

Flamme compilation of the best essays published on Pollock between 1986 and 2008. Nonetheless, Coates' volume is generous in bringing the attention of the reader to the considerable weight of scholarship that already exists on Pollock, while offering a new selection of good-quality essays by established and emerging scholars, many of whom have not appeared previously in a Pollock collection.

Coates' something-for-everyone approach may have its drawbacks; inevitably one ends up wanting more of one thing and less of another. Still, whether the volume functions as a pleasant walk down memory lane for older scholars who already know Pollock well, or as an engaging introduction to her for younger scholars who do not, Coates' collection constitutes a worthy addition to the body of Pollock scholarship—and an affectionate, well-deserved salute to the then and now “First Woman of Canadian Theatre.”

Notes

- 1 All quotations are from Coates.

Works Cited

- Anthony, Geraldine. *Gwen Pharis Ringwood*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981. Print.
- Grace, Sherrill. *Making Theatre: A Life of Sharon Pollock*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2008. Print.
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JAN SELMAN AND JANE HEATHER, eds.

Theatre, Teens, Sex Ed: Are We There Yet?

Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2015. 542 pp. + DVD.

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Jan Selman and Jane Heather's *Theatre, Teens, Sex Ed: Are We There Yet?* is an impressively comprehensive resource, exploring how participatory theatre can be used to promote political and social change in sexual health education. The collection focuses on the award-winning theatre program, *Are We There Yet?* (AWTY), and a five-year research study evaluating its efficacy. Developed in 1998, AWTY is a collaborative partnership between Concrete Theatre and Options Sexual Health Association (previously Planned Parenthood Association of Edmonton). While theatre practitioners are seemingly the most appropriate audience for this book, program evaluators and sexual health educators will certainly find it useful and, as the editors advise, readers are invited to engage with different sections of the book depending on their needs.¹

The book is divided into three parts, exploring participatory theatre, collaborative partnerships, and documentation and evaluation respectively. Each section, which includes

contributions from scholars from a variety of disciplines, addresses its topic broadly, drawing on theoretical conversations and performance practices before discussing it within the context of *AWTY*. The book also comes with a DVD featuring a recorded performance of the play and interviews discussing how to produce and facilitate *AWTY*.

Part One provides scaffolding for the rest of the book, establishing the value of participatory theatre and the importance of engaging youth in conversations about sexual health. Drawing on the work of community-based theatre companies and applied theatre and educational research, Selman and Heather make a compelling case for the advantages of using participatory theatre in sexual health education and introduce the reader to the fields of theatre for change (applied theatre) and inquiry-based education.

The script of *Are We There Yet?*, also included in Part One, is a captivating example of participatory theatre and provides an excellent balance of theatrical performance and audience participation. Comparisons between sex education and driver education structure the play, which employs what contributor James McKinnon calls the “pedagogy of laughter” to encourage authentic engagement with a potentially uncomfortable topic. The script, broken into five “lessons,” explores sexual health concepts such as “knowing your vehicle” and “talking protection,” and concludes with the opportunity for students to practice their skills. Actors perform like a Joker from Boal’s Forum Theatre (a neutral facilitator who mediates the action between performers and spectators), engaging the audience in dialogue as a way to co-create the story. Indeed, Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed, briefly introduced by Selman and Heather, is a key aesthetic influence on the script, specifically Boal’s concept of simultaneous dramaturgy, a theatrical form where the audience can stop the play’s action and intervene by offering suggestions for the actors to improvise to change the outcome of the scene. Reflecting the educational approach of Paulo Freire, participants are recognized as active co-constructors of knowledge rather than empty vessels to be filled with information. As a result, participants feel invested in the educational process and are empowered with skills that can influence future behaviour and choices.

Part One concludes with a comprehensive unpacking of the script, complete with a scene-by-scene breakdown of objectives and character intentions. Facilitation techniques are also provided for practitioners interested in adapting this script for their own communities. These resources are valuable as they offer a clear and precise guide to using *AWTY*, while allowing for the flexibility that Selman and Heather stress throughout the book. For example, Part Two examines performances in contexts such as rural Nova Scotia and indigenous reservation communities in Saskatchewan to show how language and references can be altered to ensure the play remains culturally sensitive and relevant to its audience. The conversation about adaptation is revisited in Part Three, where examples of modifications to the script and areas in need of further development are highlighted, embodying the idea that within their own praxis this work is continuous and always evolving.

Part Two focuses on the importance of collaboration between theatre artists and sexual health organizations. Selman and Heather address concerns raised in Part One around ethical responsibility and highlight how collaboration can ensure that the needs of a community are met when undertaking this work. Artists and educators are positioned as equal collaborators, each respecting the expertise and knowledge of the other. This partnership is not only essential for the devising of the script, but also allows health educators to act as a resource so

conversations and concerns raised in performance can be addressed post-production, avoiding “hit-and-run” type theatre where the dialogue ends when the lights fade.

One of the most recurring questions in the scientific and health communities surrounding arts-based research focuses on how the work can be evaluated. This focus on evaluation, while important, also implies hidden criticisms around legitimacy. Scientific and health research often operates within a quantitative and positivist paradigm, which creates skepticism around the validity of arts-based research. Selman and Heather tackle this in the third and final part of the book, which discusses the five-year evaluation of *AWTY*. Combining “[s]ocial science-based qualitative and quantitative assessments [...] with theatre theories of engagement and distancing” (269), they found small yet significant changes in audiences’ understanding of sexual health—results that support the predicted benefits of participatory theatre practices and Freirian inquiry-based learning. In this section, Selman and Heather also discuss how over the course of five years the objectives of the qualitative component continually evolved, and data collection aimed to gain both an immediate and a longitudinal understanding of the play’s impact.

While reading, I found myself asking critical questions of Selman and Heather about their process, script, and evaluation. As if reading my mind, the authors demonstrated a reflexivity about their work and addressed potential concerns throughout. *Theatre, Teens, Sex Ed: Are We There Yet?* offers a strong illustration of how participatory theatre can be used for change. Through its assemblage of the script, essays analyzing the process and its impact, and extensive supplementary materials—including sample rehearsal schedules, publicity materials, facilitation questions, and post-performance workshops—this book serves as an excellent resource to theatre practitioners who wish to engage with the topic of sexual health and to sexual health educators who are unfamiliar with participatory theatre. Sexual health can be a topic that is uncomfortable and embarrassing for students and teachers alike. As educators experiment with how to approach this subject matter, *AWTY* demonstrates how applied theatre can facilitate educational engagement that is adaptive and exciting, rather than static and didactic, creating meaningful and transformative pedagogy.

Notes

- 1 *Theatre, Teens, Sex Ed: Are We There Yet?* is the winner of the 2016 Patrick O’Neill award, presented by the Canadian Association of Theatre Research to the best edited collection published in either English or French on a Canadian theatre and performance topic.