

# Learning That Matters

## Revitalising Heathcote's Rolling Role for the Digital Age

Susan Davis



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# **Learning That Matters**

# IMAGINATION AND PRAXIS: CRITICALITY AND CREATIVITY IN EDUCATION AND EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

VOLUME 7

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## SCOPE

Current educational reform rhetoric around the globe repeatedly invokes the language of 21st century learning and innovative thinking while contrarily re-enforcing, through government policy, high stakes testing and international competition, standardization of education that is exceedingly reminiscent of 19th century Taylorism and scientific management. Yet, as the steam engines of educational “progress” continue down an increasingly narrow, linear, and unified track, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the students in our classrooms are inheriting real world problems of economic instability, ecological damage, social inequality, and human suffering. If young people are to address these social problems, they will need to activate complex, interconnected, empathetic and multiple ways of thinking about the ways in which peoples of the world are interconnected as a global community in the living ecosystem of the world. Seeing the world as simultaneously local, global, political, economic, ecological, cultural and interconnected is far removed from the Enlightenment’s objectivist and mechanistic legacy that presently saturates the status quo of contemporary schooling. If we are to derail this positivist educational train and teach our students to see and be in the world differently, the educational community needs a serious dose of imagination. The goal of this book series is to assist students, practitioners, leaders, and researchers in looking beyond what they take for granted, questioning the normal, and amplifying our multiplicities of knowing, seeing, being and feeling to, ultimately, envision and create possibilities for positive social and educational change. The books featured in this series will explore ways of seeing, knowing, being, and learning that are frequently excluded in this global climate of standardized practices in the field of education. In particular, they will illuminate the ways in which imagination permeates every aspect of life and helps develop personal and political awareness. Featured works will be written in forms that range from academic to artistic, including original research in traditional scholarly format that addresses unconventional topics (e.g., play, gaming, ecopedagogy, aesthetics), as well as works that approach traditional and unconventional topics in unconventional formats (e.g., graphic novels, fiction, narrative forms, and multi-genre texts). Inspired by the work of Maxine Greene, this series will showcase works that “break through the limits of the conventional” and provoke readers to continue arousing themselves and their students to “begin again” (Greene, *Releasing the Imagination*, 1995, p. 109).

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**Susan Davis**

*Central Queensland University, Australia*



**SENSE PUBLISHERS**  
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## **PRAISE FOR *LEARNING THAT MATTERS***

“This book is a very readable and worthwhile labour of love and good investigation. Fossicking through the dusty archives of the legendary teacher and drama educator Dorothy Heathcote, as well as her own experience as a practitioner of Heathcote’s methods, Sue Davis found herself curious about a more-or-less forgotten pedagogical innovation called ‘Rolling Role’. Davis set out firstly to find out all she could about the philosophy, principles and structures of Rolling Role. In doing this she discovered much priceless video footage of the great pedagogue and her associates – full of dazzling and entirely practical insights, couched in Heathcote’s trenchant and no-nonsense delivery. Meticulously, Davis reorganised this, and embedded it in sound contemporary educational scholarship. She rightly sets it as an archetypal example of ‘progressive pedagogy’, directly in-line with Dewey, Froebel, Bruner et al. She also neatly frames it in current philosophies of innovation and creativity, and draws attention to its cultivation of the imagination. That in itself might be enough for a book, but like all good drama practitioners, she wanted to test it out and see if the proof was in the pudding. And that was no small challenge. The project produced some surprises, occasional eureka moments, a few bruises and many invaluable insights. Some of the most revealing of these are discoveries made or remembered about ordinary matters of teachers’ good practice. But did the project work? Read to the end and you will see ... the book is for all these reasons worth reading from beginning to end.”

– **John O’Toole AM, Hon Professorial Fellow, The University of Melbourne, Hon Professor, Griffith University, Australia**

“As Director of the National Drama International Conference 2013, Heathcote Reconsidered, I initiated a project to reinterpret for the 21st century digitally mediated, a particular aspect of Dorothy Heathcote’s methodology known as Rolling Role. I floated this concept at the International Drama in Education Research Institute in 2012 and Dr Davis embraced it immediately and became the driving force in bringing the project to its very successful conclusion. She brought together colleagues from five countries across the world to create a Rolling Role drama that culminated in an outstanding presentation at the international conference and in a series of academic papers and now this book. They now provide new and internationally significant research outcomes concerning this form of drama for learning. The book will be a great success I am certain.”

– **Pamela Bowell, Visiting Reader, Bishop Grosseteste University, Lincoln, England**

“With this book Susan Davis has made a valuable contribution to the field of drama education that will be appreciated by scholars and practitioners alike. The book sets out to describe possibilities for ‘Rolling Role’ in a digital age. Vygotskian theories are used to illuminate Heathcote’s practice in a useful and accessible way, while the close attention to archive material brings to light some important and previously unexamined material.”

– **Viv Aitken, Associate Professor, School of Education and Social Sciences, Eastern Institute of Technology, Hawkes Bay, New Zealand**

“This important and accessible book will prove a significant element in the living legacy of Dorothy Heathcote, that unique educator. The writer explores Heathcote’s practice and her relationship to other educational innovators with clarity and considerable scholarship. She shows how Heathcote’s use of Teacher-in-Role and Mantle of the Expert established the principles of her innovative approach and led to the development of Rolling Role, that complex and innovative approach to the curriculum. Rolling Role creates a shared context among teachers and students, carefully structured so as to provide access to a variety of subject areas. Since Heathcote’s death very little has been published about efforts to implement this approach in schools. The author’s examples of practice and detailed analysis of hours of videotapes will support and inspire educators wishing to explore the model’s potential for curriculum innovation. Readers are also likely to be inspired by the possibilities of expanding the community of learning within the school and beyond to the wider world, using digital technology for creative and educational purposes. This book is a significant addition to Heathcote scholarship. It clearly demonstrates that Rolling Role is an invaluable and innovative approach to teaching and learning with the potential for real impact on curriculum design and delivery.”

– **Cecily O’Neill, Associate Professor Emeritus, The Ohio State University, Honorary Fellow at the University of Winchester, Visiting Professor at NYU, USA**

*Dedicated to the woman who fanned the flame  
Dorothy Heathcote,  
and the men who helped keep it alive  
Ray and Jackson*



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	xi
Acknowledgements	xv
Chapter 1: Rolling Role as an Educational Innovation	1
Introduction	1
Innovations in Education	3
Contemporary Relevance and Reworking	6
Conclusions	10
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framing: Heathcote, Vygotsky, and Cultural-Historical Theory	11
Introduction	11
Heathcote and Vygotsky	11
Vygotskian Concepts Related to Learning and Development	13
Vygotsky on Creativity, Imagination and Drama	20
‘CHAT’ as a Frame for Systemic Analysis	24
Conclusions	27
Chapter 3: Heathcote and History: Genesis of the Rolling Role Model	29
Dorothy Heathcote – Subject Formation and Discovery of Her ‘Object’	30
Progression of Ideas and Work	32
The Spread of Her Work and Influence on the Field	36
Transformative Pedagogy – Drama for Learning and Development	39
Drama and the Process of Engagement	41
Conclusions	44
Chapter 4: Rolling Role History: The Development of a System for Meaningful Learning	47
Introduction	47
Heathcote’s Definition of Rolling Role	47
The Initiating Project	48
Elaborations and Development	50
The History of Trevelyan Chapel – Joan Kerley Masters Project	52
Collaborations with Claire Armstrong Mills	54
Teacher Professional Development	55

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Summary of the Key Elements of Rolling Role	57
Conclusions	58
Chapter 5: The Rolling Role Videotapes: Analysis and Synthesis of the Model	59
Introduction	59
The Rolling Role Video Series	59
Rolling Role as an Activity System and Process	61
Conclusions	80
Chapter 6: Rolling Role in Practice: Planning and Practice from the Classroom	81
Rolling Role Planning for Video Series	81
Rolling Role in the Classroom – 1994 Madame Lingard project	88
Rolling Role and the Dynamics of Engagement	95
Conclusions	97
Chapter 7: The Water Reckoning: A Case Study of an International Digitally Mediated Project	99
The Water Reckoning Project as an Activity System	99
Engagement and Learning in Context	107
Contradictions, Expansion and Learning	121
Conclusions	127
Chapter 8: Rolling Role as a System for Creative Learning: A Model for Local and Global Contexts	129
Features of Learning through Rolling Role	129
Rolling Role as a New Order of Learning	136
Appendix A: Rolling Role and the National Curriculum: Videotape Series Overview	139
Appendix B: Rolling Role Planning	147
Appendix C: Sample Rolling Role Planning: The Leyford Drama	151
References	155
About the Author	161
Index	163

## PREFACE

It's 2012 and I'm in Limerick, Ireland at the International Drama In Education Research Institute. People are recalling the great Dorothy Heathcote who passed away the year before.

While at the conference I escape for a day to the Aran Isles with an Australian colleague Mary Mooney. She asks me if I am going to contribute an article to the special journal edition she and Michael Anderson are editing with a focus on legendary teacher Dorothy Heathcote and Australian drama scholar John Carroll – Heathcote's former student who had also passed away in 2011.

I'm not sure I know enough about them, but I bravely suggest I might analyse their lives and work through using a creativity framework. She encourages me and so I agree to give it a go. At the time I have no idea how much work that is going to entail and where it will take me, but what a wonderful journey it will be.

So begins my closer acquaintance with Dorothy, or Mrs Heathcote, as she preferred new acquaintances to call her. Unfortunately I was never able to meet her or work with her while she was alive, however after pouring over hours of video with her, I must confess I do feel like I have come to know her rather well. So I hope she'll forgive me if I call her Dorothy.

At the same Irish conference I am introduced to Pam Bowell of Bowell & Heap process drama fame and she is interested in my PhD experiences of exploring the use of digital technologies in drama. She is going to be convening an international conference in Dorothy Heathcote's honour in 2013 and would like there to be a youth focused project featured at the conference. More specifically she would like us to revisit a strategy called 'Rolling Role', one Dorothy always believed was well suited to sharing through the Internet.

I admit to her I really don't know much about Rolling Role, in my twenty odd years of classroom drama teaching I had drawn on Dorothy's work on Teacher-in-Role and Mantle of the Expert, but I had not come across Rolling Role. There is one article of Dorothy's online where she talks about the key features of Rolling Role (Heathcote, 2002), and Pam shares with us her recollections of Rolling Role work with Dorothy. Beyond that we will have to draw upon what we know of the principles of Heathcote's work and figure it out for ourselves. So, I end up being the project convenor and we have participating sites in Greece, Singapore, the USA, and two in Australia – one in Sydney and the other on the Sunshine Coast ... but what should the project be about?

At the beginning of 2013 most of our state is inundated with floods. There are also torrential rains and damaging floods in Sydney, in Greece and Singapore. It's quite a reckoning...

## PREFACE

Drama, water, survival, resilience, people and change. How might we use drama to make sense of what we can't control? What is within the sphere of our control?

And so *The Water Reckoning* project is born in the midst of so much water-based devastation.

Five groups come together to experiment, to share their learning, posting artefacts and events online to a digital water museum. Travelling to London, I learn more about Heathcote's practice and legacy, and we proudly share the outcomes from our revised Rolling Role work, encouraged by the support of other living drama legends.

Afterwards, in quite the wrong order I head to the Heathcote Archives in Didsbury; a Manchester Metropolitan University Campus housed in a charming former parsonage. There, down the twists and turns of the old hallways, past the creative arts teaching space and mail-box for children to post out their requests and imaginings... down past shelves of children's picture books, and a wall of old VHS videos, I arrive at the shrine of our hero(ine), or rather a dusty set of books, tapes and boxes, the Heathcote Archives – a room and a half stuffed full of Dorothy Heathcote's, books, writings, publications and photographs.

After making a list of the written catalogue items for Rolling Role, I am initially disappointed as I search for the items on the shelves – there's not as much as I'd hoped for, and some of what was listed cannot be found. And it's hot, like really hot – the hottest English summer for about seven years. I am tired, I stretch and yawn. I look up, and then to the side, and there it is. A box, with faded marker pen writing on the side – and what looks like the words... Rolling Role. I drag over a chair and pull it down. Lifting the lid, it's clear that this is a collection of materials that has never been properly catalogued and sorted. It's a collection that hasn't been touched, not since Dorothy packed away all the bits and pieces after filming her Rolling Role series. It's all here, her notes, her prompt cards, her handwritten signs and photocopies. All her Rolling Role originals – a veritable treasure trove!

And with that I become immersed in the riches and reality of Dorothy's planning and practice. Her words, her videos, her voice and presence – authority, confidence, kindness, crafting, guidance, caring, humour, excitement, learning, and those magic questions ...

Can you agree ...?

I wonder if we ...?

What if?

One does wonder ...

I realise I have inherited an important legacy, am part of a living legacy, one worth knowing about, revisiting and reaffirming.

The pendulum swings, and these things that we believe are true, need to be rediscovered and shared anew. Student voice, power sharing, meaningful

learning – they still matter, though sometimes they seem to be forgotten. The writings and wisdom of those who've gone before us need to be dusted off, re-examined and tested anew.

It's time to see if the methods and models can live on without the woman who inspired them.

Another project begins, this time one of research and reading, of transcribing and analysing. It's hard work, it seems to take forever to watch and transcribe the 16 Rolling Role videotapes. I wonder at times if it is all worth it, but I am learning so much myself.

Powerful pedagogy, it's all there. I wrestle with the content and eventually find a form. The chapters begin to take shape...



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sincere thanks to John Rainer and The Heathcote Archives, Manchester Metropolitan University and to Marianne Heathcote Woodbridge for assistance and allowing me to share this wonderful work.

Much of the material included in this book is drawn from documents that were located at the Heathcote Archives at the Manchester Metropolitan University. Some of them have never been published, some were published decades ago but are not available now. It must be noted that there was other work referred to in a number of documents (including other student thesis work) which I was not able to locate in the archive. A set of the Rolling Role videotapes is held at the Heathcote Archives, the tapes were originally produced by the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The author would appreciate receiving other information about Rolling Role history and examples. Attempts have been made to gain permissions for the inclusion of various material in this book, other claims regarding acknowledgements should be directed to the author.

Sincere thanks to my husband Ray Land for his insight, support, critical gaze and editor's eye.

My thanks and appreciation to the wonderful team who contributed to the creative project that became *The Water Reckoning*:

Pamela Bowell (Project initiator), Angelina Ambrosetti & Glenn Taylor (Queensland, Australia), Xenia Simou (Greece), Prue Wales, Mei Yee Chang & Jeffrey Tan (Singapore), Chris Hatton, Jenny Nicholls, Mary Mooney & Julian Kennard (NSW, Australia), Jen Kulik (USA) with input & advice from Paul Sutton & Max Allsup (C & T, UK) & John O'Toole (Australia). Thank you of course to the brave and adventurous students who helped take an idea from our collective imaginings and make it into something real.



## CHAPTER 1

# ROLLING ROLE AS AN EDUCATIONAL INNOVATION

### INTRODUCTION

There is nothing more difficult to carry out nor more doubtful of success nor more dangerous to handle than to initiate a new order of things. For the reformer has enemies in all who profit by the old order and only luke-warm defenders in all those who would profit by the new order. This lukewarmness arises partly from fear of their adversaries who have law in their favour and partly from the incredulity of mankind who do not truly believe in anything new until they have actual experience of it. (Machiavelli, 1513/1950 in Heathcote, 1993, Tape 1)

This provocative quote by Machiavelli was selected by Dorothy Heathcote to introduce what she saw as a revolutionary new pedagogical system – one called Rolling Role. She was well aware that it was not going to be easy to inspire educators and institutions to embrace what she saw as a radical new way of connecting the curriculum in meaningful ways. She knew that change is difficult, but she believed that if people had the ‘experience’ of Rolling Role and were not scared off by the critics they would be able to initiate a whole ‘new order of things’. It was an ambitious plan.

In the early 1990s Dorothy Heathcote was a teacher with unprecedented international standing. With over 40 years of experience behind her she had inspired thousands. She regularly shared her innovative practice through demonstration workshops viewed by other teachers and academics and had featured in a number of BBC documentaries that had been shown across the globe. She also worked with a steady stream of national and international teachers and academics who came to study with her in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. In her 60s and officially ‘retired’ she saw the impending implementation of the national curriculum in England as a golden opportunity to demonstrate the relevance of Rolling Role. She believed that this approach could stimulate and lead to the accomplishment of significant learning for very different types of students, right across the curriculum.

Rolling Role can be seen as being situated within the tradition of progressive educational innovations with traces going back to the philosophical ideas of Rousseau and Locke and theorists such as Froebel (1902), Dewey (1938/2007), Piaget (1973),

Bruner (1960/2009) and Greene (1995) who have envisaged models of education that promote human potential and imagination, moving beyond binary notions of education which devalue the embodied, sensory and affective.

Like Heathcote and other innovators within the progressive tradition, many educators and artists today believe that there is an urgent need to find alternative models of curriculum organisation and delivery. This is in the face of recurring calls by educational instrumentalities for a return to basic skills and discipline integrity. The standardisation movement seems at odds with what other researchers claim should be the focus of 21st century learning: learning that promotes critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, civic skills and connectedness through problem-based activity (Beetham & Sharpe, 2013; Bellanca, 2010; Lombardi, 2007; Scott, 2015). An innovative curriculum model such as Rolling Role has the potential to be a bridging platform which connects these diverse agendas.

In Heathcote's work on Rolling Role it is clear that she believed that she had "been on the cusp of something" (Heathcote, 1993, Tape 16), however there has been very little published about the concept to help disseminate the model. This book therefore seeks to provide a record of what Heathcote and her collaborators discovered thirty years ago, but also why this model has ongoing relevance to the digital age. This chapter will briefly introduce Rolling Role as an educational innovation and explore its relevance within current agendas; the second chapter proposes a theoretical framework for conceptualising and understanding Rolling Role drawing on the work of Vygotsky and cultural-historical theory. Following that a profile of Dorothy Heathcote is presented in chapter three, to enable the reader to appreciate the development of Rolling Role within the broader context of her life and work. From there, chapter four introduces the Rolling Role model, drawing on documentary evidence from those involved in the creation of the model and others who experienced it or studied it with her. Chapter five summarises material from the set of 16 Rolling Role videotapes and draws upon the theoretical framing provided by cultural-historical theory to analyse Rolling Role as a system. Examples of practice are described in chapters six and seven, the first providing some snapshots from Heathcote's practice and the second from a contemporary reworking of the model. The final chapter summarises the key findings which have emerged through this historical and contemporary analysis, before reconsidering the potential of Rolling Role for learning in the digital age.

The methodologies used in writing this book have been informed by cultural-historical theory and historiography (Postelwait, 2009), with a case study of practice framed by Cultural Historical Activity Theory (Engeström, 2005) and Activity Systems Analysis (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). A major focus of the research process has been on the writing of a history – in this case an educational history. The writing of history is not unproblematic and goes beyond the mere documenting of archival records and accounts of events. Historiography requires accounts to be written which draw on interpretation and speculation. As theatre historian Postelwait explains, the process draws on investigating archives and evidence, considering their credibility

and reliability and constructing arguments and narratives. He argues that the writing of history must then go beyond objective accounts of the archival evidence and involves interpreting and narrating what are the probable, not just possible, stories offered up by the achieved representations (Postelwait, 2009). Furthermore the writer may extend beyond interpreting historical events in the context of their occurrence, to also identify possible connections, causations and consequences which could not be seen at the time of the events. That is a process that has certainly been undertaken for this work, speculating as well on the potential for ongoing action and innovation.

### INNOVATIONS IN EDUCATION

Before progressing, we will consider the concept of innovation, with reference to the field of education. While most countries see ‘innovation’ agendas as crucial to their productivity and futures, innovation is a term used more often with fields such as science and technology, less so in relation to schooling. The term innovation derives from the Latin word *innovatus*, the past participle of *innovare* “to renew or change”. Innovation refers to the creation of some qualitatively better or new product, technology or idea that may be accepted or valued by a community or group. Barnett’s work in anthropology provides a definition of innovation which is defined in a broad sense:

An innovation is here defined as any thought, behaviour, or thing that is new because it is qualitatively different from existing forms. Strictly speaking, every innovation is an idea, or a constellation of ideas; but some innovations by their nature must remain mental organisations only, whereas others may be given overt and tangible expression. (Barnett, 1953, p. 7)

Innovation is often defined as related to creativity but with the focus being more upon the *application* of a new idea or system. Innovation is regarded as leading to some form of economic or social value, recognising the importance of the context in which it emerges.

It might seem at times that true innovations in education are rare, especially as educational systems become more risk-averse, with mistakes and failures frowned upon. On the other hand, it could be argued that innovations in education occur in everyday ways all the time (Vieluf, 2012), for individual teachers, teaching teams, schools and authorities, as they adapt programs and practices, and devise new systems and schemes to meet the needs of their students and various stakeholders. “Within education, this can be the application of a new approach to questioning, the use of a new digital tool or a novel use of space – that brings about some value by altering the social practice of teaching and learning” (Kirkland & Sutch, 2009, p. 10). However some innovations assume a position of influence beyond the immediate team or community, and may be disseminated, shared and adopted more widely.

Rolling Role can be conceived of one such influential educational innovation, one of a number which demonstrates the ideas of leading educational thinkers being

realised as praxis. Like Heathcote, Froebel, Dewey and Bruner not only philosophised about the purpose and practice of education, but also created practical models as well, some associated with very material creations and tools. It is interesting to briefly recall some of these to enable the innovative nature of Rolling Role to be further appreciated.

Freidrich Froebel is often acknowledged as a leading figure in the ‘progressive education movement’, perhaps most notably because he coined the term ‘kindergarten’ setting up learning centres for young children. He is also known for inventing Froebel’s Gifts (sets of wooden blocks and other tools that may stimulate children’s learning) and Froebel’s Occupations (Wiggins & Smith, 1895, 1896). Influenced by the ideas of Rousseau, and Pestalozzi’s ‘learning by doing’ concept. Froebel valued the concept of child play and ‘free work’, designing sets of play materials and games that would stimulate children’s learning. His approach encouraged teachers to allow children freedom to explore alternatives and be extended (Froebel, 1902; Lawrence, 1952/2012). Versions of material tools that he created still exist today, and these include Froebel’s Gifts.

Another leading light of the progressive education movement is John Dewey, someone who continues to influence educational thinking into the 21st century. What is interesting to learn from Dewey’s work is that he also was driven to explore his ideas about education in practice and was instrumental in setting up the Dewey School with the University of Chicago (Camp Mayhew & Camp Edwards, 1936). Along with his wife Anne as principal, Dewey sought to work out how his ideas about learning might translate into practice. Ideas that were explored in the Dewey school included building upon children’s initial engagement with the life of the home to extend the experience of children as useful members of human endeavours through ‘occupations’. Prefiguring Heathcote’s work and also many of the concerns of Vygotsky regarding learning, Dewey’s rationale for the curriculum was as follows:

Since the development of the intelligence and knowledge of mankind has been a cooperative matter, and culture, in its broadest sense, a collective creation, occupations were to be selected which related those engaged in them to the basic needs of developing life, and demanded cooperation, division of work, and constant intellectual exchange by means of mutual communication and record. (Dewey in Camp Mayhew & Camp Edwards, 1936, p. 5)

As to innovative curriculum programs, it is worth recalling that Jerome Bruner was not only one of the twentieth century’s major educational scholars but also instrumental in the design of a most ambitious curriculum reform. The development of *Man: A Course of Study* (otherwise known as MACOS) (Bruner, 1965; Hanley, Whitla, Moo, & Walter, 1969) was Bruner’s grand vision for a curriculum and pedagogy for humanity with learning centred on the chain of life. The expansive program addressed big ideas such as human adaptation to the world, continuity, the importance of culture, and its ongoing evolution. The project involved the creation of comprehensive sets of materials and tools for teachers and students to use. These

included lesson plans, texts, videos, games and visual aides. This ambitious program was implemented in the USA, Britain and versions of it beyond. Its implementation was not unproblematic though, with its questioning of ‘universal’ human values and beliefs drawing criticism from political and religious groups.

What this brief overview of several educational innovations shows is that many of the concerns of previous educational innovators were also reflected in Heathcote’s work more broadly, and with Rolling Role specifically. What is common to these approaches is a valuing of experiential learning that features connections with life roles and issues, recognising the importance of carefully selected material objects and the teacher’s role as active agents of change. Some of the challenges of educational innovation relate to scale-up, replication and dissemination. Those are challenges that are certainly of importance to considering the impact of Heathcote’s work within her time, but also for considering the future for innovations such as Rolling Role.

### *Rolling Role in Brief*

Rolling Role, as conceived by Heathcote, is not just a teaching strategy, but also a systemic model, which impacts upon curriculum design and pedagogical approaches. This was a model that was created to address historically presenting tensions within the educational system of the time, but built upon decades of practice by Dorothy Heathcote and her colleagues. Heathcote’s foundational work on Teacher-in-Role and Mantle of the Expert established the principles of her innovative ways for working with children and others. These included a nuanced understanding of how to lead and mediate collaborative creative processes, situated from within a dramatic context, endowing participants with power and agency. The role of the teacher or leader was an active and interventionist one as they carefully curated, interacted and responded to the developing action. Heathcote deliberately selected and orchestrated the signs and mediating means that were brought into the process, providing common anchor points for creating work of the collective imagination. Together with her students she would build layers of meaning and understanding, with the use of dramatic frames allowing participants to explore experiences, situations and emotions outside the usual scope of classroom activity. What Rolling Role added to this was particular insights about how multiple groups, teachers or discipline areas may work together, and the importance of publishing and recycling the outcomes of student work.

A major strength of the Rolling Role model was that it provided a practical way to link the fragmented curriculum of separate discipline-based subjects. Through Rolling Role each teacher could work with their students on their own subject content, but the learning would be directed towards applying that learning to authentically styled contexts and problems. Furthermore, students and teachers could feel that they were part of a larger endeavour and collective enterprise, as they published outcomes from their work, which other groups acknowledged, used and extended upon.

Heathcote began to see that this was a model that might have particular significance for secondary schools in the process of implementing what was in the 1990s, the ‘new’ National Curriculum. Wanting to crystallise the body of work that had been conducted to date with Rolling Role, she began planning a comprehensive videotape series, collaborating with a practicing teacher she had worked with in the classroom. The resulting legacy project was a series of 16 videotapes featuring Heathcote in conversation with drama teacher Claire Armstrong Mills and a team of other teachers from Claire’s school. Across the series Heathcote explicated the system and how it worked, building a working example as she went. Heathcote hoped that the videotape series would act as a set of consultations to assist groups of teachers who were willing to test out this new system and experiment with it themselves. Her overarching goal was for teachers, together with their students, to experience important learning, fully meeting the new National Curriculum requirements while being concerned with learning that matters. This concern was a central thread throughout her work, one deftly captured by O’Connor in recalling Heathcote’s questions to him regarding education in New Zealand “So in New Zealand schools, do young people do things that matter? And in doing that do they know they matter too?” (O’Connor, Holland, & O’Connor, 2007, p. 15). She understood the personal, social and transformative nature of learning and the commitment and active acts of engagement and reflection required to realise such.

As the creative and making possibilities of the Internet expanded in the late 1990s and into the 2000s Heathcote believed that Rolling Role was a system that was perfect for further development using these new tools and platforms. While she could ‘imagine’ the opportunities for sharing and collaboration online, this reworking of the innovation was not one she was able to carry out herself. Following Heathcote’s death in 2011 this proposition was put to a group of drama education researchers and practitioners at an international drama conference. The author was one of the those who took up the challenge, and embraced a new phase of Rolling Role experimentation.

#### CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE AND REWORKING

We turn now to the current age and how Rolling Role can be conceived as a model with the potential to build on existing curriculum models while also transforming them. Across the globe we continue to see enormous energy and resources devoted to educational initiatives concerned with ‘improvement’ agendas. Recent trends have seen a widespread increase in the use of standardised curriculum, measurement, reporting and evaluation regimes, programs that aim to increase literacy and numeracy performance which are measured through national and international testing programs (Alexander, 2009; Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Luke, 2004). Many of these reform programs are linked to political agendas, and a nation’s aspirations for improved national performance within competitive global economies. Lists and rankings published by organisations such as the OECD are

regularly quoted in political debate and the construction of each new cycle of educational crisis.

The focus on national testing and assessment programs has been widespread but the outcomes have been of a dubious nature, with a flow on of undesirable effects upon curriculum and pedagogy (Hamilton, 2007; Harlen & Deakin Crick, 2002; Meyer & Benavot, 2013). While arguments are put that these programs are important for identifying and supporting the students who require additional assistance, in many cases the same data sets are used to set benchmarks and achievement standards that schools, teachers and principals are judged (rewarded and even penalised) against. This accountability and improvement agenda has also had a backwash effect with evidence pointing to a narrowing of the curriculum in many jurisdictions. Teachers often feel compelled to ‘teach to the test’ with curriculum areas deemed non-essential (such as the arts and other ‘practical’ subjects) pushed to the margins. In the *Cambridge Review of Primary Education* one of the reports claimed this has resulted in a ‘state theory of learning’ based on high stakes testing, mandated pedagogy in numeracy and literacy and a “machinery of surveillance and accountability” (Alexander et al., 2010, p. 730).

While these policy and program directions dominate there have also been ongoing challenges to these agendas (Caldwell & Vaughan, 2012; Lake, 2013; Warwick Commission, 2015). From the likes of Ken Robinson and his much viewed TED talk *Do Schools Kill Creativity* (2006) to business councils and the OECD there is another solid choir of voices calling for educational reforms that promote creative learning, connected learning and agency for teachers, students and communities. A recent OECD report about international educational policy suggests that educational reforms should place students and learning at the centre (OECD, 2015). Furthermore, the report recommends that school improvement agendas should draw on research-based learning principles that encourage engagement, and support learning that is social and collaborative. This work also calls for schools to pay attention to learner motivation and emotions. Of direct relevance to Rolling Role is the advice to “promote horizontal connectedness across learning activities and subjects, both in and out of school” (Dumont et al., 2010 in OECD, 2015, pp. 139–140).

To conceptualise curriculum and pedagogy that is responsive to current times, it is important to acknowledge other major agendas on the international educational landscape. UNESCO educational priorities in regard to Global Citizenship and the *Roadmap for Sustainable Development* make it very clear that different approaches are required of education to help us deal with the complex issues of change brought on by problems such as climate change. The UNESCO Roadmap includes pertinent priority areas for educators, ones which can be promoted through a system such as Rolling Role. These include: transforming learning and training environments; empowering and mobilising youth; and accelerating sustainable solutions at local level.

The UNESCO priority area of Global Citizenship recognises the multiple ways that individuals, communities and nations are connected. Understanding the

networked impact of decisions made is more important now than ever before, as decisions made and actions carried out impact on others and environments in diverse and long-lasting ways. The document *Global citizenship education: preparing learners for the challenges of the 21st century* highlights the implications of this thinking for new approaches to pedagogy and learning:

In an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world, there is a need for transformative pedagogy that enables learners to resolve persistent challenges related to sustainable development and peace that concern all humanity. (UNESCO, 2014b, p. 11)

The report also identifies that education programs need to be concerned with more than just ‘cognitive’ knowledge and skills and embrace arts-based programs, social and emotional learning to be able to make a difference:

[Global citizenship] represents a conceptual shift in that it recognizes the relevance of education in understanding and resolving global issues in their social, political, cultural, economic and environmental dimensions. It also acknowledges the role of education in moving beyond the development of knowledge and cognitive skills to build values, soft skills and attitudes among learners that can facilitate international cooperation and promote social transformation. (UNESCO, 2014b, p. 9)

These priority areas suggest that learning that *matters* may be achieved through valuing the human and social dimensions of learning, engaging students with issues at the local and global level and making connections to people and places where similar concerns exist. Rolling Role has the potential to be a model which can successfully realise such goals for a ‘good’ education in the 21st century, especially capitalising on the affordance of digital technologies which are currently transforming society.

In the past two decades we have seen the rapid rise of public use of the Internet, and most recently what has been called the ‘read/write’ version of such where people are not only able to view content online, but write, create and share (Lawson, 2005). The widespread proliferation of digital technology and tools means that current generations are growing up with unparalleled access to information, collaboration and mediated experiences. As of the time of writing approximately 3 billion of the estimated global population of 7 billion are believed to be using the Internet (Internet World Stats, 2014).

The impact of networked communications and digital technologies for learning purposes is also enormous and not unproblematic. While many have romanticised Prensky’s ‘digital natives’ concept (Prensky, 2001a, 2001b) to assume that young people would be unproblematically navigating this brave new world, a growing body of empirical research has highlighted the flaws in such assumptions (Buckingham, 2007; Thomas, 2011). The evidence shows that young people’s use of technology is varied, and many demonstrate limited competency and fluency beyond familiar technologies and tools. Their digital engagement often relates to communications,

information retrieval and entertainment and there are far fewer young people engaging in content creation (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2013; Livingstone, 2011; Ólafsson, Livingstone, & Haddon, 2013). The development of digital literacy skills for multiple purposes still requires critical attention. The provision of educational experiences that engage young people with real-world digital creation and sharing is also constrained by the contradictory discourses at play in regards to digital technologies in education. On the one hand while the transformational power of using digital technologies for learning tends to be glorified, on the other hand authorities tend to control and limit access to many of the creative and social tools available (Ching & Hursh, 2010; Sharples et al., 2009).

Across educational systems worldwide, billions of dollars have been invested into digital infrastructure, hardware, software, learning management platforms and digital tools. Ongoing calls for transformations of pedagogy are not necessarily matched with support for teacher professional development and learning. Furthermore, meta-analysis research reveals little consistent evidence proving the investment in technology has been matched with improvements to learning (Cuban, 2001; Higgins, 2003; Trucano, 2005). Of great interest to drama educators and the concerns of this book are the collaboration and creative opportunities available through digital and networked communications, which are not always fully promoted within formal educational programs.

There is no doubting the impact of technologies on our lives however, and this is leading to rapid changes to the world of learning but also the world of work (Frey & Osborne, 2013). Recent research has analysed the impact of computers and robotics upon labour supply and indicates the ongoing reduction of job opportunities in low-skilled labour fields such as production and manufacturing. Growth continues however in sectors that rely on creative capacity and social interactions “Our findings thus imply that as technology races ahead, low-skill workers will reallocate to tasks that are non-susceptible to computerisations – i.e., tasks requiring creative and social intelligence” (Frey & Osborne, 2013, p. 45). Human communications, social interactions and creativity are not optional areas of focus for education, but essential for opening up future study and work options.

There is the potential to realise visions of connected learning in ways that early pioneers could only dream of, and dream of them Heathcote did. To do so requires careful negotiation, however, navigating the competing discourses that are inherent within the education policy domain. The very skills and interactions that the international research and policy agendas are calling for are not necessarily easy to promote in practice as risk-averse education authorities restrict many of the opportunities for creative learning and innovation. Educating our children for meaningful engagement and preparing them for their future roles calls on educators to be courageous and creative, willing to work through the apparent contradictions inherent in educational systems. It requires the reworking and transformation of education models and systems, and Rolling Role is one system that has the potential to realise some of these ambitions.

CONCLUSIONS

As in other areas of human endeavour, innovations arise in the field of education, responding to the pressures and opportunities of the times. Heathcote's development of Rolling Role can be seen as situated within a long tradition of progressive educational innovations, those concerned with the 'humanising forces' of education and learning. The contestation over the purposes of education and what works is not confined to our times or Heathcote's, and similar debates have been had historically by influential educational thinkers. In seeking to create new solutions to contemporary iterations of existing and evolving problems, there is value to be found in revisiting past models of educational innovation, such as Rolling Role, and considering what we can learn from them. To further understand the genesis of the Rolling Role model and its potential for revitalising in a new era, this book will examine it as a system of curriculum and pedagogical innovation identifying its development, features and examples of practice. It is proposed that Rolling Role is a model which can cultivate many of the features required of a contemporary learning system, one that will make a difference for individuals and our world.