

THE THEATRE OF URBAN

Youth and Schooling in Dangerous Times

Because of its powerful socializing effects, the school classroom has always been a site of cultural, political, and academic conflict. In an age in which terms such as 'hard to teach' and 'at-risk' permeate our pedagogical discourses, and anti-immigrant, anti-welfare, 'zero-tolerance' rhetoric is commonplace, how we frame and understand the dynamics of the classroom has serious ethical implications and practical consequences. Using theatre and drama education as a window into life in four urban secondary schools in Toronto and New York City, *The Theatre of Urban* examines the ways in which these schools reflect the cultural and political shifts in North American schooling policies, politics, and practices of the early twenty-first century.

Resisting facile comparisons of Canadian and American school systems, Kathleen Gallagher opts instead for a rigorous analysis of the context-specific features – noting both the differences and similarities – of urban cultures and schools in the two countries. Gallagher re-examines familiar 'urban issues' facing these schools, such as racism, classism, (hetero)sexism, and religious fundamentalism, in light of theatre performances of diverse groups of young people and their commentary on their own creative work together. A profoundly challenging and innovative work, *The Theatre of Urban* not only provides new insights into the conflicts that often erupt in these highly charged school spaces, it also explores the potential of drama as a powerful medium for personal growth and social change.

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To the brilliant teenagers with whom I have spent the better part
of my teaching and research life: 'Thank you for the fire.'
(Dr Rank, *A Doll's House*)

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