



**The Indra Congress**

+44 (0) 1822 610801

[facebook.com/indra.congress](https://facebook.com/indra.congress)

[www.indracongress.net](http://www.indracongress.net)

[david@indracongress.net](mailto:david@indracongress.net)

# Newsletter

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A letter from David

Dear Friends

I shot an ARROW in the air  
It came to earth I know not where. (Longfellow)

This letter is addressed to the wide community of friends who have been supportive of our efforts over recent years with ARROW/INDRA to explore the diverse roles of the creative arts in peacebuilding. The communication comes to you not just in the usual format of a reporting back on events and activities but rather as an invitation to contribute towards the debate about transition from ARROW to INDRA. The newsletter is designed to generate discussion and involve the wider Indra constituency in the process of determining the future. Its content is informed by rigorous discussion with fellow directors Tim Prentki and Dawn Melville and our active partners in the UK and globally.

A year ago we were celebrating the wonderful Global ARROW Congress, which had such a transformative impact on so many of us. Shortly afterwards we were faced with the challenge presented by UCP Marjon management's decision to take direct



control of the programme and change its direction. Our response was to establish a new social enterprise company to capitalise on and sustain the momentum generated over the past 6 years. The INDRA Congress, inspired by the image of Indra's Net, was duly set up as a Community Interest Company to achieve this end.

As a result of changes at UCP Marjon my own circumstances have changed drastically. 12 months ago I was a full time senior lecturer. I had the support of Lesley and Dawn on 0.5 contracts and infrastructural backing from a university college. I currently have none of these and as from now I will be 'singing for my supper.' This presents me with a very different challenge in the coming months: obviously a major part of my current energy is committed to earning a living and paying the bills!

We need now to develop a sustainable model that has a clear and identifiable focus in the next phase of development. This may lead us to a more co-operative model of practice in which the key partners play a central role in co-ordination, fundraising and project development. For example, the running and resourcing of a Congress event would rely less on me and more on the INDRA partners *in situ* and of partners taking on the responsibility of raising the resources to get there – where this is realistically possible. In this way the particular INDRA organisation which put itself forward as host for a Congress, national or international, would commit to the resource implications of that decision. This is not an abnegation of responsibility on my part for I have lost none of my passion for this work. It is a matter of dealing with practical economic and political realities and acknowledging that 'INDRA has come of age.' The uni-directional arrow has morphed into a network of mutual support and co-operative action.

In order to attract funding we need to demonstrate our determination to build a sustainable model for development and identify a clear and identifiable focus. Later in the newsletter I would like to propose a specific idea for your consideration. But first some news items.

### **Derry 2013**

The INDRA co-ordinator in Derry, Mary Duddy, has just given birth to her first child and we all extend our congratulations. In her spare moments Mary has been working hard to make it possible for the Derry 2013 Congress to take place. Although Derry is the UK Capital of culture for the year competition for resources is very steep and we will all have to work alongside Mary to help make our aspiration for the Congress a reality. In terms of planning a major event summer 2013 is not very far away so all our groups need to be looking at fund raising strategies to travel to Derry sooner rather than later. As happened for the 2010 event it would also be a good idea for groups to team up to help support less well resourced partners.



## China

Jill Bailey has reported that the Congress event in 2010 had a much stronger impact on the Chinese partners than we originally thought. For example, on their return flight one of the Chinese group produced a perceptive piece of writing that was deeply moving. Jill tells me that Aisha, one of the group, will be studying a degree at the University of Exeter. Taking part in the World Congress last year really made her want to spread her wings and come here to study.

## South Africa

ARROW SA continues to be active. Juno Fitzpatrick, a student from King's College London, spent some time as an 'intern' with the group. Here is an extract from her observations and reflections:

My time as an intern with ARROWSA: Art, Culture & Heritage for Peace was an enlightening and gratifying experience. The diverse group worked well with each other and I was astounded at the ability of the students to organise within themselves different team leaders and delegate specific roles. Each session would open with a discussion concerning topical themes, such as the London riots. The debates concerning protests, surveillance and police presence in the UK allowed the students to compare their situation of living in a South African city with those in Europe, drawing upon the similarities and differences in politics and culture.

ARROWSA, whilst firmly dedicated to their specific cultural exchange projects, is committed to individual appraisal of each student's personal extracurricular and academic achievements. The Peace Forum Project, in which 2 students were taught the effect of one's carbon footprint, would then relate to the wider themes of ARROWSA's musical production of 'The Bridge'; a romantic narrative concerning the protection and conservation of the environment and natural resources.

The current productions of 'Oliver' combined with scenes from 'Annie' and 'Sarafina' displayed an inter-textual array of themes concerning slavery, liberation and the poverty associated with urban dwelling. The youth group improvised each scene through song and dance, showing a strong support and negotiation of each social actor's ideas. The literary content was adapted to suit Durban appropriate settings and mixed songs of English and Zulu to create an original, culturally diverse performance piece.

Furthermore, the students are focused in their team building exercises due to the overwhelming desire to attend a trip to the Kalahari Desert. With such an interesting goal, each learner is motivated to generate funding for the trip. The initiative helps to focus the projects and create new and exciting ideas in which the group can raise funding and awareness of their projects in cultural exchange.



## Palestine

In Palestine, Marina Barham and her colleagues in AL-HARAH Theatre are working towards creating the first performing arts training centre in Palestine. Marina writes: 'By promoting theatre arts in Palestine we are assisting in building and maintaining a civil society that emphasizes human rights, democracy and pluralism.'

The aims of the centre are:

- to develop the local, Palestinian and Arab theatre movement
- to reach audiences wherever they are
- to organise and conduct workshops and training programmes in theatre
- to develop playwriting and script writing in Palestine
- to encourage and facilitate the incorporation of Theatre education in Palestinian curricula
- to build a network with other theatre groups in Palestine, the Middle East and Internationally
- to produce performances for all age groups
- **to establish the first Performing Arts Training Centre.**

Marina writes:

'The idea of the Performing Arts Training Centre came as a result of working in the field of theatre in Palestine for the last 15 years. The number of actors, dancers, technicians and performing arts practitioners in Palestine is very limited. Many of them have been working without studying performing arts, but only through talent and experience. There is a need and demand in the community for more professionals in all fields of the performing arts.

There are over 19 performing arts organisations in Palestine, in the fields of music, theatre, dance and circus. These organisations have great needs in capacity building for new staff who are trained on a professional basis.

Over the years of working with young people we discovered that several of them would love to be trained in the different fields of performing arts, but they cannot because they could not afford travelling outside the country to study or because they have not been able to be accepted at university or college. We have been encouraging young people to study Performing arts by trying to get them scholarships in Egypt, Syria or Tunisia. We succeeded in sending four young people to study scenography, acting, community theatre and directing.

Al-Harah Theater has many contacts with trainers, experts and teachers from all over the world who have been coming to Palestine to work with us on training young people. These trainers together with our own new graduates from the different fields of performing arts are willing to come to Palestine and work with us on one time workshops and/or continuous training programmes to provide a breadth of provision.'



We wish Marina luck with this venture and I look forward to discussing how the INDRA Congress can support the initiative.

### **Greece**

I have just returned from tutoring a 5 day residential course in Greece on the beautiful island of Spetses. The theme of the course was theatre, conflict and education and was promoted by the Hellenic Theatre/Drama and Education Network. I am grateful to Betty Giannouli and her colleagues for inviting me and I look forward to further collaboration and exploring how the Network can work in partnership with INDRA on a sustainable basis. We will soon hopefully have an active INDRA group in the country.

### **Albert and Equiano**

The tour of 'Albert and Equiano' was launched in Greece, in the open air, and now begins its tour across the UK to Plymouth, Taunton, Liverpool, Leeds, Derry, Burnley, Chester, Birmingham, Cornwall and elsewhere. If you live near any of these centres and would like to know where it is being performed do please contact me.

### **Tim in Brazil**

Tim Prentki will be spending three weeks in October working at the University of Rio and the State University of Santa Catarina in Florianopolis where he will be collaborating with Indra colleague Marcia Pompeo on a practical and theoretical seminar on fooling and facilitation in community theatre. Tim's book, *The Fool in European Theatre*, will be published in November.

### **Greetings from the 2010 team of artists**

Those of you who saw the splendid carnival event at the ARROW Congress 2010, created by the participants under the leadership of Tony Gee and the team of artists, will remember the wave of colour and vitality that was brought to the streets of Plymouth. Tony and his company (Moveable Feast) are just back from the Bristol Puppet Festival where they created a procession to represent the creatures of the planet with Bristol playschemes and all comers. Moveable Feast have just moved into new premises on the site of an old agricultural college, Seal Hayne.

Maggie Squire has been creating a string of 5 sculptures on the theme of hope for a sculpture trail at a Devon site. More from the others next time!



In the picture below Tony can be seen with yet another of his weird and wonderful creations



### **A proposal for a shared project:**

#### **Cooling Conflict**

I recently met with a friend and colleague of mine from Australia, John O'Toole. John has had a distinguished career as a lecturer, researcher and practitioner in drama education. Whilst professor at Griffith University, Brisbane John, together with colleague Bruce Burton, developed over an 8 year span a unique approach to bullying/conflict in schools called *Cooling conflict*. The programme is a whole school approach that uses creative techniques and peer group teaching to systematically address conflict issues; helping significantly to build positive relationships across seeming boundaries and barriers.

John has agreed for me to promote and develop the programme and adapt it for schools in the UK and in the various contexts of Indra hubs elsewhere. *Cooling Conflict* involves staff and students at all levels of the secondary school and in feeder primaries. It also has the potential to spill over into the wider community and, through the Indra network, beyond.



There are three pillars underpinning the programme and through Indra we can add a fourth:

1. An understanding, appropriate to each age group, of the basic elements of conflict/bullying.
2. Enhanced Forum Theatre (EFT)

EFT is a carefully structured and accessible drama form that allows issues to be explored in imagined contexts that are based on but detached from real life. The programme does not propose quick fix solutions (conflict resolution) but provides participants with the tools to explore, understand and deal with the underlying patterns, the webs of relationships that motivate ongoing conflict (conflict transformation).

3. Peer group teaching

Studies have shown that peer group teaching is the most effective way to teach these issues – both for the teacher and the taught: peer teaching enhances the self-confidence and self-esteem of students who have been peer tutors.

4. A national and international network

Through the Indra Congress we can link pupils with their peers in our overseas partner settings such as Palestine, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Kosovo, India, Greece and others. This encourages young people to 'see the self in the other and the other in the self.'

### *Cooling Conflict* and Indra

If Indra groups agree to adopt the framework we could use the programme as a shared thread in which all the groups are involved, initially engaging with it for their own direct benefit. Indra groups could be then trained as catalysts to promote and facilitate this work in their local schools and communities and take a leading role in connecting schools across the world to share their experience. Our own Indra Congress network would be central but would be active in encouraging and facilitating the development of a wider network of schools and young people seeking to share their experience of dealing with conflict and bullying across the world.

I recommend you try to get yourself a copy of the *Cooling Conflict* book:

O'Toole, J. Burton, B. Plunkett, A. (2005) *Cooling Conflict*. A new approach to managing bullying and conflict in schools. Pearson Education Australia.



## Summary

- we are in a state of transition from ARROW to Indra
- our previous model of practice is no longer sustainable
- we need to evolve more co-operative ways of working with less reliance on the centre
- we need a shared programme of activities that provide focus and the opportunity to attract funding
- working in partnership with *Cooling Conflict* provides such a vehicle
- the INDRA Congress core groups remain at the heart of INDRA, around which we can evolve and build circles of related and supporting activities, e.g. Indra Theatre, Indra Training, Indra Research, Indra Schools.

The transition from the metaphor of an ARROW to that of a NET has stimulated thought and discussion. A number of people have remarked that a net is now a more appropriate symbol for our aspirations as it is an inclusive concept, bringing together implications of shared, collective energy and responsibility.

Best wishes to you all

David

