

Brisbane Junior Theatre: A new theatre paradigm

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Abstract

In Australia, there is currently a need to strengthen young people's involvement in theatre. Therefore, there is not only a cultural need for new ways of providing regular performance opportunities, but also a need to inspire young theatrical performers. This paper proposes that a week intensive youth theatre production, such as those performed by Brisbane Junior Theatre (BJT), is a viable way of meeting this demand. The paper is a practitioner led account on how to create sustainable, enduring and consistent theatre that draws upon BJT's 18-year experience as an Australian youth theatre. The author, Jack Bradford is the founder and artistic director of BJT. By using BJT as an example, this paper proposes that these practises can be utilised with great effect by any theatre practitioner. In particular this paper will take a detailed look at BJT's methodologies, and intensive process and examine how it is able to succeed against the accepted theatrical norms of time and focus. It will also examine Newport's "Deep Work" principles to provide evidence for BJT's success. Ultimately this paper will not only demonstrate the reasons for BJT's success and longevity, but also provide a possible model for future companies to emulate in order to answer the call for strengthening theatre in Australia.

Keywords

Intensive Theatre; Youth Theatre; Endurability; Deep Work; Theatre Methodologies

Introduction: The need for a new theatrical paradigm

The Australian Theatre Forum 2011 called on individuals, organisations and agencies involved in theatre in Australia to commit to "strengthening young people in theatre, increasing the scope of theatre and young people, particularly on main stages; [and] increasing access to theatre for young people" (Australian Theatre Forum). This theatrical edict demonstrates a cultural need for a new way of providing regular performance opportunities to inspire young theatrical performers in Australia.

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Richard Schechner (Brown) declared: “Theatre as we have known and practiced it – the staging of written dramas – will be the string quartet of the 21st century.” In contrast, Robert Hetherington said, “in many places theatre is heading off to be the buggy whip of the 21st century” (Hetherington). Hetherington is using the term “buggy whip” as a metaphor to describe the conventions of modern theatre as drastically outmoded and in need of new practices and paradigms.

In 2018, there is a growing need to provide a new paradigm for producing theatre that gives young performers opportunities and skills and provides a way of creating enduring theatre practice. The practices, methods and 18-year history of Brisbane Junior Theatre’s (BJT’s) uniquely Australian cultural phenomenon of an intensive one-week production and performance process, may provide some insights and solutions for a new paradigm to equip an ever-broadening base of young performers with skills and opportunities for life in the performing arts. The practices and methodology of BJT can also be applied by other theatre practitioners to help create sustainable theatrical practice for any theatrical organisation.

What is Brisbane Junior Theatre?

BJT is a not-for-profit youth theatre company in Brisbane Australia that has produced 76 intensive, fully resourced productions over its 18-year history. Each production is entirely rehearsed and performed within a single week, with an average of 40 hours total rehearsal time, four performances and an average cast of 65 performers aged 5-18 with at least 20 production support personnel. Music Theatre International and Hal Leonard Australia recently referred to BJT’s significance as a youth theatre in Australia by saying that “BJT has had the most Youth Theatre performances in all of Australia and is known for its consistent quality performances.” (Stoddard)

BJT’s one-week theatrical process can be described as both intensive and enduring, produced with consistency and quality, and fully resourced, meaning each production includes and integrates sets, props, costumes, sound, lighting, video, special effects, make-up and any theatrical support needed to produce a quality production. BJT produces quality Broadway-based musicals (mostly abridged) for eight hours a day for five days, Monday to Friday. Each show is double cast with casts alternating performances: two on Friday night at 6pm and 8pm and two on Saturday afternoon at 2pm and 4pm. The intensive nature of BJT’s theatrical practice relies on focused and intense work performed in a much shorter time than the accepted theatrical norm has historically required. BJT’s intensive performing processes, identified later in this paper as BJT’s Musical Theatre “Taxonomy,” will describe ever increasing levels and elements of focus required for each day of rehearsal and performance. At least part of BJT’s longevity is due to its repurposing of established theatrical mediums to fit into an Australian cultural context.

Bradford, Artistic Director of BJT, was deeply influenced, not only by the history and knowledge of Old Repertory and Summer Stock Theatre, but by his own personal Summer Stock intensive experience. Bradford performed in the 1980 Cripple Creek Colorado production of *My Partner and Olio Act*, a three-hour performance played two

times per day, six days per week, 150 times to sold out audiences from June to September. Bradford auditioned and rehearsed this professional three-hour production in a ten-day period. He remembers that the process of memorising lines and lyrics, creating a role, negotiating with actors and audience was a gruelling, exhausting process, but very valuable in developing his ability to understand successful intensive theatrical practice. This experience led Bradford to believe that intensive theatre was not only possible, but achievable for young performers, and can act as a vital catalyst for their development.

Theatrical norms versus intensive practice

Francis Hodge, in his seminal book *Play Directing*, declared that quality theatrical productions require a minimum of “8 hours rehearsal for every 10 minutes of performance on stage” (Hodge 178). Most professional and reputable theatre directors and producers accept and practice this convention as the norm. However, proven historical intensive theatre practices, such as Summer Stock and The Old Repertory System, have required much shorter and much more intensively focused rehearsal and performance processes, albeit for varied reasons. Using Summer Stock and The Old Rep as precedents BJT has likewise created a condensed but equally intensively focused process. BJT’s average theatrical performance is 1.5 hours long with 40-hours of rehearsal time. There are 30 hours of scheduled rehearsal time and 10 hours of break time. This process, based on Hodge’s formula (assuming with adults) would require 72 Hours of effective rehearsal time. Consider the significance of this intensive formula being accomplished by an average of 65 young performers aged 5-18 over 76 performances in 18 years of practice. This experience is currently unique to BJT, due to being influenced by its Australian context, allowing it to stand apart from its historical influences.

Intensive Influences: Summer Stock and Repertory

Though BJT demonstrates a unique cultural theatrical practice, it is important to examine its influences to better understand its unique significance. In the United States between 1920 and 1960, theatre saw the advent of “Summer Stock,” which invented another form of intensive theatre, based on the cultural phenomenon of “The American Three-Month Summer,” and created a way for young aspiring professionals to do back-to-back productions in regional areas where the public could experience quality theatre. Summer Stock used the intensive 7 to 10-day rehearsal periods to produce multiple productions back-to-back using stock sets and costumes, as well giving young actors opportunities to hone their craft in front of an audience.

Martha Schmoyer LoMonaco in her study *Summer Stock! an American Theatrical Phenomenon*, defines Summer Stock as:

a particular type of entertainment that evolved in the North Eastern United States during the 1920s and 1930s ... between the months of June

*and September ... it was part of the new American 'Cultural Maturation'
(preface)*

This study also lists over 580 Summer Stock Theatres throughout the US from 1920 to 1960. Summer Stock Theatre as a unique American phenomenon used intensive theatrical practice for practical as well as financial reasons, as the American three-month summer June, July and August, created the basis of demand for this form of theatre. As LoMonaco further states:

*Most theatres played one-a-week stock offering a different play every week throughout the summer season of as many as 8 to 14 or 15 weeks ...
Most plays were recent Broadway hits. (preface)*

While BJT uses a similar shortened intensive rehearsal process in order to produce commercial musical theatre, it has been scheduled to fit in with the Australian Holiday System rather than the American 3-month Summer Holiday period. This phenomenon has led BJT to produce one production quarterly as opposed to many productions in a short period of time. Which in turn has created financial and theatrical sustainability by reinforcing demand, while allowing for greater control over quality by giving downtime for the company to prepare for the next show.

The Old Repertory System is an intensive form of theatre that emerged in the 1920s and began to decline in the early 1960s. Based on intensive two-week rehearsal schedules, it provided opportunities for young actors to develop their craft, to perform more quality productions and created a financially viable way of bringing theatre as a popular form to the masses. *The Oxford Companion to Theatre* states, "One of the most phenomenal aspects of British drama has been the remarkable growth and success of the Repertory Movement, resulting in the establishment of over 100 Repertory Theatres in Great Britain" (Hartnoll 664). The article also declares that:

The true Repertory Theatre is one in which a number of plays are always ready for production, so that as many as five or six can be performed weekly, with new ones in preparation ... much of the work is performed under exhausting conditions; a new play every week or two, endless rehearsals, constant learning of new parts ... all these demand much mental and physical endurance...and the experience gained on the Repertory stage was invaluable. (Hartnoll 665)

It was the practice of a Repertory Theatre to change the bill frequently to attract greater audiences, which meant that the rehearsal process had to be quick. Peggy Ashcroft, who played Juliet at the Old Vic in 1935 opposite Gielgud and Olivier, remembers "with hindsight one can appreciate the difficulty of trying, in three weeks rehearsal, to combine an electric naturalism with a feeling of the pulse of the verse." (Billington 80) Billington further asserts (79) that the reason for Ashcroft's success as a repertory actress is "her ability to absorb deeply packed imagistic speeches into her being and then speak them as if they came newly minted from her brain." These quotes emphasise the process of integrated acting elements in a shortened intensive process that produced quality and consistent theatrical practice. Olivier, concerning the length of

process, also remembers that he rehearsed for only “two weeks” when directed by Noel Coward in *Private Lives* in the same era (Olivier 90). In like manner, Gielgud, when discussing one of his own ‘intensive’ theatre experiences, (Brandreth 42) declared that he

was forced instinctively to react instinctively to the parts, not studying the details but imagining the whole ... as we rehearsed the play. With only three weeks of course there was not time to do much of anything else.
(Brandreth 42-43)

While BJT does not utilize the Old Rep’s system of producing multiple shows being performed on a weekly basis, it does strive to utilize the same intensive techniques, albeit in a more streamlined and focused context.

Both the Old Repertory and Summer Stock processes have easily contradicted Hodge’s rule that “for every 10 minutes of performance, 8 hours of rehearsal is required.” (Hodge 91) Both Old Repertory and Summer Stock production lengths were about three-hours long, which means at a minimum, these productions needed at least 4 - 6 weeks of rehearsal time to be successful. In contrast, Brisbane Junior Theatre’s intensive practice is accomplished in five eight-hour days. Actual rehearsal time is only six hours per day because of much needed breaks. However, the significant cultural element that sets BJT apart and makes it a “unique phenomenon” is that BJT’s intensive work is performed by young actors between the ages of 5 and 18 years.

Yet these intensive processes are not as prominent as they once were, with the Old Rep system being in decline since the early 1960s. This has ultimately lessened theatrical opportunities for performers in England to receive an intensive theatrical experience to help build their craft. Ken Rea, prominent British Theatre director and scholar, recently stated:

Repertory theatre is when you have a permanent company of actors and while you are performing one play in the evening, you’re rehearsing the next one in the daytime. And so it goes on ... the demise of the repertory system means that you are losing actors who have been through a real apprenticeship. (Dale)

In like manner, famous repertory actress Judi Dench espoused:

That’s what the repertory theatres did. Something that changed each week or each fortnight ... They were so crowded ... and we were terribly lucky to have those theatres ... as long as there’s some of those Reps going and keep going you know, there is a light, a little flame that we can nurture and hope that sometime in the future it can come back to be a bonfire. (Dale)

Rea and Dench are speaking about the deterioration and demise of the Old Repertory Theatre system. The demise of The Old Rep has led to a significant diminishment of performance opportunities for aspiring actors to learn their craft.

Australia has never had a prominent intensive theatrical process, which means that Australian trained actors have also lacked opportunities to hone their craft. BJT has adapted elements of the aforementioned processes to fit its Australian cultural context and has become the leading intensive youth theatre in Australia.

BJT's adaptation to Australia's theatre scene: Cultural opportunity

By incorporating elements of cultural practices into the theatrical processes a company can be more successful. The willingness and ability to adapt to Australian cultural factors has been one of the key areas of success for BJT. The main cultural factor that helped inspire BJT's one-week process was the "Australian School Holiday System." In 2000, when forming BJT's production process, Bradford considered the Australian Cultural educational convention of "four holiday periods per year." Bradford began planning four shows per year, one in each of the quarterly school holidays: a Summer Show – (1st week in January after January 1st), an Easter Show - (usually Easter Monday to Saturday), a Winter Show – (1st week of the two-week break, usually June 30 - July 6), and a Spring Show – (the 1st week in September Holidays, around Sept 24th - 29th). Bradford thought it was also important to develop and communicate a ritualised tradition so that parents and young performers could plan their year of performances in advance and create a regular pattern of being part of BJT theatre practice. With this formula, parents could also plan for holidays in the off week in each two-week holiday period. In the Australian culture, most workers only have four weeks of paid holidays per year. If parents traditionally take one week per holiday period, then they would need their children to be occupied in the alternate week and so this practice was formed to fit into the Australian cultural convention.

Another Australian cultural phenomenon that has provided a significant opportunity for BJT's work is the notion that there is a division of drama and theatre at the secondary and tertiary levels. Because of the educational emphasis on "drama education" as opposed to theatrical experience in Australia, young performers have developed limited theatrical technique without audience-based performance as being a strong part of the curriculum.

Therefore, to create an endurable theatre culture with home-grown Australian talent, there must be an emphasis on "extracurricular" training. BJT has arisen both because the Australian culture has created this opportunity, but also out of desire to provide performance opportunities for young performers in the Australian culture.

BJT's business plan and mission statement

BJT incorporates intentional business principles integrated with its values and goals to create a unique theatrical practice. From its inception, BJT established values and goals to help govern its work. These values include developing and maintaining family value productions, artistic excellence, a safe environment, fairness, a commitment to developing and nurturing talent, skill and creativity. BJT's initial business plan listed as

its main objective to “develop in children self-worth and self-confidence through self-expression. BJT’s mission statement states: BJT exists to provide cultural and educational development for children...through performing arts training, production and experience. (Bradford). In order for these core values and objectives to be achieved Bradford initiated goals of “Consistency and Quality” and “Production that Drives Training” as major success mechanisms to ensure successful, enduring theatrical practice in BJT’s work.

Endurable theatrical practice

The concept of “endurable theatrical practice” coined by the author of this paper means the significance of consistent and quality productions and processes over BJT’s 18-year period. “Endurability” is a significant factor as each BJT production of four performances has occurred an average of 4.2 times per year for 18 years. This enduring theatrical practice has provided regular and important performance opportunities for young performers to build their skills and crafts and develop valuable techniques over several generations.

“Endurability”, including consistency, quality and fully resourced productions, are major goals of successful youth companies in Australia and globally. While there are other youth companies, as well as one-week theatre workshops, the ‘Intensive’ practice of producing a quality, fully resourced Broadway-based production in one week is unique to BJT. Bob Hetherington, Theatre Historian and Head of Theatre and Dance at University of Memphis, stated, “the one-week production blitz is unknown in [youth theatre] production in the US.” (Hetherington)

Consistency and quality

Consistency and Quality means that in order to achieve success, BJT must have regular performances four to five times per year. BJT needs to also ensure consistent rules, standards and quality of its performances and processes as well as consistent growth of reputation and resources. Quality refers to maintaining a high standard of productions by producing great plays, popular, well written musicals, and by attracting quality people to perform and produce them, as well as ensuring and producing quality skills and experiences in each production and performance. In order to accomplish this BJT committed to ensuring its productions were done in quality theatres spaces, using quality resources.

The second major guiding factor developed by Bradford was the notion that “Production Drives Training.” This means that young performer’s desire for better roles and greater experiences need to be facilitated by ever increasing quality training. BJT both fuels this desire by creating consistent quality productions while also providing training opportunities to help them obtain their theatrical objectives. To accomplish this BJT provides group workshop training as well as the development of technique through private lessons. BJT training technique is designed to integrate and synthesise acting, singing and dancing in a simulated performance workshop environment.

The Collins Approach: Hedgehog and Bus

One of the main goals Bradford adopted from the research of Jim Collins was that it was imperative for success that businesses get the “right people on the bus.” This means that BJT should have quality leaders in decision-making roles. Collins’ “The Bus” principle (Collins 41) has been a guiding force in developing leaders at BJT since 2001. Another Collins principle Bradford adopted from BJT’s first production was “the Hedgehog” principle (Collins 90-110). This notion means that BJT should do what it does best, “produce one-week Broadway-based musicals”, and be very careful about adopting any extraneous work, unless it directly relates to this main objective. Again Bradford has diligently used this principle to guide BJT’s work. Collin’s “Bus Principle” has allowed BJT to build a trusted core of leaders that meets BJT’s desire for consistency and quality. The “Hedgehog Principle” has helped BJT prioritize goals and maintain its primary focus while preventing it from overreaching and depleting its resources and is a useful tool for theatre companies to consider as it maintains focus and control and helps eliminate distractions, allowing better financial sustainability.

The Becker Approach

Art Worlds’ author, Howard Becker, has inspired other important successful principles, which have affected BJT’s work. These principles include “reputational value” and “networking.” Becker insists (360-361) that a “corporate” group, like BJT, creates a reputation and tradition by its ongoing and endurable work. Becker also stresses the notion that a major key to the success of an Art World is its ability to successfully network with other artists, support groups and audience members. Becker (29-30) states: “producing art works requires elaborate cooperation among specialised personnel.” BJT has consistently emphasized reputational value by maintaining quality success mechanisms such as costumes, props, sets etc. from show to show. BJT has also maintained its networking focus by maintaining low prices and quality communication with local theatre groups and the extended community. This has allowed the local theatre community as well as BJT to access shared resources and knowledge, strengthening the standard of local theatre. This in turn feeds back to BJT allowing greater “endurability” and success in its theatrical practice.

The combination of “endurability”, “consistency and quality”, The “Hedgehog” and “Bus” principles, “Networking” and “Reputational Value” has provided BJT a structure which enables financial viability and affordability. For example, BJT’s endurable practices requires consistently affordable costs such as registrations and ticket prices in order to attract its clients on a regular basis. Whereas the “Hedgehog” principle ensures that BJT is always objectifying and eliminating distractions to maintain financial viability. It is these principles collectively that have allowed BJT to remain successful over its 18-year history.

Newport's *Deep Work*: Enhancing BJT's intensive practice

In order to understand the impact of BJT's processes and productions, it is now important that this paper examines and explores ideas and elements from Cal Newport's study, *Deep Work*, comparing and contrasting ideas and elements of intensive learning. Filtering BJT's work through Newport's ideas may give a greater sense of credibility to the processes of BJT and significantly form a basis for establishing the one-week theatre production process for youth as an iconic way of offering new generations theatrical experiences. The application of Newport's principles will increase focus over time, extending the capacity for youth theatre performers.

Newport, in his book defines "Deep Work" as "the ability to focus without distraction on a cognitively demanding task. It's a skill that allows you to quickly master complicated information and produce better results in less time." (Newport 4) Newport defines the "Deep Work" antithesis as "Shallow Work": "non-cognitively demanding, logistical-style tasks, often performed while distracted. These efforts tend not to create much new value in the world and are easy to replicate." (Newport 6)

Exploring "Deep Work" principles in the context of the BJT one-week process implies that each BJT production will require high levels of individual and corporate focus without distraction, in the cognitively demanding task of producing a major Broadway Musical with an average of 65 young performers in one week. The overall task of developing significantly high-level (Deep-Work) productions has been the overriding goal of BJT since 2001. Newport further states, "Deep work requires long periods of uninterrupted thinking." (Newport 5) This element of working in an intense time period meets the BJT formula of five intense eight-hour a day rehearsals followed by four performances on the 5th and 6th days.

Newport more specifically defines 'deep work' as '... consolidating ... work into intense and uninterrupted pulses ... leveraging the following law of productivity: High-Quality Work Produced = (Time Spent) x (Intensity of Focus)'. (Newport 40)

The purpose of deep work, therefore, is to extract meaning. This formula describes the work of BJT from production to production and can be measured by contrasting the time on a graph from Monday to Friday with the intensity of deep work required by individuals and groups throughout the ever increasing daily tasks. Newport continues to describe the benefit of 'flow' in *Deep Work*:

The psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi ... emphasizes the advantage of cultivating "concentration so intense that there is no attention left over to think about anything irrelevant, or to worry about problems." (79)

Csikszentmihalyi's studies demonstrate that "jobs are actually easier to enjoy than free time, because like 'flow' activities, they have built-in goals, feedback rules, and challenges, all of which encourage one to become involved in one's work...The best

moments usually occur when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile." Csikszentmihalyi calls this mental state "flow." (Newport 84) The inclusion and ritualization of flow-like activities in the rehearsal process contributes not only to the ease of the production process but also to the overall morale of the cast and team as there is a sense of accomplishment through the completion of set goals. BJT is implementing "flow" during its process, at a high level for a great number of people, and that the "built-in goals, feedback rules, and challenges" encourage the cast and production team to be involved in the work at a deep level, giving it meaning (Newport 84).

Another area of value in BJT's process is the emphasis on developing technique in acting, singing and dancing and by building techniques of stagecraft in the performers and team. Newport quotes "Dreyfus and Kelly" and identifies this as "Craftsmanship," and stresses its value by stating that Craftsmanship produces a sense of "Sacredness" (Newport 86) in the process.

Newport's first rule is to establish a "Rhythmic Philosophy of Deep Work Scheduling" (109). In other words, people engaging in "Deep Work" should "commit to a particular pattern for scheduling this work and develop rituals using the same time, place and processes to sharpen...concentration before starting each session." BJT's schedule and rituals almost exclusively have remained the same for 18 years and has successfully been passed down through multiple generations of performers.

Another Newport rule is to schedule deeply focused work in time blocks making adjustments if needed. "When you're done scheduling your day, every minute should be part of a block" and "be liberal with your use of task blocks." (Newport 23) Newport also advocates using multiple blocks of "Deep Work" time throughout a day and making them longer than required to handle the planned tasks. BJT's processes are built around blocks of time ritualised with purpose that uses gradually more intense work. BJT starts each day with the same ritual of focused creative games that build energy, unity and team work into the cast.

One of Newport's principles of "Deep Work" involves individuals and groups who engage in blocks of intense focus, taking regular breaks to rest the brain. BJT's rehearsal process from its inception has included three extended breaks per day. These breaks aid young performers in resting their brains to embrace "Deep Work" rehearsals. As Newport further asserts (146), "Downtime helps recharge the energy needed to work deeply."

Another principle Newport identifies is "collaboration" as he declares:

In many types of work – especially when pursuing innovation, collaborative deep work can yield better results. This strategy therefore, asks that you consider this option in contemplation how best to integrate depth into your professional life. (132)

Another reason for employing collaboration as a technique to strengthen deep work in BJT's productions is that "by working side by side with someone on a production, performers can push each other toward deeper levels of work." (Newport 134)

Another phenomenon motivating BJT's young performers is to engage the "Deep Work" process with enthusiasm and vigour. This element Newport identifies: "Focus on Wildly Important goals" (136). BJT's job then, has been to use training and performance processes to help young performers become "Wildly" interested in shows. Newport further asserts this process "will help focus an organisation's energy to a sufficient intensity to ignite results" (136).

Newport identifies distraction as a major danger to "Deep Work" processes and suggests several ways to eliminate distraction from a person's work ethic. Newport reveals that

People who multitask all the time can't filter out irrelevancy. They can't manage a working memory. They're chronically distracted. They initiate much larger parts of their brain that are irrelevant to the task at hand ... they're pretty much mental wrecks ... it's hard to shake the addiction even when you want to concentrate (157-158).

BJT asks that actors put away their phones and other devices and create an environment of intense focus. Youth theatre demands an extra emphasis on concentration because of the varied levels of cognitive development represented in the different age groups.

The difference in cognition for children of different age groups is of particular note to BJT and other companies that deal with children. Piaget's cognitive development theory reveals that there are three levels of development within the spectrum of BJT's age groups: The "Preoperational Stage" occurs between the ages 5–7, the Concrete Stage 8–12, and the "Formal Operational Stage" 12 and up (Cherry). The theory suggests that the growing plasticity of the brain allows ever-increasing abilities such as problem solving, logic, abstract thought, memorisation, empathy and capacity in young people. Another study shows that music may increase capacity in young people:

Children who undergo musical training have better verbal memory, second language pronunciation accuracy, reading ability and executive functions ... Providing a child with techniques and foundations, which will probably serve as a benefit for the entire lifetime. (Miendlarzewska & Trost)

In contrast, Newport also hypothesises that "Deep Work" has certain time and intensity limits for individuals to successfully perform deep work. He states:

Performance psychologists ... note that for someone new to such practice ... an hour a day is a reasonable limit. For those familiar with the rigours of such activities, the limit expands to something like four hours, but rarely more. (Newport 219-220)

However, Newport also suggests that an 80/20 split is roughly what you would expect when describing a “power law distribution over impact” (197). This principle refers to the ability to give primary focus and purpose to activities that represent what would equate to 80% of the core business that produces success in individual or group activities. Newport’s 80/20 principle is almost exactly like Collin’s (90) “Hedgehog Principle,” and has been practiced in BJT’s work from its inception. BJT regularly eliminates extraneous activities and goals, concentrating on the “top two or three such activities.” that have helped BJT “succeed” (Newport 201).

In order to further examine BJT’s intensive practice, it is necessary to introduce two figures. Figure 1 is the “BJT Musical Process Taxonomy.” The taxonomy is a hierarchy of “Deep Work” intensively focused activities and their processes in an order determined by increasing levels of intense focus and deep work in BJT’s one-week theatrical practice. Figure 2 is a graph that quantitatively measures (focus x time) in the BJT weekly process. This study supposes that a high percentage of a BJT ensemble, are “wildly passionate” about their involvement in the theatrical production. This intense engagement over a short period of time takes place in “chunks” of time, with regular periods of rest.” These and other factors identified by Newport may contribute to extending the capacity of “Deep Work” for individuals and groups.

The following two figures “BJT’s Musical Theatre Taxonomy” explain and describe the BJT musical theatre process by listing the ever-increasing tasks that build upon each other to create successful theatrical production in BJT’s intensive process.

In Figure 1, at the bottom tier of the 16-element taxonomy is the “Undirected Activities” list. This level describes the “do-nothing” or “very little” activities that performers may do when they are doing nothing in their breaks. Though BJT’s includes strategic breaks and rest periods as part of its intensive process, BJT’s main work generally begins with “Directed Activity.”

“Directed Activity” as listed in tasks (8–15) can be defined as one-dimensional work activities that performers achieve when gaining and applying knowledge, identifying key elements of characterization, play construction, language and movement, music skills, etc. The “Directed Activity” process continues by applying the skills of comprehending and understanding information, memorising lines, planning, organising and communicating ideas and information, as well as repeating skills and actions in the basic forming stage of putting the elements of the production together. Primarily these activities begin as one-dimensional tasks of building characters as well as the basic level of blending and overlapping ensemble activities. “Directed Work” begins to graduate into deep work process as the intense cognitive activities increase in the rehearsal process.

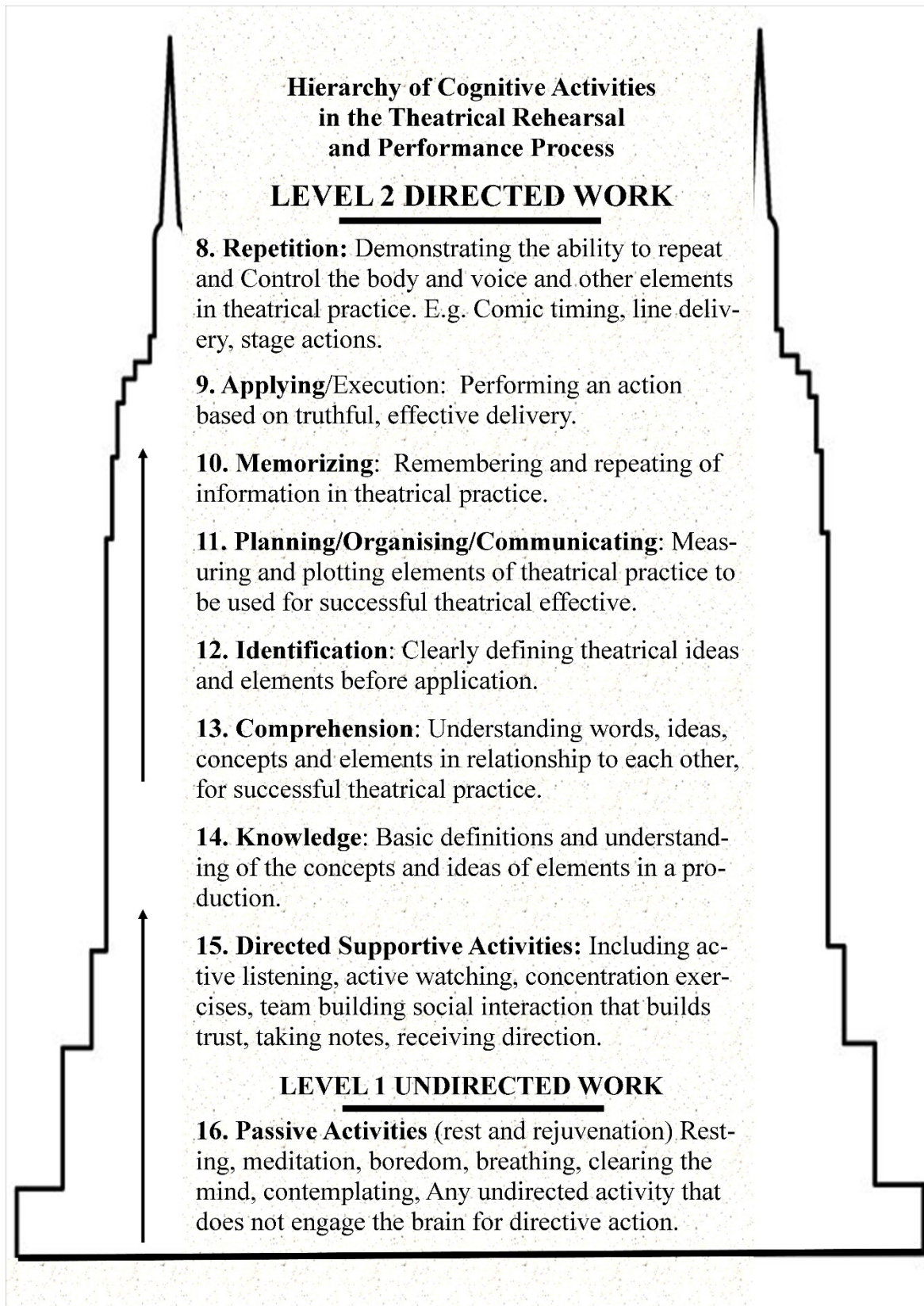


Figure 1. Non-directed Work and Directed Work
(reprinted with permission from Brisbane Junior Theatre).

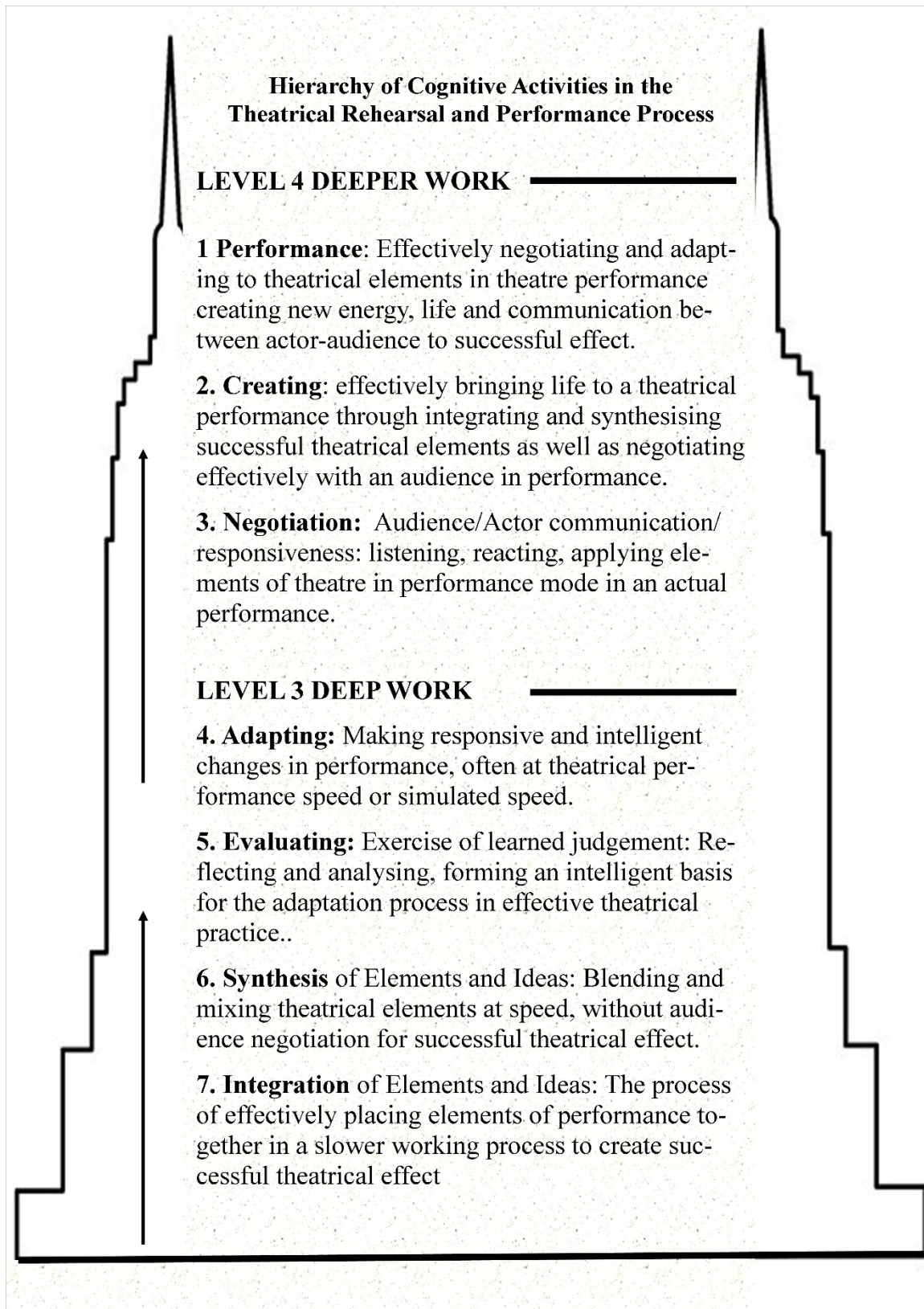


Figure 2. Deep Work and Deeper Work
(reprinted with permission from Brisbane Junior Theatre).

In Figure 2, the “Deep Work” stage 4–7, is demonstrated when the performers use integration and synthesis techniques, evaluating skills and constant adapting techniques, blending acting beats, building characterisation, as well as combining and working acting, singing and dancing together, applying these three dimensional elements with actual production based pace and rhythm. Integrating and synthesising the performing elements of voice, acting and movement are significant theatre tasks that represent a wide scope of theatrical “Deep Work” activities and require intensive focus. Joan Melton, a pioneer in the study of ‘Integration’ in musical theatre states:

Music and theatre come together in extraordinary ways both in opera and in musical theatre. Even in non-musical productions, actors sing with or without training. Yet in the training process, singers and actors often live very different lives and take on perspectives that separate rather than integrate their work as performers ... Music and theatre might well come together long before the advent of rehearsals and performances, and if they did, singers and actors would stand to benefit enormously. More overlap in the training process would mean greater ease and skill in performance. (Melton xiii-xiv)

The 4th level, Deeper Work, combines audience-actor negotiation, adaptation and transformative creativity, fully realised integrated technique at full pace and speed of performance. It is also important to understand that each of the four areas of this taxonomy should also be seen as operating in constantly moving overlapping cycles of elements that are in no way fixed or static.

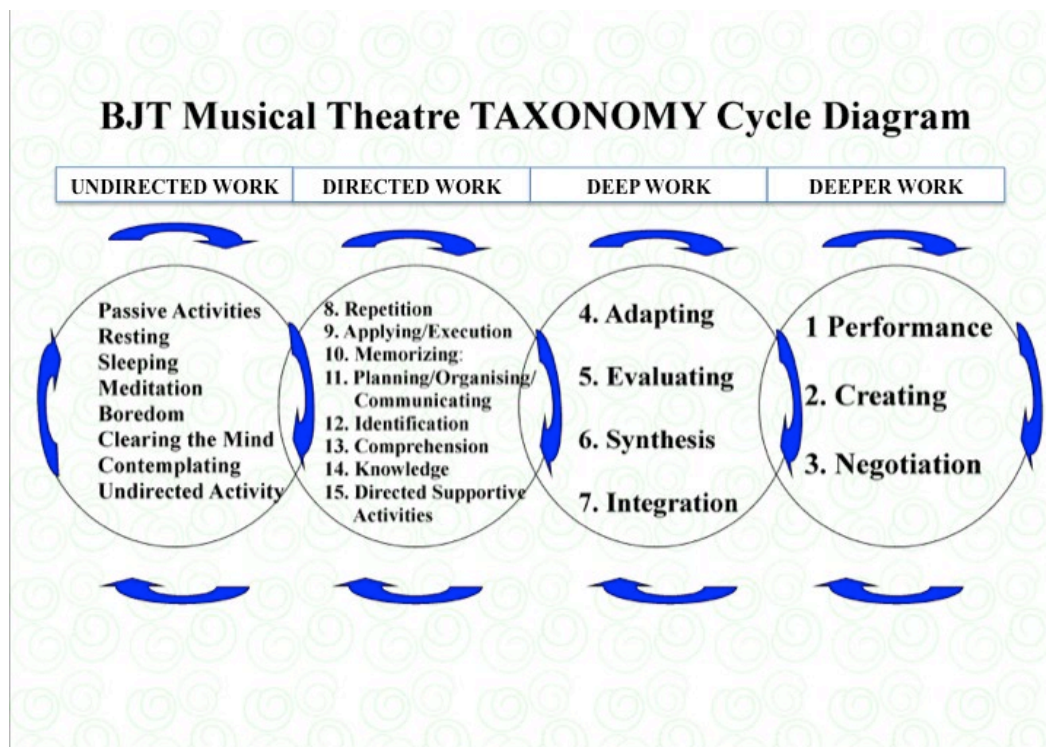


Figure 3. Taxonomy Cycle diagram (reprinted with permission from Brisbane Junior Theatre).

In Figure 3, it is important to understand that each task has a cycle of continual intensity of focus. Each cycle overlaps and affects the following upward cycle of the taxonomy creating a depth of skill and understanding in each of the levels of work achieved. Each element is not static, but constantly moving and growing, building with and upon previous cyclical elements to establish the final result of negotiating, creating and performing powerful and truthful theatre. Figure 3 demonstrates how levels of the taxonomy overlap and are connected to produce successful theatrical practice.

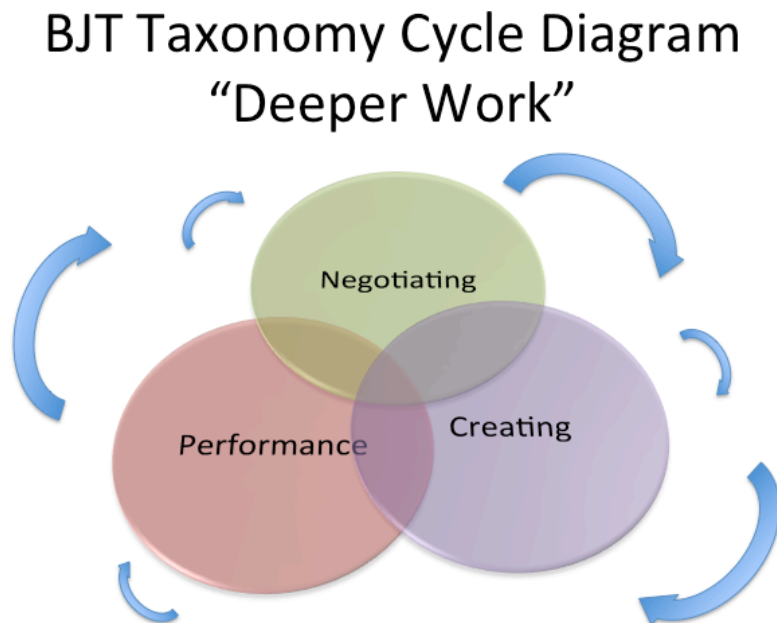


Figure 4. Deeper Work cycle (reprinted with permission from Brisbane Junior Theatre).

Figure 4 demonstrates the non-static nature of each of the elements, while recognising that the elements of each level have their own unique flow of cyclic creativity, that depends on ever increasing intensely focused tasks and the conventions and rules that shape them and govern how these elements and levels operate. The figure uses the “Deeper Work” level as an example to show how each element connects in a cyclical group and spins with flow through time, overlapping with other necessary elements in the process of creative growth toward the goal of producing a successful production. It is important to note that not only are the circles interconnected, producing nuances and new creativity, they are also moving individually and as a whole in the same direction reflecting that successful production needs to be truthful, life-like and transformative as it interacts in fresh ways in each actor-audience encounter.

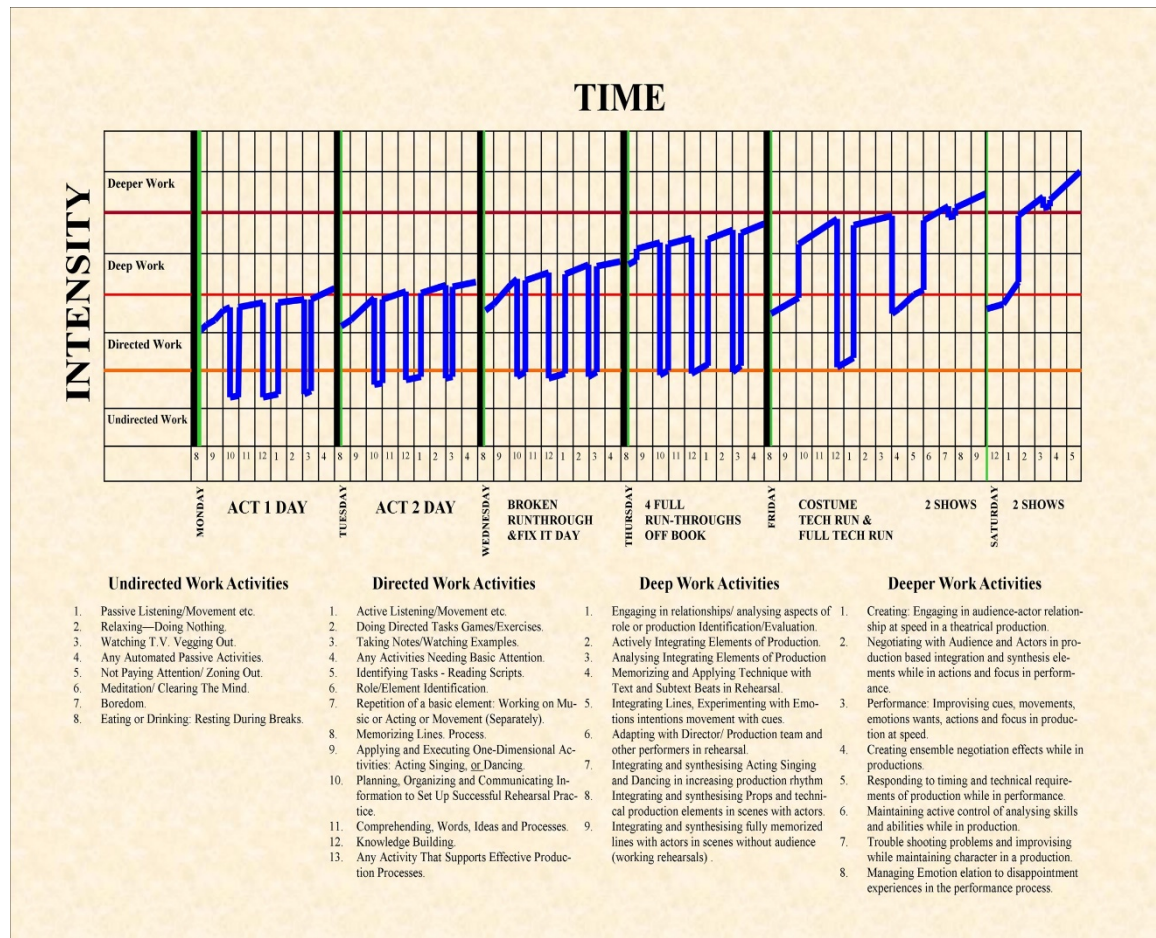


Figure 5. Time over Intensity: BJT intensive process graph (reprinted with permission from Brisbane Junior Theatre).

Figure 5 is a “Time over Intensity” graph demonstrating BJT’s one-week intensive process. The intensity of the “Taxonomy” graph is the vertical information measuring ever increasing, intensely focused activities throughout the week. The horizontal time-line quantitatively measures the hourly work of BJT’s performers in rehearsal. The figure’s blue line rises according to the intensity of the group task and falls when there are shallow work activities. The graph clearly shows that the levels of intensity based on the tasks of intense focus demonstrates in the BJT Taxonomy shown in Figures 1 and 2, generally rises according to the level of task intensity through time. This further demonstrates that as the performers progress in skill and technique, they become an integrated and synthesised ensemble, ultimately performing with creativity as they rise through each of the 4 levels and 16 elements of the Musical Theatre Taxonomy.

When viewed as a whole, the five figures above demonstrate not only BJT’s ever-increasing “Deep Work” tasks, but also the three-dimensional process of how these tasks function within BJT’s actual intensive rehearsal and performance process, and that BJT has operated within the framework of Newport’s “Deep Work” principles since its inception. Newport’s “Deep Work” principles validate BJT’s ability to develop and perform a production within the limited time of its intensive one-week period. The

proof of the importance of these principles can be found within its consistent success over BJT's 18-year history.

Conclusion

The need for an increased emphasis on theatre for Australia's youth has ensured that a new paradigm be sought. A strong solution for this comes in the form of "intensive theatre". While intensive theatre has had proven success internationally in both America and Britain, some changes must be made in order for it to succeed in Australia. BJT's intensive one-week rehearsal and performance process has demonstrated the ability to successfully adapt to the Australian culture and its proven durability, 76 successful productions over 18 years, means that its approach is worthy of consideration and possibly emulation. Due to the fact that the intensive nature of the one-week process at the point of BJT's inception was non-existent in Australia and globally, and that BJT's intensive practice success has, subverted the accepted norms of time over focus in traditional theatrical production, only heightens BJT's significance. Cal Newport's principles have both demonstrated an explanation for BJT's ability to function against the norm, and provided a framework for other theatrical practices to emulate and incorporate. Some examples include being wildly passionate, producing flow, cultivating and engaging youth in collaborative work, developing supportive relationships, instituting chunks of well-planned "Deep Work" time, followed by significant chunks of planned rest and rejuvenation, maintaining important goals, eliminating extraneous activities and actively eliminating distractions.

BJT's intensive model and formula have the potential to be the new paradigm called for by the "2011 Australia Theatre Forum" for inspiring theatre performance opportunities for young performers (Australia Theatre Forum). For example, BJT's one-week process could be adopted by schools, theatres, arts and community groups to create programs that engage young people. This paper has also demonstrated that BJT's intensive youth theatre process is unique and is perhaps the new paradigm that would provide young performers with technique, skills and greater stage experience, not only for Australia but globally. For these reasons, BJT's one-week phenomenon may deserve closer attention.

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About the author

Jack Bradford, MA, Grad Dip Ed Secondary, BA, AA, Dip MUS, Cert IV TAE, is an American/Australian theatre performer, educator and director. Jack is the founder/artistic director of [Brisbane Jr. Theatre](#), Starlight Theatre and Brisbane Musical Theatre in Brisbane. Jack's Musical Theatre roles include Jean Val Jean in three productions of *Les Misérables* with a 2002 4MBS Award for Best Actor in Brisbane. Jack has also played Sweeney in *Sweeney Todd*, Jesus in *Godspell*, and Arthur in *Camelot*. Jack has directed a number of Brisbane premiere productions including *Songs for a New World*, *Witches of Eastwick*, *Rent* and *13 the Musical*. Jack's screen credits' include *Daybreakers* with Ethan Hawke and Mr. Chauvel in the BBC/Disney TV Show *Mortified*. Jack has taught Drama and Theatre at the tertiary and secondary level and currently teaches weekly classes for Brisbane Junior Theatre where he directs and produces five yearly productions. In addition to this Jack is also the Artistic Director for BMT (Brisbane Musical Theatre) where he recently produced and directed *The Roar of the Greasepaint The Smell of the Crowd* and *Les Misérables*. Jack also teaches part-time at Mueller College as well a Charlotte Mason College where he is developing and teaching a Diploma of Musical Theatre course. Jack is also currently directing BJT's *Peter Pan* and preparing for BJT's upcoming productions of *Annie* and *Grease*. Jack is also very proud of his very talented and skilled family, Deborah his wife, Zachary, Jacob and Jesse his wonderful sons.