

John O'Toole · Dale Bagshaw ·
Bruce Burton · Anita Grünbaum ·
Margret Lepp · Morag Morrison · Janet Pillai

Researching Conflict, Drama and Learning

The International DRACON Project

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*This book is dedicated to:
The dozens of schools, hundreds of teachers,
and especially the thousands of students who
participated in DRACON, and informed,
nourished and sustained all four national
projects.*

Foreword 1 (Conflict Mediation)

The core idea of *Researching Conflict, Drama and Learning: The International DRACON Project* is inspired. After reading it, you will wonder why we don't bring drama and conflict together more often. The authors explain how the fields of conflict studies and drama do actually overlap and share a lexicon: for example, words like *protagonist* and *antagonist*, used in conflict studies, are drawn from Greek drama. In practice, too, dramatic techniques like role-play are widely used not only to teach conflict transformation but also to examine students' grasp of processes like mediation. Reading this book, I was struck by the idea that techniques like role-play might be even more effectively used if those who teach and learn conflict transformation had more education in transformative drama.

The DRACON project explores the relationship between drama and conflict transformation in an impressively comprehensive way. The first part of the book lays down the conceptual foundations of the project. Theories of conflict transformation drawn from the academic field of conflict studies are explained, and then the theory and practice of transformative drama education is explicated. The second part of the book tells the stories of four action research teams, drawn from three different countries. A description of the local cultural and educational context provides a background for the reader: the school system, the student population, the researchers' expertise. Each chapter is then centred on reporting the action research: its aims, methods, the fieldwork and its analysis. Working in schools in very different cultural settings, each team developed its own program and teachers in particular will appreciate the variety of different creative processes used in the classrooms. Set across a time span of ten years, the research uses both quantitative and qualitative approaches, and results in findings which, taken together, make a substantial contribution to the teaching of drama and conflict transformation. The third part of the book reports on follow-up events that have occurred since the project officially finished, providing evidence of the capacity of DRACON to inspire and act as a catalyst across the globe. In terms of research, the book is very sound and thorough, demonstrating how different research techniques can be used to evaluate and refine courses in drama and conflict. The coverage of the issues and relevant theories and models is encyclopaedic.

The book raises a number of novel and interesting ideas. I will touch on several as examples to whet the readers' appetite. A person who is dogmatic and black and white in their thinking is not going to be a good candidate for mediation or similar conflict transformation processes. A key element of conflict transformation is the idea that conflict has a subjective dimension and the capacity to shift away from absolutes, to accept that different perspectives may be equally valid, and that events may look different if seen from a different angle is fundamental. This more fluid and flexible way of thinking is sometimes termed *dialectical* thinking. It is hard to think of a better way of extending a student's capacity to think dialectically than using dramatic techniques which, as the authors point out, literally play with roles to shift perspectives. In drama, the actor must be both close to a person, having empathy for the character being played, and distant, aware of how the performance comes across to an audience. Similarly, the mediator must tune in closely and listen empathically to one party, but also maintain distance, being aware of the needs and concerns of the other parties and the broader system in which the conflict is embedded. DRACON has opened a door to further research: looking at how drama can promote the kind of cognitive style and dialectical thinking that makes conflict transformation possible. Another point which interested me, and is neglected elsewhere in the academic literature, is the relationship between fact and fiction. Working directly with real conflicts may be too confronting and intrusive, especially when the teachers and researchers are adults and the participants are young people, so fiction, or somewhat fictionalised conflicts based on true stories, can be valuable material to work with. And young people's fiction, their popular culture, provides such a wealth of rich resources for understanding conflict. DRACON shows how drama brings conflict to life, and drama without conflict would have no life. So, whether you are a teacher, researcher, student or interested member of the public, please read on, learn and enjoy.

Brisbane, Australia

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School of Political Science and
International Studies
The University of Queensland

Foreword 2 (Drama Education)

Over recent months, I have been involved in the national monitoring of research outputs across New Zealand universities. It is an exacting role, requiring groups of academics to negotiate an overall score on an individual's research program over 6 years. As a committee, we often talk about the impact of research. Traditionally that has been measured by the quantum of references an article or chapter attracts, or about the esteem in which an individual is held. Increasingly, we are looking at new ways to understand how we might best understand the impact and relative quality of research.

Applying the kind of metrics that might be useful to understand the value of research, the question of the impact of the DRACON project might be best answered by thinking about the many thousands of people across the world who have benefited from their use of drama to better handle conflict. Students and teachers have come to find ways of naming and understanding the culturally conditioned nature of conflict, not just within their school settings but across their entire lives. That this has happened across the cultural diversity of Sweden, Malaysia and Australia speaks loudly of the care and thought in the initial design of the program and the flexible purposing across decades of implementation.

I was left wondering as I finished reading this book of the importance of serendipity in research—though it is not a metric we use to measure the quality of the research. By serendipity, I mean more than picking up on chance, but the ability to notice possibilities, to draw links across from happenchance and make something meaningful from the seemingly accidental. The spin-off tangential projects that DRACON generated might be its most consequential contribution. DRACON has spread to China strengthening NGO trainers, involves nursing training in Jordan, is working with African men in Adelaide to challenge cultural norms on domestic violence, and has trained senior management staff at Melbourne University. The wide range of tangential projects and the longevity of the overall project, adapting and changing as it meets new challenges, speaks of a team of researchers who understood the power of serendipity.

One of the impacts of this research is that we might better understand how open, dialogic international research projects, that allow freedom and autonomy for constituent parties, provide the opportunity for long-term relationships to deliver far more than original plans or visions.

I am often invited on to research teams that have clearly defined outcomes; it is one of the binds necessary for funding. My work and the work of the rest of the team are then constrained by the roles assigned at the beginning of the project, as we move onwards to the inevitable report that somehow justifies our work and our funding. What is strikingly different about the DRACON project is its open-endedness. In many ways, it has worked in the same way that a good process drama does. There was a hook, the pre-text that drew the ensemble together to work something out, but how that was done was determined in the making of the research rather than it being predetermined. The multiple and divergent outcomes suggest researchers who aren't just using arts-based processes but are working as artist/researchers. The artistry of this research is one of its strongest features. A willingness to be deeply curious, to engage in genuine collaboration, to be playful with ideas and take risks with new approaches, content to work with ambiguity marks researchers who act as artists.

Many years ago, John O'Toole and I sat with Dorothy Heathcote on a warm afternoon in Northampton. Dorothy knew John well, me not so well. She turned to me and asked, 'So, in New Zealand do children do things that matter, and in doing those things do they learn that they matter too?' I was silent for a long time. An easier question would have been about whether they did drama. The great gift of DRACON is that the children and teachers who were engaged in this project did work that truly matters in so many ways and that the whole project was motivated by a desire to let children know their lives matter. Perhaps Dorothy's questions might help other researchers frame their work so ethically.

This book is a record of an extraordinary project spanning continents and many years. It tells many variants of the story that there is much to be gained by having people engage in drama to handle conflict in their lives and much to be learned from research which artistically works on significant issues.

Auckland, New Zealand

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Acknowledgements

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DRACON International

Mats Friberg (project leader 1994–2001); Horst Löfgren (project leader 2001–2005). The Swedish team has functioned as an informal editorial group with Löfgren and Birgitte Malm as managing editors.

DRACON Malaysia

Janet Pillai (leader, researcher); Latif Kamaluddin (researcher); Paul Jambunathan (quantitative researcher); Aida Redza (artist); Tan Sooi Beng (artist); Liew Kung Yu (artist); Leow Puay Tin (artist).

DRACON Sweden

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DRACON Adelaide

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Abbreviations

<i>AAB</i>	<i>Acting Against Bullying</i>
ACSS	Adolescent Conflict Style Scale
ARC	Australian Research Council
DASIE	Develop, Analyse, Support, Intervene, Evaluate model
DIAC	Drama in Acute Care
DIE	Drama-in-education
DRACON	DRaMa and CONflict Resolution Project
EFT	Enhanced forum theatre
IDEA	International Drama/Theatre and Education Association
LISREL	Linear Structural Relations (analysis software)
MPU	Multicultural Programs Unit (NSW)
NGO	Non-government organisation
NSW	New South Wales
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
Oxfam	Oxford Committee for Famine Relief
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment (tests)
RAD	Riksorganisationen Auktoriserade Dramapedagoger (Swedish Drama Teachers Organisation)
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
TfD	Theatre for Development
TIE	Theatre-in-education
TO	Theatre of the Oppressed
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UniSA	University of South Australia
WCC	Women's Centre for Change
WSARP	Whole-School Anti-Racism Program (NSW)

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Part I

Background and Theory

Chapter 1

Introduction



The DRACON Story

The real world of human conflict and the imaginary worlds of drama are closely tangled together in our thinking at every level—personal, communal and geopolitical. It clearly shows in our language—at least in English—and in our metaphors. Just think how often we hear and use clichés like ‘What a tragic conflict...’, ‘This is a dramatic escalation...’ and ‘Let’s not have a drama about this...’. They constantly colour our recounting of life’s difficult moments, and think how many journalists would be bereft without these images!

Harnessing the power and familiarity of those dramatic ideas and images in order to help young people to address their real-life conflicts, albeit indirectly, has been the overarching purpose of DRACON, an international educational research project with a life and afterlife of over twenty years—and, as we shall demonstrate in the final chapter, it is still very much alive.

The DRAMA and CONflict (DRACON) international project was an interdisciplinary and comparative action research project that commenced officially in 1996 and ended in 2005 with the publication of its ‘final’ report,¹ detailing a decade of mainly action research work conducted in four locations in three countries spanning the globe—Sweden, Malaysia and Australia. These countries were partly chosen because of important cultural differences and contrasts, and partly by happenstance—where those researchers with matching expertise and interests in the area happened to come across or already know each other.

¹Löfgren and Malm (2007).

Background

Sweden is one of the earliest countries whose scholars and policy makers recognised the importance of peace and conflict studies. As early as 1964, the Swedish Prime Minister, Tage Erlander, puts forward the idea of establishing a peace research institute. In 1996, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) was founded to commemorate Sweden's 150 years of unbroken peace. The Department of Peace and Development Research at the University of Gothenburg was a leading centre of interdisciplinary and action-oriented enquiry.

Peace and conflict studies can be classified as a pedagogical activity (dealing with the teaching of conflict literacy) as well as a research activity (aiming to create new knowledge about conflict and conflict handling). By the 1970s, the field had become well established as research within the social sciences in universities in many countries, including Sweden, Malaysia and Australia. However, the pedagogical aspect of teaching conflict literacy was not as far advanced as the theoretical research development. One contributing factor is likely to be that higher education has been resistant to changing the relationship between theory and practice, and university thinking is itself still largely characterised by a traditional pedagogy based on lectures, tutorials and end-of-course tests (Christie & de Graaff, 2017). Research shows that a major problem with 'traditional' pedagogy at the tertiary level is that it encourages students to take a surface rather than a deep approach to their learning (Marton, Hounsell, & Entwistle, 1984).

Sowing the DRACON Seeds—A Vision

Interestingly, the beginnings of the DRACON project can be attributed to a Swedish industrial consultant and engineer, Jöns Andersson, who worked for a time in South-east Asia. Andersson retired from engineering but retained his contacts with South-east Asia. In the 1990s, he became acquainted through Swedish researchers Mats Friberg and Jens Allwood with a cross-cultural peace research project involving Malaysia and Sweden. The project was part of a larger project entitled 'Culturally conditioned models of conflict resolution in Sweden and Malaysia' organised by the Department of East and South-East Asian Research Studies, University of Gothenburg (1988–1994). Andersson came to understand from Friberg that the teaching of peace studies faced a challenge in that while peace research had great conflict theories to work with, it lacked an animated language and pedagogy that could teach conflict literacy.

Andersson had been interested in amateur theatre in Gothenburg from the 1970s and had been further inspired by Inger Johnsson, a pioneer in the development of the Education of Drama Pedagogues in Sweden. In the early 1990s, Andersson was introduced to Malaysian theatre practitioner Krishen Jit and they talked about the possible use of theatre, and specifically educational drama, as a teaching and learn-

ing tool. After observing a creative arts program with young people, organised by the company *Five Arts Centre*, Andersson was highly inspired by what he saw as a potential link between the academic and practical fields of drama and conflict resolution. He proceeded to organise contacts between Swedish conflict researcher Friberg and Janet Pillai, the educational drama programmer at the Five Arts Centre, and a lecturer at the local University of Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia.

In July 1992, Andersson attended the first International Congress of Drama/Theatre and Education (IDEA '92) in Oporto, Portugal. Andersson was highly inspired by what he saw as a potential link between the academic and practical fields of drama and conflict resolution. Here, he connected with Margret Lepp from Malmö University, Sweden, then a PhD student in pedagogy with a focus on applied drama in nursing education. They decided to meet again in Sweden to further discuss possible plans for a drama and conflict management project. A meeting was set up with Friberg, who later became the first project leader of DRACON International from 1994 to 2001.

Andersson's vision and determination to link the two disciplines of conflict resolution and drama and bring experts together cannot be understated. Sadly, he had no further influence on the development of the project because of his death in 1995. Christie and de Graaff (2017) state that while both educationalists and engineers seek to understand phenomena and solve problems connected with them, educational researchers focus on phenomena and problems that involve people, whereas engineers tend to focus on material objects and effects. It can be surmised that as an engineer, Andersson may have professionally perceived the potential of drama and observed the effects of active learning while observing the Malaysian drama program with children.

The DRACON Is Born

In spite of Andersson's demise, the seed for a fascinating interdisciplinary venture had been planted. Starting at the drama end, in 1994 Malaysian drama educator Pillai reached out to invite Latif Kamaluddin, a conflict management specialist from the University of Sains, to become part of the Malaysian DRACON team, along with four artists: a dramatist, a visual artist, a dancer and a musician.

Coming the other way, the Swedish team of conflict specialists felt it was necessary to have experts in drama and pedagogy. In 1995, Anita Grünbaum, who was a drama education specialist and Head of drama teacher education at Stovvik College, was invited to join the team, as was another expert in pedagogy, Horst Löfgren, Professor of Education at Malmö University.

At an international meeting in Aldinga, South Australia, in 1996, it was decided to extend the Swedish-Malaysian research cooperation, with two Australian teams joining the project, one in Adelaide, South Australia, and the second in Brisbane, Queensland. Like the original projects, the Australian teams were drawn from opposite starting strengths and expertise, with conflict management leading in Adelaide