International Connections in Actor Training in Australia: Tracing Stanislavski’s System and Brechtian Politics

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Abstract:

This article traces the approaches to actor training offered in Australia based on the training backgrounds of influential teachers. The research for this article finds international connections that reveal strong links to approaches originating with Constantin Stanislavski and Bertolt Brecht. It seeks to understand with whom a teacher studied to explain what was probably learnt and therefore the type of training knowledge that the teacher is likely to pass on to students. The research confirms that international approaches are fundamental to performance training in university conservatorium courses, and the profiles of nine teachers are presented in detail to encapsulate patterns of training and to show the complex nexus of influences and international approaches. The profiles indicate an increasing influence of American approaches in the second half of the twentieth century alongside British ones, but that British influences remain important for European approaches and for political theatre in particular into the twenty-first century. We argue that even where there was a synthesis happening in the teaching of performance in Australia, the influences of major international approaches are identifiable through the training backgrounds of teachers. In this way, it is possible to locate teachers in Australia within actor training internationally.

Key words: actor training, Australia, teachers, Stanislavski, Brecht

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This article traces the approaches to actor training being offered in university conservatorium courses in Australia in the late twentieth century into the twenty-first century. It presents research investigating the training backgrounds of influential teachers that asks: what international approaches are evident in the training of influential teachers of performance in Australia? It confirms that leading international approaches were fundamental to performance training in Australia, ¹ and explains these approaches by presenting the profiles of nine teachers in detail. We argue that even where there was a synthesis happening in the teaching of performance in Australia, Stanislavski-influenced training and Brechtian-influenced training remains clearly identifiable in the backgrounds of teachers. We conclude that elements of leading international processes were being passed on to students.

The training profiles of selected teachers indicate an increasing influence of American approaches in the second half of the twentieth century alongside British ones. But British influences including interpretations of Constantin Stanislavski, remain important because European approaches including that of Bertolt Brecht influence concepts of political theatre. The complex intersections between American, British and European approaches evident in Australian training assist the understanding of
twenty-first-century performance practice and the capacity of Australian actors to work internationally.

The research project upon which this article is based, was designed to chart the training backgrounds of teachers and other influences on them through diagrammatic mapping, and the outcomes of its investigation into Australian training in tertiary courses are summarized in the following points.

Firstly, the research reveals intersecting approaches, and where a teacher’s training encompasses more than one approach, for example, the influence of Stanislavski and/or a movement training method such as that derived from Laban, it can be assumed that the principles of both influences were passed on to students albeit with some synthesizing.

Secondly, most of the teachers in this research overlapped with or worked alongside another prominent teacher, which suggests more than one interpretation was also available to students through a team that included specialist voice and movement teachers. The research mapping reveals common alignments, which raises additional questions as to what extent teachers influence each other and this was only partially addressed in this research.

Thirdly, it becomes clear that institutional courses developed particular strengths in, for example, American or British interpretations of Stanislavski’s or in political theatre.

Fourthly, the research finds that while a teacher’s contribution might have been largely viewed as specific to a particular institution due to the duration of employment, cross-institutional teaching opportunities and professional practice reveal broad influences and dynamics across the theatre training sector since most of the teachers in this research taught in a wide range of settings from private studios to tertiary courses. Therefore the teaching in this research can be considered indicative of patterns of training in Australia.

Fifthly, teachers in this research advocate an integrated curriculum, which confirms the importance of a course and, implicitly, the contribution of a team of teachers.

Sixthly, the research asked about the use of books and publications on performance training and finds broad influence; while this is appropriate for the tertiary sector, it may also indicate the use of books to offset Australia’s geographical remoteness.
Contrary to any claim of a distinctive Australian approach to training, Australia’s actors were and are being trained within international approaches because their teachers trained within the leading international approaches.

**Methodological Choices**

The research seeks to understand with whom a teacher studied to explain what was probably learnt and therefore the type of training knowledge that the teacher is likely to pass on to students. In this way it is possible to outline paradigms of what approaches were and are offered to student performers. The research utilizes diagrammatic mapping to locate each teacher within a nexus of influences, and it allows individual teachers to be clearly situated. Melanie Beddie developed a diagrammatic research process based on a sociogram specifically for this type of research into actor training. She creates a diagram with each teacher, where possible during an interview. The authors of this article are both actor-trained and experienced in teaching actors and performance. In particular, Beddie has specialist knowledge of the tertiary actor-training sector through her teaching work at the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) for nearly a decade.

The 2017–2018 project investigated the performance training of teachers working within major actor-training institutions to identify types of training. It developed diagrammatic profiles for fourteen teachers based on interviews with eleven, interviews with family members for two, and published sources for one. A further group of teachers are referred to in the analysis by using published sources on their backgrounds, and to indicate the broader opportunities for training outside those offered by the teachers interviewed in this research project. (The research is ongoing and it is intended that training influences from Asia will be part of future work.) The teachers were selected as having worked for a significant part of their career in a major tertiary course and our research sought to expand on existing research, interviews and publications.

Australia’s training nationally corresponds with elements of American training outlined by Peter Zazzali in the progressive shift from private studios to university drama schools and courses during the twentieth century. In his overview of the development of drama schools in Britain and Australia, Ross Prior identifies the
internationalism of Australian training in the first decade of the twenty-first century. His interviews with actor trainers usefully capture a specific period and he describes the results of the research as “dynamic”. The participants in Prior’s research remain anonymous with pseudonyms utilized. While this facilitates a general summary, it does not illuminate specific influences, practitioner connections and cross-institutional teaching. The research presented here therefore includes the names of the teachers who were interviewed for the research project. Prior delineated four categories of knowledge that the acting teacher may have: personal knowledge, social knowledge, practical knowledge and intellectual knowledge. We accept that knowledge can be tacit and unconscious in the moment of doing in training, and we agree with Prior that there needs to be more analysis examining what is being transferred in the teaching situation through reflection on the practices for both trainers and students. We suggest, however, that it is important to identify some of the originating sources of knowledge, which is our purpose here.

Our research sought to establish how teachers were trained. The effectiveness of their own delivery of training and styles of teaching are outside the scope of the research presented here; Prior’s research investigates this topic. Nor does the research cover an important issue of whether teachers explain the originating sources to students. Instead our research reveals a multi-layered inheritance from the training of teachers and follows research that aligns teachers in lineages. Particularly relevant to the analysis in this article are teaching lineages that connect a teacher to Stanislavski’s work, for example, through training with Stella Adler or other leading American exponents.

Andrea Moor, a graduate of National Institute of Dramatic Arts (NIDA), has worked as an actor and a director and she is currently a lecturer at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT). Her research presents a comparative survey of four key tertiary training institutions and an overview of what was taught from 2000 to 2011, and she interviews teachers of acting and also teachers of movement and voice. These are named in Moor’s research. Our research set out to avoid interviewing all the same participants although there was some unavoidable overlap and notably with Kevin Jackson and Lindy Davies because of their significance and because they taught for such a substantial period of time. Moor’s research shows a high turnover in teaching staff in the decade of the 2000s as the principal acting teachers either retired.
or moved institutions. Moor also surveys graduate readiness to work in the industry, which offers new valuable research about the effectiveness of the training. Moor’s teaching practice includes David Mamet’s and William Macy’s Stanislavski-influenced Practical Aesthetics training and she describes intellectual decision-making prior to rehearsal and kinaesthetic action in work on the floor. This suggests some alignment with what is termed the psycho-physical approach derived from Stanislavski.  

NIDA’s course was the first university conservatorium course and it remains preeminent and the influence of Michel Saint-Denis’s on the foundational curriculum suggests internationalism in curriculum in tertiary institutions from the outset, and in the different modes of training that emerged in Australia. We speculate that this internationalism could be intensifying in the twenty-first century.

**Stanislavski and American Interpretations**

Our analysis begins with the American influences because these became predominant in the time frame of the research. The importance of locating individual teachers within a lineage of teachers becomes evident in relation to applications of Stanislavski’s System in Australia and we start with the work of three teachers in Sydney: Hayes Gordon, Brian Syron and Kevin Jackson. The influential teaching of Gordon provides a context for the way Stanislavski’s System influenced actor training in Australia, and in relation to its global reach throughout the twentieth century. Stanislavski’s approach to acting and directing arrived in Melbourne during the 1930s through the work of a director, Russian-Jewish refugee, Dolia Ribush who, in turn, influenced Irene Mitchell and she directed generations of young performers. The publication in 1924 of Stanislavski’s *My Life in Art* in English provided a key resource for Doris Fitton in Sydney in setting up the Independent Theatre and the associated acting studios that opened in August 1930. Private studios and professional work offered most opportunities for actor training until an expansion of state-based tertiary conservatorium acting courses during the 1970s.

The most influential and far-reaching private studio training, however, was offered by The Ensemble Theatre Studios founded by the American-born Hayes Gordon. He was a professional actor who had been taught by a student of Richard Boleslavsky, who
had worked with Stanislavski, and Gordon subsequently took regular workshops with Sanford Meisner in New York and briefly with Lee Strasberg. Gordon taught acting in Sydney for forty years, starting weekly classes in 1956. By the 1960s he was aided by his co-teacher Zika Nestor, who had been his student and who could read Stanislavski in Russian. After working professionally for over a decade in American theatre and in Broadway musicals, Gordon had arrived in Australia in 1952 to escape Senator McCarthy’s restrictive employment purges, and he established The Ensemble Theatre in Sydney, which continues today although the associated Ensemble Studios closed in 2009. The Ensemble Theatre became well known for its alternating repertoire of drama which championed social justice, and commercially successful productions that ensured the theatre’s financial survival. The Ensemble Studios taught generations of performers who were often attracted to Gordon’s left-leaning political perspectives, many of whom became teachers of actors. Gordon was widely known as an important teacher who emphasized Stanislavskian techniques and psychological interpretations of the character in combination with the actor’s experience. In contrast to NIDA, which chose its first cohort in 1959 through a selective audition process, the Ensemble Studios were open to all who wanted to learn acting.

Australian Aboriginal actor and director, Brian Syron, became another leading teacher in Sydney with strong connections to the USA and American methods (Interview Lisa-Mare Syron 2017). He began his training with Gordon in Sydney, and he subsequently trained with Stella Adler in New York. Syron recounts: “I was the first Australian to study with Stella Adler and one of the few Australians who learnt the Stanislavski drama techniques from so close to the source”. Born in Balmain, Sydney, in 1934, Syron was a man of Birripi heritage, connected to what is now being recognized as a 60,000-year-old living culture and performance tradition. He first trained at The Ensemble with Hayes Gordon in 1960 and left Australia in 1961 to live in Europe and New York and where he worked as a model, and began actor training with Adler. In 1963 he travelled to the UK and studied with voice teacher Cicely Berry and method acting teacher Doreen Cannon, at the Drama Centre, before returning to the USA to continue his training with Adler and other teachers. Whilst living in the USA he worked professionally as an actor and director. Syron witnessed and was inspired by the American Civil Rights Movement for racial equality and when he returned to Australia in 1968, the
Australian Aboriginal Rights Movement was gaining momentum and included a Black Theatre. Syron quickly became central to promoting these important cultural changes. In 1969, Syron began offering acting classes for Australian Aboriginal actors and later opened his studio to non-Aboriginal actors. As a teacher, he emphasized exercises that promoted relaxation and the physical transformation and he was rigorous about the need for detail in a performance and for imaginative connections to the world of the play.

Syron invited Stella Adler to Australia in 1973 to give a series of workshops, and in 1974, he travelled to Los Angeles to work at Adler’s studio there. Syron also took over Hayes Gordon’s teaching at the Ensemble Studios when Gordon returned to his signature role in *Fiddler on the Roof* during the 1980s. Syron continued teaching intermittently until 1992. Sadly he died prematurely in 1993.

Syron’s approach came from a unique combination of sustained training in leading interpretations of Stanislavski’s system, and his developing awareness of Aboriginal performance practice. His teaching and directorial approach had immeasurable significance for many Australian actors and was particularly crucial in the training of Australian Aboriginal actors.

American-influenced training became a central part of NIDA training through the preeminent contribution of Kevin Jackson who taught there for twenty-seven years (Interview with Jackson 2017). He trained generations of performers including internationally renowned film actors; numerous ex-students continue to work in the industry as actors, directors and writers, and also as teachers. Jackson graduated as an actor in 1971 from NIDA, where he had been taught by leading figures in the New Wave of Australian theatre such as John Bell, Alexander Hay, Aubrey Mellor and John Clark. He was taught movement by the esteemed Keith Bain and Margaret Barr. Jackson returned to NIDA first as an acting teacher and then as Head of Acting from 1985 to 1988. He subsequently took on a part-time position while concurrently teaching at the American Conservatory Theatre (ACT) in San Francisco. The NIDA teaching team who worked alongside Kevin Jackson included Tony Knight and Dean Carey, and Carey later set up the well-known private studio in Sydney, The Actor’s Centre. Jackson left NIDA in 2011 but continues to teach.
Jackson describes two periods of work that affected him deeply and shaped him as a teacher, and his background illustrates the two major sources of influence in Australia from British and American approaches. From 1975 to 1981, Jackson was employed by artistic director Doreen Warburton, at the Q Theatre, Penrith, Sydney, where he also conducted workshops for young people from the outer Sydney suburbs. Working with Warburton, Jackson gained insights into work developed by Joan Littlewood, and UK-based community theatres influenced by Brechtian political theatre.

In 1983, Jackson spent six months observing the working processes at ACT led by influential American teachers Alan Fletcher and Larry Hecht. The curriculum there is based on an organizational model of the kind espoused by Saint-Denis in which a training school and a professional theatre are connected to allow students to learn from experienced actors while continuing their training. The teaching at ACT combines the principles of emotional and sense memory derived from Stanislavski but reinterpreted through the American Method in conjunction with rigorous vocal, physical and intellectual development of the actor. Jackson continued to learn from Hecht and Fletcher on his return to the USA in 1986, and his time spent working as a teacher at the ACT.

Jackson views his teaching as an amalgam of lessons and insights accrued over a long period. He learnt about text analysis and stage skill from his British-trained teachers (for example, John Bell), but he believes it was his engagement with teachers in the USA that led him to understand how the actor can access and express feeling. He recognizes that his approach is based in Stanislavski’s System but he believes it is continually evolving and he acknowledges the influences of Uta Hagen, Saint-Denis, Mike Alfreds and Susan Baston through their books. While Jackson provides a clear indication of widely used paradigmatic practices from outside Australia that combine those from Britain and from the USA, he is also expressly revealing the importance of publications for teachers and students of acting in Australia.

American-influenced approaches in Australia become a clear trend exemplified by Gordon, Syron and Jackson, who demonstrate how the influence of Stanislavski remained central to training in Australia. Students of these teachers continue to teach in a variety of contexts and tertiary courses.
Exporting Australian Training

As Stanislavski-influenced approaches underwent further development, Australian interpretations were receiving recognition in training courses outside Australia. Training in Stanislavski’s System was available at the VCA in Melbourne from the 1970s into the 1980s, taught by the founding Dean of Drama, Peter Oyston, and his teaching is documented in a film. He had a substantial career as a theatre director in Britain during the 1960s, and later Oyston was invited to teach at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) in London. Similarly, the two teachers presented in detail here, Aarne Neeme and Terence Crawford, taught in training institutions in Australia before teaching outside Australia in Singapore. Significantly, Crawford authored books on actor training: *Dimensions of Acting: An Australian Approach* and *Trade Secrets: Australian Actors and Their Craft*.

While Neeme’s initial training was in dance rather than theatre, his background illustrates the types of training becoming available in Australia and his teaching includes Stanislavski-influenced approaches (Interview with Beddie 2017). Neeme trained by working in professional theatre, which was the traditional way of training, but also by studying theatre in a university course, which was a new opportunity. Neeme was Head of Theatre at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA) from 1985 to 1989, teaching acting and theatre history in a team that included Lisle Jones and Chris Edmund – also interviewed in this research. In 1992 Neeme set up the inaugural theatre studies course at the University of Singapore and he taught screen acting at Adelaide College of the Arts and Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS) and directed at Intercultural Theatre Institute (ITI), Singapore.

Born to an Estonian family in Germany, Neeme migrated to Australia with his family when he was four years old, and initially he performed with Australia’s National Theatre Ballet Company. From 1963 to 1965, he was a fulltime member of the Emerald Hill Theatre Company in South Melbourne, learning to act and being mentored by director Wal Cherry (see below). In 1966 Neeme studied with the newly established Drama Department at the University of New South Wales (UNSW), where he was taught by the Australian theatre expert Phillip Parsons, studying alongside influential director Rex Cramphorn.
Neeme’s approach to actor training is also influenced by reading the works of Stanislavski and Michael Chekhov. He has an interest in the movement vocabulary of Laban and improvisational games such as those devised by the highly influential Viola Spolin. Teaching at WAAPA, Neeme encountered the work and books of Robert Benedetti, on Stanislavski-derived techniques. Neeme focuses strongly on text analysis in teaching and discerning the Given Circumstances through a close reading of the script and he also encourages students to clearly identify actions and objectives.

The ongoing theatre industry experience of teachers became increasingly valued during the 1980s and 1990s. Neeme’s extensive professional directing career encompasses being Resident Director at Nimrod Theatre Co. from 1971 to 1972 and holding Artistic Directorships of the National Theatre Company, Perth, and Hole in the Wall Theatre, Perth, and the Hunter Valley Theatre Company, Newcastle. Neeme directed productions in Australia, Singapore and New Zealand.

The more recent pattern of training for Australian teachers within tertiary courses had emerged by the 1980s, and it is illustrated by Terence Crawford who trained at NIDA, graduating in 1984 (Interview with Beddie 2017). He is currently Head of Acting at Adelaide College of the Arts, and was previously Head of Acting, Theatre Nepean, University of Western Sydney, from 1997 to 2002. (This actor training course has ceased). Crawford held similar roles at both Theatre Training and Research Program in Singapore (now known as Intercultural Theatre Institute) and LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore. Although he did not adopt Asian theatre training styles, Crawford taught a number of graduates who have become well-known actors working across Asia. Crawford continues to work as an actor, playwright and director.

As a teenager, Crawford began performing at the youth theatre in Newcastle and was taught by Wendy Leis, and at NIDA he was taught by Nick Enright. Although Enright became most well known as a playwright and as a film writer in the USA, he had acted in commercial theatre as a teenager before completing a BA at the University of Sydney in 1971. After working with Nimrod Theatre, Enright subsequently completed an MA at New York University’s TISCH School of the Arts in 1977. He became Head of Acting at NIDA in 1983 and taught students to work closely with
text in a Stanislavskian approach – probably influenced by Hagen – and to find ways to identify with the play.

Enright influenced Crawford who elaborates on American influences in *Dimensions of Acting*, discussing both Meisner’s and Strasberg’s modifications of Stanislavski’s ideas and practices. There is a psychological dimension to Crawford’s approach that reflects American ones because he is interested in family influences and early relationships that shape the actor. But Crawford recommends Stanislavski’s books in his teaching and he continues to use aspects of Hagen’s textual analysis, which he was taught at NIDA. He incorporates this with the physical work that allows the actor to discover the relationships in the scene and the intentions of the characters. This physical process emerges from Crawford’s own experiences as an actor and through his interactions with Lindy Davies and her approach to rehearsal, in an interesting cross-over of approaches. It allows an identification of the “stakes” in the scene and might be thought of as a psycho-physical approach. Crawford believes it is important for the actor to be able to self-diagnose to understand what is and is not working. Crawford stresses the need to teach the actor about theatrical dramaturgy in order to understand what the text or project requires, as he seeks to develop “the dramaturgical actor”.

The continuing influence of significant American teachers and supported by publications is apparent in the approaches of leading Australian teachers who remain keenly aware of Stanislavski’s work as the originating source. Australian teachers have learnt from a number of leading interpreters and this means that students are being taught within international approaches. Invited to teach in the USA, Singapore and London, Australian teachers demonstrate that Australian interpretations of Stanislavski have become sufficiently established to be taught internationally.

**Complex British Influences**

Although American influences on Australian actor training became increasingly important, actor training remained strongly connected to British theatre but in more complex ways. Certainly a large number of Australian actors, directors and designers continued to go to Britain for professional experience until the late twentieth century,
when opportunities in the USA for film work, began to take precedence. A training through working in professional theatre including on English drama and Shakespeare’s plays must not be underestimated in a pattern that traditionally shaped Australian acting. Although British training included interpretations of Stanislavski’s work on text, it was a more expansive process than it might first appear, since it included the ongoing influence of left-leaning British political and socially inclusive theatre practices. For example, English interpretations of Brecht, and the aforementioned Joan Littlewood who had been also influenced by Rudolf Laban. British approaches that influenced later decades of twentieth-century performance training in Australia were diverse.

A training background from Britain becomes complicated by the British integration of European practice. As indicated, an important twentieth-century influence was Frenchman, Saint-Denis who developed the London Theatre School in 1936 and The Old Vic Theatre School from 1947. His approach became highly influential in British training, and Saint-Denis also influenced actor training curriculum in the post-World War Two era internationally, developing the first curriculum as the Director of the Juilliard Drama Division, and at the National Theater School of Canada. Saint-Denis was a twentieth-century theatre director trained in movement and mask work by Jacques Copeau and Suzanne Bing, who developed non-realistic improvised and expressionist performance in the 1920s. As a director Saint-Denis valued stylized performance as well as poetic realism influenced by Stanislavski whom he met in 1922. Saint-Denis promoted the value of specialist actor training – and director training – within a comprehensive curriculum that included physical training in movement techniques and was taught by a team of specialist teachers.

Australian actors and directors who travelled to England in the late 1950s and into the 1960s encountered teachers influenced by the Old Vic teachers and students. They brought their embodied knowledge of contemporary British theatre practice back to Australia, where it was applied within the profession. Two participants in the research discussed here, Lisle Jones and Chris Edmund, provide examples of a cohort of teachers who were British trained and connected to specific practices in Britain.
Australian-born Lisle Jones exemplifies the pattern whereby Australians worked in Britain but returned to Australia with extensive experience (Interview with Beddie 2017). Jones worked as an actor in both Australia and Britain for several decades and he taught acting in Britain and then Australia for over sixty years. His initial work in Australia included working with director Doris Fitton, and he joined The Shakespeare Memorial Theatre Company as an actor on their first Australian tour in 1953. After an extended period of work with Gertrude Johnston at the National Theatre, St Kilda, Melbourne, he went to Britain in 1958 where he worked as a professional actor before becoming Head of the Drama Department at London’s Arts Educational School, a position he held for a number of years. Jones was invited by Nigel Rideout to return to Australia in 1980 to join the staff at the recently formed WAAPA. Rideout, formerly the head of The London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA), had set up WAAPA’s Theatre Department at Edith Cowan University. Jones took up the role of Head of Acting and later became Head of Theatre Department, only retiring in 1995.

Jones reflects a tradition of training by working in Australian theatre during the 1950s and then British theatre in the 1960s and 1970s. He gained his knowledge of acting from the practical experience of performing. Interestingly, however, he is adamant that effective actor training requires a well-designed and integrated curriculum and not merely a series of acting master classes. This turns out to be a common perspective among the interviewed teachers. As well, Jones recognizes the usefulness of certain American approaches and he values how Robert Benedetti’s *The Actor at Work* provides a sequenced and thorough process and emphasizes how to create character. Jones is also confirming the importance of publications.

Another British-trained teacher, Chris Edmund is a director and acting teacher who worked at WAAPA for twenty-seven years and as Head of the Theatre Department from 2002 to 2014 (Interview with Beddie 2017). Edmund is a playwright whose works include *Paradise* and *Bacon and Eggs*, and recently he also became an exhibited painter. As a teenager, British-born Edmund worked as an usher at the Aldwych Theatre in London and witnessed the work of important contemporary directors through the World Theatre Seasons from 1964 to 1973, and the international companies included the Comédie Française, the Moscow Art Theatre and the Abbey Theatre.
Significantly, Edmund trained as an actor at Rose Bruford College with Jean Benedetti, a leading British-based translator and interpreter of Stanislavski’s work. Not long after graduating, Edmund returned to Rose Bruford to direct students, and in 1978 he began teaching at the Drama Studio, London. In 1980 he went to Berkeley, California, to set up a branch of London’s Drama Studio there. Edmund attributes influences beyond his own actor training to Mike Leigh’s improvisational model of developing work and character, and also the Brechtian approaches adapted by Edward Bond and the director William Gaskill, both of whom explore political ideas through theatre. Edmund’s interest in actions and objectives was developed through observing and following the work of British director Max Stafford-Clark, who drew on Stanislavski’s approach.

Edmund first came to WAAPA in Perth in 1983 when he was invited by Rideout to direct a student production. In 1985 he moved to Perth and in 1988 he took on the role of Head of Directing at WAAPA with Aarne Neeme as the Head of Theatre Department. The role of Head of Directing meant Edmund was responsible for programming plays and also directing acting students in productions and in group-devised theatre. He further initiated a series of research projects with students across the three years of training, with workshops developing material in the first year that Edmund then structured into a script for a production for the entire ensemble by third year. Students were learning to devise their own theatre.

British influences on Australian actor training include the intersecting international approaches that have been integrated into the theatre culture of Britain. These have fostered major international approaches within training in Australia.

**Political and European Influences**

Australia’s performance training includes politically orientated theatre, which remains significant within the art form. The two teachers presented below introduced Australian acting students to the politically focused approaches of Brecht, Vsevolod Meyerhold and theatre about gender, racial and ethnic identity. They were both directors who continued to direct professionally, and their teaching not only confirms the internationalism of Australian training, but particular European influences.

Australian director Wal Cherry directed the first Australian production of a play by Brecht in 1959 and, appointed as the first Professor of Drama at Flinders University,
South Australia, he founded its Drama Centre in 1967 (Interview with Kate Cherry by Beddie 2017). His interest in performance began through the type of training offered by student theatre at the University of Melbourne, from 1951 to 1954, and in 1956, he was appointed director of the Union Theatre Repertory Company (UTRC), which later became the Melbourne Theatre Company (MTC). From 1956 to 1959, Cherry worked at UTRC directing texts by contemporary British and American playwrights such as Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams. In 1958 he travelled to Europe on a study tour and saw the work of the Berliner Ensemble and other companies and on his return directed *The Threepenny Opera* by Brecht (and Elisabeth Hauptmann) in 1959. In 1962, together with George Whaley, Cherry established Emerald Hill Theatre Company in South Melbourne, an ensemble theatre that included Neeme, and where Cherry experimented with introducing new international theatre forms and writing until the company closed in 1966.

Actor training at Flinders University under Cherry emphasized production experience. Influenced by the ideas of Stanislavski, Brecht, Artaud and Richard Schechner, Cherry also worked alongside a diverse group of teachers whose training was thoroughly international. He continued to direct Brecht’s works throughout the 1970s collaborating with John Willet, Brecht’s translator. In 1980 Cherry was invited to become Professor of Theatre at Temple University, Philadelphia, and in 1985 he became associate director of The Boston Shakespeare Company. He died unexpectedly in 1986.

When Julie Holledge was appointed as the artistic director of the Drama Centre, Flinders University in 1981, she brought a background in professional theatre practice combined with academic scholarship. British-born Holledge was a performer and a director who had worked in leading innovative political theatres and she held a doctorate in the theory of theatre, and suffrage theatre practice (Interview with Tait 2018). She was artistic director at the Drama Centre until 2010, and directed over twenty professional productions, a number of which involved important collaborations with Asian artists. Holledge is well recognized internationally for her scholarship on feminist theatre, intercultural theatre, Ibsen’s drama and digital approaches to humanities and she became Professor of Drama in 2000, and a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Humanities in 2018.
An early major influence on Holledge’s work was that of her mother, June Myles, who had trained in theatre at the Royal Academy of Music. Myles’ training drew on a British heritage of stage technique that went back to David Garrick and included techniques for characterization and vocal control, although influences on Myles during the 1930s also included Theodore Komissarzhevski. An appreciation of stage technique meant that as Drama Centre director, for example, Holledge would look to Jo Estill from the USA specializing in the anatomy of the voice.

Holledge trained in performance at the University of Bristol from 1969 to 1972, which was the first such course of this type offered by a university in Britain. It brought in teachers of acting from the Old Vic School and the university staff included Edward Braun, the English language translator and interpreter of Meyerhold’s work. Holledge’s appointment was the first clear indication of a Meyerholdian influence on a teacher in Australia. From 1972 until 1981, Holledge worked in professional theatre that was influenced by the alternative theatre movement including agit prop theatre, German political theatre and Brecht, and significantly, ground-breaking feminist theatre. Holledge became the first director of the Women’s Theatre Group from 1978 to 1981, a seminal British theatre group.

As a teacher, Holledge engages in a collaborative process of discovery and experimentation in her work with students, encouraging them to become conceptualisers of their own work as well as interpreters of the work of others. Holledge draws on a wide range of approaches, with which to experiment and find out what works. She strongly advocates a fully developed curriculum taught by a team and to include workshops and training of the body and voice to develop the necessary skills to work across contrasting aesthetic forms within the theatre and film industries.

The approaches of the leading innovators in the twentieth-century theatre form are clearly integrated into Australian training. As seminal creators of realism and nonrealism, and aesthetic stylization, Stanislavski, Meyerhold and Brecht point to an intellectual tradition of twentieth century actor training developing in Australia. The long-term impact of these influences is evident in the diverse work of graduate performers, directors and writers, nationally and internationally.

**Conclusion**
As the training histories of an influential cohort of teachers working in Australia reveal, performance training was completely connected to international developments. While this training was predominantly influenced by interpretations of Stanislavski’s approach towards the end of the twentieth century, the Australian context also reflected a diverse range of these approaches, brought (back) to Australia by individual teachers who worked in both private studios and the conservatorium tertiary sector. While Australian teachers have adapted and expanded these techniques, often through synthesis, the major tenets of leading international approaches are clearly identifiable in their backgrounds. Their students were taught within international styles even with an Australian emphasis. This arguably contributes to the success of the Australian actors overseas.

As the diagrammatic mapping of the background of Australian teachers reveals, institutional training offered strong combinations of international approaches. Several key teachers returned to teach where they had trained, for example, when Syron returned to teach at The Ensemble Theatre Studios and Jackson returned to teach at NIDA. Teachers trained in Australia, such as Crawford and Neeme, went on to teach overseas and it becomes more common for professional directors, including Cherry and Hollide, to train actors in courses – and given that directors once trained by directing actors in professional productions. These patterns indicate a vital dynamic relationship between Australian theatre and its performance training.

Such patterns continue into the twenty-first century, as the students of the teachers in this research began teaching. For example, actors and directors who trained at NIDA and have become established teachers include: Rosalba Clemente at the Drama Centre, Flinders University; Glenda Linscott at WAAPA; Andrea Moor at QUT; and John Bashford, the current Head of Acting at NIDA. In addition to developing lineages of teachers in international approaches, Australia has enthusiastically embraced physical and exploratory processes in training which will be explored in subsequent articles.

The research finds that there have been strong connections between teaching peers working in Australian institutions and schools. Teachers influence each other in the context of working together and this provides a dimension to training that is not immediately apparent, but indicates some of the ways in which teachers develop their
own teaching capacity over time. Australian training is unmistakably supported by international publications on acting and potentially by theatre studies scholarship.

Australian training during the second half of the twentieth century became an extension of Stanislavski-derived psycho-physical approaches, whether influenced by American and/or British interpretations. A comparable expansion becomes evident among teachers influenced by British approaches and by European political theatre. Teachers synthesize their professional experience, intellectual reflection and training to promote the continuing development of international performance training in Australia.

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**Interviews**

John Bolton interview with Melanie Beddie 16 November 2017
Wal Cherry, interview with Kate Cherry by Melanie Beddie 8 June 2017
Terence Crawford interview with Melanie Beddie 5 June 2017
Lindy Davies interview with Melanie Beddie 10 June 2017
Kim Durban interview with Melanie Beddie 17 May 2017
Chris Edmund interview with Melanie Beddie 24 July 2017
Julie Holledge interview with Peta Tait 15 November 2018
Kevin Jackson interview with Melanie Beddie 8 June 2017
Lisle Jones interview with Melanie Beddie 21 June 2017
David Latham interview with Melanie Beddie 3 October 2017
Robert Meldrum interview with Melanie Beddie 9 May 2017
Aarne Neeme interview with Melanie Beddie 13 December 2017
Brian Syron, interview with Lisa-Mare Syron by Melanie Beddie 9 June 2017.


4 For a description and diagram for each interviewed participant in the 2017–2018 research, see AusStage.edu.au (search by Name> click document>click La Trobe University Library). This research project, “Performer Training in Australia and International Practice”, was funded by La Trobe University in 2017–2018. The project was one section of a proposed larger project to investigate the history of actor training in Australia in conjunction with Professor Anne Pender and Associate Professor Ian Maxwell.
6 Prior, Teaching Actors.
7 Ibid., 104.
8 Ibid., 91.
9 Ibid., xxi.
11 Andrea Moor. “Contemporary Actor Training in Australia.” Doctorate, Queensland University of Technology, 2013. Moor has also taught at Western Australian Academy of the Performing Arts (WAAPA) and NIDA.
12 NIDA: acting, Tony Knight, Kevin Jackson; voice, Bill Pepper, Betty Williams, Katerina Moraitis. QUT: acting: Dianne Eden, Leonard Meenach. VCA: acting: Lindy Davies, Tanya Gerstle, Melanie
Beddie; voice: Tony Smith. WAAPA: acting, Andrew Lewis, Chris Edmund, Angela Punch-McGregor; movement, Lisa Scott-Murphy; voice, Julia Moody, Donald Woodburn.


20 Tait, “Acting Idealism”.


25 Beddie in conversation about Syron’s (and Gordon’s) teaching with the ex-student, the acclaimed actor, Helen Morse, 10 June 2017.

26 Adrian Kiernander. John Bell and the Development of Australian Theatre. Amsterdam: Rodopi/Brill, 2014; also see AusStage.edu.au.


36 For Nimrod, see Julian Meyrick. See How It Runs: Nimrod and the New Wave. Sydney: Currency Press, 2002; for the other theatres, see Milne, Theatre Australia (Un)Limited.

37 In 1978 Neeme received a Churchill Fellowship to travel to Europe and the UK and Neeme was awarded an Order of Australia (AM) in 2013. In 1994 to 1995 he was artistic director of The Actors Centre, Sydney.
44 Saint-Denis, Training for the Theatre; Michel Saint-Denis. Theatre: The Rediscovery of Style and Other Writings, edited by J. Baldwin. London: Routledge, 2009; Baldwin, “Michel Saint-Denis”.
45 See: AusStage.edu.au.
47 Edmund directed student productions at National University of Singapore, Gaiety School of Dublin and Hong Kong Academy. Now resident in Melbourne, Edmund continues to teach, write and direct theatre in Australia and internationally.
48 From the 1950s student theatre at Australian universities becomes a type of training ground for young Australian performers and famously, for example, for actor/director, John Bell at the University of Sydney with SUDS. See Kiernander, John Bell; Dalton and Ginters, The Ripples Before.
49 See AusStage.edu.au.
50 The team at the Drama Centre included: Zora Semberova, Henry Salter, Bogdan Trukan, Moshe Kedem and Yutaka Wada.
51 Cherry received two Fulbright Scholarships, 1972 and 1976, for further study in the USA at a number of institutions including Cal Arts, University of San Diego, Riverside. He also received a fellowship to study in Japan from the Cultural and Social Centre for the Asia-Pacific Region in 1973.