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## **Convening the International Drama in Education Research Institute (IDIERI): past, present and futures**

### **Abstract**

Since its inaugural conference in 1995, the International Drama in Education Research Institute (IDIERI) has become one of the prominent research meetings in the field of drama education and applied theatre. Held triennially, IDIERI has brought together leading academics and practitioners to share practices and deepen their critical engagement with research. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on public health and international travel, as well as growing concerns around lowering carbon-emissions, has thrown the purpose of academic conferences into existential uncertainty. In July 2022, the University of Warwick is set to host the tenth IDIERI as a ‘hybrid’ live in-person and virtual conference with accompanying ‘local’ modes of workshop facilitation. This article offers a timely retrospective informed by reflections from past convenors and related literature. We analyse IDIERI’s role in the research community, focusing on its scope, its shifting boundaries and intersections, its internationalism and diversity, as well as its significance in the future sustainability of our evolving discipline.

### **Biographies**

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Jennifer Kitchen is a theatre education practitioner and scholar and currently teaches in Education Studies at The University of Warwick, in addition to co-ordinating the Monash-Warwick Alliance hosted International Conference of Undergraduate Research (ICUR). She completed her PhD on the social justice implications of playful and collaborative approaches to teaching Shakespeare in 2018. Her monograph *Critical Pedagogy and Active Approaches to Teaching Shakespeare* will be published by Cambridge University Press in 2022.

**Keywords:** International Drama in Education Research Institute (IDIERI), conferences, drama education history, applied theatre.

## Conferencing in a time of Coronavirus

The initial motivation behind this article was to produce a retrospective of the International Drama in Education Research Institute (IDIERI) as it was due to mark its 10<sup>th</sup> conference in July 2021 at the University of Warwick, UK. It seemed timely to revisit past conferences and to invite previous convenors to share their experiences as well as to reflect on what IDIERI represents for our research community today. However, in 2020, the gathering of human beings from across different parts of the globe to share physical space, dwell and work together was disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Live, in-person conferences were made virtual, deferred, or cancelled. As we write, we are preparing to host IDIERI in July 2022. The after-effects of the pandemic on public health, and international travel, as well as growing concerns around lowering carbon-emissions, have shaped our proposed modes of conference participation. As we will detail later in this article, we are offering a hybrid format of in-person participation at the University of Warwick, as well as online and ‘local’ modes of workshop facilitation. The pandemic has forced us to reassess the ways we communicate, connect and interact with others, arguably a key ontological quest at the heart of drama and theatre education. It has heralded new ways of being and, with it, a new lexicon of terms. To ‘socially distance’ is an anathema to so much of our drama practice, often predicated on fostering conviviality through physical proximity and social play. During these last two years, many drama and theatre practitioners and researchers have responded pragmatically and creatively by adapting and reimagining their diverse practices, methods, and research for the digitised, virtual space. Given that the chosen theme of our conference aims to explore ‘mess and complexity in uncertain times’, we feel somewhat prophetic. Decided *pre*-pandemic, it was coined in response to the immediacy of the climate crisis as well as political polarisation emerging across the world. Our theme invites the research community to contemplate the opportunities and challenges of ‘mess’, ‘complexity’ and ‘uncertainty’ in their differing contexts. However, we could not have envisaged such an unprecedented realignment of so-called ‘normal’ life. This article seeks to use this disruption as an opportunity to refresh our understanding of IDIERI’s origins, its evolution and its significance today.

### Methodological approach

We argue that conferences are worthy of meta-analysis as they occupy a vital place in the wider ecosystem of a field of study, and yet, they are a neglected, under-documented aspect of how a discipline develops. Inspired by a question posed by the Applied and Social Theatre Working Group at Theatre and Performance Research Association (TaPRA) in September 2021, this retrospective of IDIERI aims, in part, to respond to the question, ‘what histories are relatively unknown in applied and social theatre?’ and to the provocation to problematise acts of ‘remembrance, archiving, documentation, visibility, authority, representation: what gets recorded and why?’ (Hepplewhite, Massey-Chase & Smith 2021). Critically, very little archival or documentation of IDIERI exists. To inform our research, we invited past convenors to respond to a questionnaire focusing on specific aspects of IDIERI:

- core purpose
- boundaries and intersections in the field
- internationalism and diversity
- future opportunities and challenges.

We have analysed their reflections alongside existing literature on IDIERI. As demonstrated in Table 1, IDIERI has traversed countries and continents (more on the diversity of its locations and delegates later) and has tackled several pressing themes.

<b>No.</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>IDIERI theme</b>	<b>IDIERI venue</b>	<b>Conference Convenors</b>
<b>1</b>	1995	<b>New paradigms of research in drama education</b>	Brisbane, Australia	Phillip Taylor
<b>2</b>	1997	<b>The Practice of Research: The Research of Practice</b>	University of Victoria, Canada	Juliana Saxton and Carole Miller
<b>3</b>	2000	<b>Asking the Right Questions? Drama, Diversity and Research</b>	Ohio State University, US	Cecily O’Neill Brian Edmiston Christine Warner
<b>4</b>	2003	<b>Destabilising distinctions and definitions</b>	Northampton, England	Judith Ackroyd
<b>5</b>	2006	<b>Returning the Gaze, Reclaiming the Voice - Post-colonialism and its implications for Drama and Education</b>	University of West Indies, Jamaica	Brian Heap
<b>6</b>	2009	<b>Examining our past, critiquing our present, imagining tomorrow</b>	University of Sydney, Australia	Michael Anderson
<b>7</b>	2011	<b>Borders and Translations: towards new paradigms and languages in Drama Education</b>	Mary Immaculate College, Ireland	Michael Finneran
<b>8</b>	2015	<b>Open Culture in the Asian Century: Reimagining Drama Education</b>	CARE, Singapore	Prue Wales Charlene Rajendran
<b>9</b>	2018	<b>The Tyranny of Distance</b>	University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand	Peter O’Connor

*Table 1: Locations, themes and convenors of IDIERI 1995-2018.*

We are grateful to previous convenors for their insightful responses. A notable absent voice in this piece is Phillip Taylor, who passed away in June 2020. As Dani Snyder Young writes, Taylor was ‘instrumental in drawing together a global community of applied theatre scholars’ (2021: 167). We hope that this article demonstrates the important role he played in establishing IDIERI.

Given we are in the process of hosting IDIERI 10, we chose to focus mainly on the previous *convenors*’ experiences. In Helen Nicholson’s application of ‘critical genealogy’ to the field of drama education and applied theatre, she highlights the significance of ‘counter-

memories, questions the gaps and absences' (2011: 10) that exist outside of any official archive. We recognise that a range of *delegates'* perspectives would have provided alternative accounts of the explicit and implicit power relations at play, thus contributing to a more a comprehensive, diverse, and complex collective 'memory' of IDIERI. As Nicholson suggests, it is often the intangible and ephemeral interactions, 'the gossip, the debates, anecdotes, workshop practices, performances, and discussions as part of the physical network of relations' (Nicholson, 2010, 149) that contribute to a field's evolution. Nowhere is this more manifest than in the dynamic context of an academic conference. We hope to uncover some of the key issues around hosting to inform IDIERI 10.

### **IDIERI's Core Purpose**

Phillip Taylor convened the first IDIERI in 1995 at Griffith University, Australia stating that:

An institute can become a beacon through which emerging understandings happen, where stereotypical notions can be challenged, where new beginnings occur (Taylor 1996: preface).

With the exception of IDIERI 2 and the forthcoming IDIERI 10, the conference has been held triennially, and has brought together leading academics, practitioners and postgraduate students to explore new paradigms, share practices and deepen their critical engagement with research. The 'institute' of IDIERI perhaps suggests a more formal institution than the reality. There is no standing committee or board of official members, but a rolling group of conference convenors within a growing and shifting international research community concerned with drama and theatre in applied and educational forms. IDIERI 3 co-convenor, Cecily O'Neil, states that IDIERI is a 'loosely organised but vibrant community of discourse' (O'Neil 2019: 50) and this was reflected in the range of perspectives offered by past convenors. Some emphasised the 'research institution' remit of IDIERI, arguing that it should, first and foremost, be an event for sharing and developing academic scholarship. Others highlighted the rich connections IDIERI holds in sharing (and reflecting on) cutting-edge practice amongst teaching practitioners and artists.

In their helpful chronology of the complex developments in the field, Gallagher, Rhoades, Bie and Cardwell explain that 'drama education/applied theatre is young as a discipline within the academy' (2017) and IDIERI has been fundamental in elevating the status of the emerging field through its global research networks and outputs. Whilst the scale and format of IDIERI has expanded and evolved over the years, across all previous convenors' responses was a consensus that IDIERI's core purpose is to engage delegates in rich discussions about pioneering research practices, paradigms and methodologies in the field of drama education and applied drama/theatre. Peter O'Connor emphasised that IDIERI aims to attract high-quality submissions in order to 'push the boundaries of our research' and should 'avoid being a staging ground for teaching the basics of applied drama/theatre' (O'Connor 08 February 2021 questionnaire). Likewise, 2011 host Michael Finneran stressed that IDIERI should provide delegates with a reflective/reflexive space that avoids the pitfalls of pure advocacy (Finneran 28 February 2020 questionnaire). It is worth returning to its origins to understand why *critical* engagement with research remains a key aspiration.

At the time of the inaugural IDIERI in 1995, with the new millennium beckoning, there was a confluence of key happenings in the field. IDIERI was part of three related conferences including the Drama and Theatre in Education Research Conference convened by John Somers at the University of Exeter as well as the International Drama Education Association (IDEA), established in Portugal in 1992. The creation of such conferences was indicative of what Nicholson recounts as a 'new scholarly interest in theorising forms of drama ... in a range of

community and educational settings' (2010: 151) and this correlated with a proliferation in drama and theatre education courses in higher education (Nicholson 2010; Gallagher, Rhoades, Bie and Cardwell 2017). A year after the first IDIERI conference, the first edition of the *Research in Drama Education (RiDE)* journal was published and soon after, in 2000, the *Applied Theatre Researcher* was launched, further contributing to the burgeoning ambition of the field. This alignment of university courses, academic research and access to international conferences has been critical, creating what Michael Anderson describes as an 'infrastructure for drama education research and practice' (2012: 13).

### **IDIERI's evolving format and ethos**

Emerging from the convenors' responses was an emphasis on creating the conditions for rich dialogue, attributed to keeping the overall delegation relatively small. Indeed, recent meetings have had between 180 and 230 delegates. Repeatedly, past convenors referred to 'intimacy' and 'care' as key qualities they had experienced as delegates and had attempted to recreate as hosts. This dates back to Phillip Taylor's first IDIERI which was designed to foster in-depth dialogue around the complex hybridity of the 'teacher-researcher' or 'practitioner-researcher'. There was a deep suspicion of many of the traditional positivist methodologies that were being applied ubiquitously in educational research. Inspired by Schön's 'reflective practitioner' (1995), teachers were taking ownership of their research methods, engaging reflectively and reflexively in their work and deploying innovative, radical approaches to make sense of the living contexts of their practice. For Taylor, it was vital that teacher-researchers engaged in deeper theoretical positions that 'challenged qualitative researchers to examine the ethical frameworks being reinforced by educational practices' (Taylor 1996: 8). At IDIERI 2 Saxton and Miller developed a series of 'demonstration masterclasses' led by prominent practitioners and chaired by PhD students. They argue that these participatory workshops allowed them, as hosts, to 'create a conference not only on research and practice but one that was itself an act of research' (Saxton and Miller 21 April 2020 questionnaire).

When Judith Ackroyd took on the role of host in 2004, she developed this further by inviting drama educator Jonothan Neelands to lead a series of morning workshops, with participants advised to act 'as researchers with different methodologies in mind' (Ackroyd 24 April 2020 questionnaire). This process led to Ackroyd's edited collection (2006) with contributing authors covering key areas such as case study research, reflective practice and critical ethnography. It remains one of the seminal texts on methodologies in drama education, demonstrating one way ephemeral IDIERI experiences have become central to the field's scholarship.

For Brian Edmiston, the learning remit of the conference was at the forefront of his and his co-convenors' considerations in hosting IDIERI 3, namely creating space 'to be able to learn with and from one another' (Edmiston 03 March 2021 questionnaire). He emphasised this dialogic learning as a core value of IDIERI, above 'standard' conference activities of presenting and networking. IDIERI as a platform for 'praxis' became less of a notable feature of subsequent IDIERI meetings, however. In 2015, when reflecting on changes in the field, O'Connor suggests that the 'travelling masterclasses' (2015: 370) that had internationalised the practice of 'Dorothy Heathcote, Augusto Boal, Cecily O'Neill, Jonothan Neelands' (370) had become less prominent and that educational drama had moved from what he calls a 'pre-theory' to a 'post-practice' moment. O'Connor attributes this to the fact that 'universities value theorised accounts of practice over practice itself' (370), but he is clear that whilst this shift away from practice may be a loss, it is indicative that the field has become both less inward-looking and more willing to engage critically with theory leading to significant interdisciplinary connections. As hosts of IDIERI 10, we are mindful about ways we might

circle back to a focus on praxis, not least because the pandemic has taken away so many opportunities to share practice in-person. Whilst the virtual space provides us with ways of bridging geographical separation, IDIERI 10 is an opportune moment to re-engage with the virtues of a collaborative workshop or ‘masterclass’.

When discussing the ethos of his experience as both a delegate of previous IDIERIs and as host of IDIERI 6, Michael Anderson, echoing the responses of many past convenors, emphasised how meaningful the in-person experience of attending a live conference had been for him, leading to lifelong friendships and research collaborations. For Anderson, the conviviality that comes from ‘breaking bread together’ (Anderson 06 April 2020 questionnaire) is a vital part of the in-person conference experience. To this end, he aimed to create an ‘ethic of ‘care’ in which ‘everyone should feel as if they are included and cared for in a community’ (Anderson 06 April 2020 questionnaire). He shrewdly notes that ‘I can’t say we always achieved that but it was utmost in our planning and delivery of the event’. Conferences, even small convivial ones, are not *automatically* caring or welcoming spaces and can further delegates’ sense of exclusion through embedded hegemonic, hierarchical structures, as demonstrated by Jonny Saldaña’s provocative 2001 response to IDIERI 3. He describes his experience as a ‘marginalised scholar of colour’ as being at odds with a conference he felt posed ‘detached’ and naval-gazing questions (Saldaña 2001:100). This sentiment was echoed by Prue Wales and Charlene Rajendran (IDIERI 8), who argued that ‘the intimacy of mixing with the IDiERI family’ can mean that the community can become ‘too insular’ and not ‘open to new or different ways of seeing, thinking and doing’ (Wales and Rajendran 19 April 2020 questionnaire). In taking on the role of host, we are conscious of our positionalities as ‘white’ and ‘British’ females. Though these identity markers only tell part of our stories, we cannot ignore the privileges they bring us. As detailed later in the article, as scholars particularly concerned with hospitality and care (Kitchen 2021; Turner-King 2018), our programming and planning has involved seeking ways in which to create a more radical kind of hospitality by working in partnership with delegates ‘to produce dynamic and inclusive notions of shared space and togetherness’ (Turner-King 2018: 435).

### **Boundaries and intersections in the field**

IDIERI’s primary role is to enable scholars to share cutting-edge research across the interdisciplinary fields of Education Studies and Theatre and Performance Studies, contributing to the fields of health and wellbeing, ecology and sustainable development, indigenous studies, translation and migration studies, disability studies, queer studies, youth studies, care and social justice. As Saxton and Miller discuss, throughout IDIERI’s history, there has always been a clear focus on research in drama with ‘young children through to pre-service teacher education and Theatre in Education’ (Saxton and Miller 21 April 2020 questionnaire). It was clear for many of the past convenors that this should remain a key remit. Whilst a focus on education endures, applied drama/theatre practices and methods have become increasingly significant, as acknowledged by IDIERI 5 host, Brian Heap:

The scope of research has broadened widely over the decades with ideas of Applied Drama, Applied Theatre, Process Drama, Drama for Development, Aesthetics, Drama with Prisoners, Drama and Health, Drama with Refugees and Displaced people. The landscape is constantly changing (Heap 09 April 2020 questionnaire).

This expanding field has also been reflected in related scholarly outputs, notably the change of *RiDE*’s surtitle in 2009 to include: ‘The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance’. Anderson argues that such interdisciplinarity ‘does not limit the discussion; on the contrary, it

helps us to have a broader and richer discussion’ (Anderson 06 April 2020 questionnaire); while Edmiston likewise acknowledged that ‘permeability across messy boundaries is good for new growth. That’s where there can be cross-fertilization’ (Edmiston 08 March 2021 questionnaire)

From our perspective as future hosts of IDIERI, we cannot comprehend a viable international drama education conference *without* applied theatre research in its programme. By the time we entered the academy as early career researchers (2013 onwards), many of the past fault lines and territorial battles that had placed drama in education in a false dichotomy with applied drama/theatre had become more permeable and overlapping. Indeed, in their chronicling of the development of drama education, John O’Toole and Madonna Stinson emphasised that ‘drama education, has been a growing critical eclecticism, a blurring of definitions and a slipperiness of genre, including much more openness of form, collaborative generation of artwork and a readiness for cultural border crossing’ (O’Toole and Stinson 2009:198). Likewise, Gallagher, Rhoades, Bie and Cardwell (2017) emphasise how ‘an ever-richer theoretical terrain in the field has inspired new and complex questions’ that ‘stretches across and beyond the fields of sociology, psychology, education, philosophy, political science, and anthropology’. This resonates with past IDIERI convenors’ decision to include perspectives from the fields of post-colonialism, performance studies, critical social theory, history and cultural studies in an attempt to expand the cartography of our field.

Yet, for several of the past convenors, there was also a note of caution on this increased interdisciplinarity. They expressed a *responsibility* to preserve IDIERI’s identity as a space for educational drama and theatre due to the notable downturn of drama and performing arts in schools across past IDIERI hosts’ countries. As Anderson explains:

Drama education needed to re-imagine a way forward to ensure it remained relevant. By 2009 we had seen the decline of curriculum drama in schools internationally and I think that fired our resolve for a consideration of how we might re-invigorate drama education. (Anderson 06 April 2020 questionnaire)

This pull towards conservation comes from a recognition of the risk of erasure of the discipline. Notably, Finneran’s IDIERI 7 tackled the theme of ‘borderlands’ head on:

I wanted us to talk about the then generally identifiable trend in terms of the decline of drama education and the simultaneous though unrelated (my contention) growth in applied theatre practice. (Finneran 28 February 2020 questionnaire)

Edmiston argues that this goes beyond subject-specific advocacy and connects to the humanistic potential of drama pedagogy to address some of the most urgent and high stakes issues of 21<sup>st</sup> century culture and education (Edmiston 08 March 2021questionnaire) Wales and Rajendran’s IDIERI 8 drew on Singapore theatre doyen Kuo Pao Kun’s concept of ‘Open Culture’, provoking debate around the creative and innovative potential of border-crossing by examining the ways cultures, disciplines and practices might be ‘simultaneously rooted in situated histories and open to multiple influences, without fear of dissolution or loss of identity’ (Wales and Rajendran 19 April 2020 questionnaire). This tension persists. In our experience of marketing IDIERI 10, it has come to light that some scholars, who identify with the field of ‘applied theatre’, were unaware of IDIERI and thought it was a conference solely for drama educationalists. This suggests that if there is an interest and appetite within the field to be more inclusive of applied theatre and other relevant interdisciplinary scholarship then there is still further work to be done to make IDIERI visible and accessible to these fields.



## **Internationalism and diversity**

IDIERI, as the name suggests, has from its beginning been international in its delegates and its perspectives. The conference has been hosted across the globe (see Table 1) and has incubated a range of international research collaborations. However, a core issue within this internationalism, repeatedly mentioned in the past convenors' responses, is the continued focus on the global north. IDIERI has typically been attended by delegates from socio-economically developed countries with notable absence of scholars working in the global south.<sup>1</sup> Such hierarchies have manifested across IDIERI's history, raising questions of access, representation and inclusivity as well as the focus, framing and diversity of scholarship. Some hosts have grappled with these issues by explicitly centring diversity and postcolonialism within the conference theme. Examples include IDIERI 3's 'Asking the Right Questions: Drama, Diversity and Research', concerned specifically with US social inequality and racial injustice, and IDIERI 5's 'Returning the Gaze, Reclaiming the Voice - Post-colonialism and its implications for Drama and Education', a response to the underrepresentation of scholars of colour at previous conferences. For other convenors, questions of diversity, inclusion, colonialism and conflict were present, explored through lived and localised understandings. For example, IDIERI 7 (Republic of Ireland) sought to highlight and explore the implications of the Republic's border with Northern Ireland, whilst IDIERI 9 (New Zealand) provided opportunities to, as O'Connor describes, 'engage in the postcolonial structures that govern our way of being, that sits alongside indigenous ways of knowing' (O'Connor 08 February 2020 questionnaire).

As the next hosts of IDIERI 10, we are all too aware that this continues to be very much a live and knotty issue. Questions of inclusion and access for IDIERI manifest through multiple considerations, not only participation: who gets to host, present and attend the conference? What forms of scholarship, practice and knowledge formation are seen to 'count' within the academic conference? How do these questions of academic knowledge intersect with the balance of practice and theory within the field? As Wales and Rajendran raised in their responses, central to questions of diversity and inclusion for IDIERI are considerations of:

Practitioners who are not doing formal kinds of research with outcomes that are familiar with formal research (papers, etc). In a vast majority of countries there are no university courses for this field, so we need to consider who is going to be suited to attend IDIERI from these countries/regions, unless we are willing to include people who are conducting the non-formal areas of research. (Wales and Rajendran 19 April 2020 questionnaire)

How can IDIERI as a conference welcome and make space for geographically, methodologically and academically diverse practice-based scholarship? This already multifaceted question is further complexified by its unavoidable connections with other forms of exclusion, including gendered care responsibilities and challenges for the academic precariat who struggle to access funds to attend conferences at precisely the career stage when conference networking and research exposure would be most useful (Henderson and Burford 2020, 1). International conferences are inherently exclusive gatherings, attracting those with the capacity and material resources to be mobile. As Mike Featherstone argues, 'these mobile elites, who enjoy the freedom of physical movement and communication, stand in stark contrast to those who are confined to place, whose fate is to remain located' (Featherstone 2002: 1). Furthermore, questions of virtual access and accessibility have of course been accelerated by

the Covid-19 pandemic, enabling new modes of participation. For example, in response to the pandemic and the climate crisis, the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) was made entirely virtual allowing them to experiment with their format. They 'extended the program over six weeks' allowing delegates to join 'both synchronously and asynchronously' (Silova, Millei, Goebel, Manion and Rea 2020: 749) enabling a slower-paced participatory experience. Brian Heap, speaking from his experience of hosting IDIERI in Jamaica, discussed the inclusive potential of a more virtual conference model, circumventing the cost and visa issues which can disproportionately limit conference attendance for those without permanent institutional support or with caring responsibilities.

Whilst the Covid-19 pandemic has expedited the development of online conferencing platforms and has further exposed the ecological implications of international travel, online conferences are not a panacea. Issues of digital access still remain; and such platforms do not satisfactorily enable those wanting to share *practice-based* research with others within a globalised network, a central consideration for IDIERI. Embodied, practice-based conferencing, and the interdisciplinary 'open-spaces' (Monk, Chillington-Rutter, Neelands and Heron 2011) it can engender therefore remain central to issues of diversity and inclusion within IDIERI.

As hosts of IDIERI 10, we want to use the disruption caused by Covid-19 as an opportunity to reimagine conference participation. In collaboration with fellow IDIERI advisory committee member, Claire French, we are offering those unable to attend Warwick's in-person conference the opportunity to deliver a 'local' workshop (at a site close to them) by creating a network of university partners who will then share the various modes of practice in an online presentation.<sup>2</sup> This model is drawn in part from the innovative international digital conference practices of the Warwick Monash Alliance's International Conference of Undergraduate Research (Aldred and Barker 2020). This enables us to actively foster localised and community-focused connections with institutions in the global south in an explicit attempt to facilitate a more diverse delegation as well as piloting a more ecologically sustainable conference model.

Another route through questions of diversity and inclusion is suggested by the hosts of IDIERI 8, Wales and Rajendran who, conscious that this was the first time the conference had been held in Asia, turned the delegates' gaze towards the Singaporean environment:

We didn't just want our delegates to engage with each other, but with the location and the context. We wanted them to think beyond 'western' notions of seeing and consider the multiplicity within Singapore, their own countries and the IDIERI community itself. (Wales and Rajendran 19 April 2020 questionnaire)

Through a programme of local 'learning journeys', cultural engagement and carefully curated keynote speakers IDIERI 8 was designed not just to celebrate being present in a particular geographic space, but to draw on the epistemological affordances of a culture and community to think *through* that space in an attempt to decolonise, decentralise and problematise the often western-centric models of knowledge within applied and educational drama and theatre. This site-specific approach to hosting resonates with our aspirations for IDIERI 10. We want to avoid staging a conference in which delegates travel from around the globe, only to remain cocooned in a campus environment. We aim to welcome delegates to the culturally and ethnically diverse city of Coventry to engage with locally produced arts. Furthermore, we are

considering the ways scholars and practitioners accessing the conference online from diverse locations can be brought into meaningful engagement with artists working in Coventry.

### **Possible futures: IDIERI as a ‘barometer’ and a ‘catalyst’**

This delve into IDIERI’s past has led us to conceptualise IDIERI as both a ‘barometer’ and as a ‘catalyst’. As a barometer, IDIERI helps the research community gauge the changing conditions, dynamics and overall weaknesses and strengths of the field, as exemplified by O’Toole’s ‘reflective’ keynote at the 2009 conference, where he turned a research lens on the abstract programme to explore contemporary trends within the field (O’Toole 2010). Simultaneously, IDIERI is a catalyst in that it raises the profile of research, supports the development of postgraduate and early career academics and facilitates knowledge exchange that forges new international research connections. This has important political implications: IDIERI plays a key role in raising questions about the health of the drama and theatre ecosystem as a whole. If drama in schools has a reduced profile nationally and internationally, how robust is the sustainability of applied and educational drama and theatre in its broadest sense? As researchers of drama united under the platform of IDIERI, it is perhaps incumbent on us to make sense of this and work collectively to lobby governments. However, if we aspire to move towards a more radical inclusivity and to create space for more meaningful cross/inter/transdisciplinary connections, this needs more sustained time to germinate than a weeklong conference allows. IDIERI may ignite conversations, but the incubation and development of new knowledge has to be resourced and sustained elsewhere. To this end, both Saxton and Miller and Anderson recommended more work could be done by the IDIERI community to foster funded longitudinal, multi-sited research networks.

Gallagher, Rhoades, Bie and Cardwell characterise the history of the progressive discipline of drama education/applied theatre’ as ‘an ambitious, flawed, idealized, politicized, divisive, and deeply humanistic scholarly and practice-driven field’ (Gallagher, Rhoades, Bie and Cardwell 2017), and IDIERI has been a key contributor in influencing its entangled, messy non-linear evolution. Conferences are not neutral sites for the passive dissemination of research and the past nine IDIERI gatherings represent key moments in time and space, signifying the many cultural, political and social vicissitudes in the field. Not only this but they also contain living histories and the ‘embodied memories’ (Nicholson 2010; 153) of each one of its delegates and convenors. The IDIERI 10 conference theme invites delegates to turn *towards* mess, complexity and uncertainty with hope and imagination. Whilst we cannot reasonably propose to resolve the many knotty issues raised within this paper, this excavation of the past has reinvigorated ways of ‘imagining the future’ (Nicholson 2010: 153) of IDIERI. It has provided us with a timely reminder of the value of the live intimacy of the physical meeting place of a conference, precisely when attention is turning towards the digital and the virtual. Further, it has alerted us to the ways we might offer hybridised online and localised forms of participation in order to reach out and engage under-represented members of the wider ecosystem. When speaking about the impact of the pandemic, writer Arundhati Roy (2020) argues, ‘historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next’. Inspired by Roy’s rallying call, IDIERI 10 will be shaped by the research community’s imaginative capacity to see and do things differently, leading, perhaps, to radical and positive impacts.

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<sup>1</sup> In using this term, we refer to Nour Dados and Raewyn Connell's (2012) definition of the global south as 'regions outside Europe and North America, mostly (though not all) low-income and often politically or culturally marginalized' (2012: 12).

<sup>2</sup> Claire will become the Local Section Coordinator, pending funding.