be entirely absent from teacher-training programs. This is
obviously true if we are intending to use an arts-based pedagogy. As
many adults can attest, there’s nothing so excruciating or counter-
productive to learning than an instructional role-play training session run
by those who have no understanding of how dramatic empathy actually
works.

But I don’t just mean for teaching the arts. For all teachers, one of our
jobs in facilitating learning is to create an appropriate, congruent
environment: a harmonious, inspiring and motivating ambience where
enthusiastic, embodied learning can flourish. Science, Maths, Social
Studies and English teachers also need the artistic skills to bring out the
creativity, wonder and imagination, the artfulness and the playfulness in
their own subjects.

Visually, aurally and kinaesthetically, how much of what we and the
students do contributes to that? A classroom needs sophisticated
understanding not only of the pictures on the wall, but how our bodies
move and are grouped in the space and the aural harmonies and
disharmonies. Good teachers know instinctively, and have found ways of
subduing the cacophony, of brightening the visual barrenness, and
embodying the learning. Contemporary teaching resources, and now
especially the internet, certainly all provide ancillary visual and aural
stimulation … but do we have to retreat into cyberspace to provide an
atmosphere fit for learning?

And drama skills are the most important of all, because the classroom is a
performative space and must have a performative pedagogy – which does
not mean a teacher up the front giving a monologue to a silent audience.
Dramatic performance means dialogue, not monologue. The students are
equally actors, and a performative classroom means maximising the
opportunities for meaningful dialogue. We could do much worse than
follow the ancient Greek scholar Aristotle’s analysis of drama here.
Looking at Classical tragedy (and some among us might think an average
classroom has quite a lot in common with a Greek tragedy) he identified
the six key elements of dramatic performance, which tally very nicely
with contemporary educational jargon of Productive Pedagogies:

The classic tragedy must have:

- **thought** (*high level thinking and deep understanding*)
- **understanding of character** (*connectivity and diversity*)
The classroom is a public stage, where a narrative of learning is to be enacted, and so dramatic tension and focus are crucial. The teacher herself is the key performer too, and must have some of the skills and range of an actor to command and shift focus, engage the students in the dialogue, inspire them with the story of what is to be learned, and above all model and embody the learning stance of the students. These all demand very specific artistic knowledge and skills.

How much of this do pre-service teachers get, except implicitly from absorbing the gifts of those lecturers who teach artistically and resist the dumbing down of university pedagogy in the interests of economic efficiency? So many of the students and their lecturers too, were largely untouched by arts in their own looking-glass schooling and teacher education, so how can we expect them to have those skills, that understanding of the elements of the art form – harmony, balance, rhythm, aesthetic shaping, effective dialogue and personal performance? And it’s not improving: student teachers today, apart from arts specialists, are almost certain to get less of the arts in their pre-service courses than twenty years ago.

We have to address this elsewhere at the moment, mainly in in-service education, where we can at least call on the services of the communities of artists help us.

Now for the artists – there’s another career option for you. You might be feeling smug at seeing me pillory the education industry! How appropriate is it for the contemporary world, your conservatory approach? I read a recent PhD thesis that showed many elite theatre trainers resist the term ‘educators’, and more so the notion that some kind of pedagogy might be needed for training talent. I would not for a moment question the need for those artists with exceptional talent and the opportunity to use it at the highest, virtuoso level, to get the maximum dose of intensive training that they need. But what do we want from most of our artists in contemporary society, I often wonder? In the short term, we have to have something to fill the very large cultural centres or culture bunkers we
have built, to satisfy the sophisticated palates of cognoscenti like ourselves. But every time I look at children’s art and their dramatic play, I marvel again at the sophistication and controlled purposeful creativity of their invention, their composition – and I realise what an incredible artistic resource, life-long, is devalued, allowed and in fact encouraged to wither, in every ordinary person, never mind the ‘mute, unglorious Miltons’ that Grey mourned in his elegy. But the twenty-first century is not as certain sure as the eighteenth or the twentieth were. I look at art today, particularly my own dramatic art, how it is changing, and no longer fits so easily into those culture bunkers. The once derided notion of community art is coming charging back in the wave of post-modern, post-structuralist life, where the opportunities for art are open, processual, unfinished: community television and radio; group-devised film; verbatim and forum theatre; arts therapy; the visual art of the palimpsest such as altered books and interactive performance art, with multiple artists at work; the collaborative music and multi-medial art that can be constructed with a sampler and digital technology. A lot of our artists whether they want to or not already spend a great deal of time in educational or community settings. So they should do. UNESCO’s just published global research compendium of arts education identifies as the first characteristic of a quality national arts program

- Active partnerships between schools and arts organisations and between teachers, artists and the community.

How far do traditional conservatory models of training fit artists for these kinds of futures? When theatre artists-in-residence have to be actor, playwright, director, teacher-in-role and teacher-out-of-role, which strand at NIDA or VCA do they take? How does it fit them for their futures in artistic partnerships with schools that I was talking of earlier? As a teacher, I don’t want actors in theatre in education, or visual artists in residence, or music and dance teachers for my children, who are merely using this as a bread-ticket while waiting for the real job to come along. In conclusion, it may be like ‘the mouse that roared’ to suggest it, but I believe that education needs artistry as much as art needs pedagogy, and that artistic educators and educated artists can and must make common cause in our universities

We must listen to each other, collaborate and adapt our creative practice to what our colleagues are offering – and help them to realise that the arts are the real hidden trump of education, the ace in the hole.
Here a sound track of Paul Simon: ‘Ace in the hole’ was played over a slide depicting a teacher dressed in motley dancing forwards outside in the sunshine, with a crowd of happy, focused children dancing along too:

Some people say music
That’s their ace in the hole
Just your ordinary rhythm and blues
Your basic rock and roll
Ace in the hole
Lean on me
Don’t you know me
I’m your guarantee
Hey, Junior, I’m your ACE in the hole
Hey, Junior, I’m your ACE in the hole]

I’m saying it: music and all the arts. This is the kind of pedagogy I’m talking about and dreaming of: the teacher and classroom that is both playful and artful.

Postscript: Under a 2006 Education Faculty restructure, a new academic grouping called Artistic and Creative Education (ACE) has been formed, with the author as its inaugural leader.
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