

MA Work Based Learning Studies

WBS 4861 Project Module

Project Title:

***Dance and Theatre Performance for
Young People 11+ Years:
an exploratory and comparative study
of current practices and discourses***

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Dance

Education

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Summary

This report explores and compares current practices and discourses in the fields of dance and theatre performance for young people 11+ years, including work for young deaf people.

It is written as a worker-researcher in my role as Associate Director of Green Candle Dance Company, which creates dance-theatre productions and participatory programmes, for young, deaf and older people, in many educational and community settings; and is aimed at professionals in the fields of dance and theatre for young people, including arts educators and funders.

The enquiry is based on qualitative research rooted in case study: one of a young people's theatre company and the second within dance. It employs mixed methods, using both fieldwork and deskwork: encompassing literature review, observation, questionnaires, interviews and discourse analysis.

The research asks the following questions:

- Why, or to what degree, is it important to create or present dance and theatre performance specifically for young people?
- What defines, and what processes help to create 'excellence' and...
- 'relevance' in performance for young people?

In conclusion it presents the inter-relationship of 'relevance' and 'excellence' in performance for young audiences. A diagrammatic model is offered which suggests that excellent, and thus important, work for young people synthesises three elements: relevance, innovation and quality.

The report advocates the 'joining up' of two 'communities of practice': dance for young people and theatre for young people.

It recommends supporting the continued development of professional dance for young people, including increasing the literature on this subject.

Chapter 1: Introduction

My work context

I am the Associate Director of Green Candle Dance Company, which specialises in creating performances, and participatory programmes, for young, deaf and older people, in many educational and community settings. The company's professional dance-theatre productions incorporate acting, text and song as well as dance: therefore our work is relevant to developments in both dance and theatre.

This Research Project helps to pave the way for the creation of *Communicate!* (working title), the company's next planned production for deaf and hearing young people aged 11+ years, due to be developed in autumn 2008.

The company has made 16 full-length productions for young people since 1984; however it has not made one specifically for this age group since 1994, although two productions since then have partly catered for adolescents, and several have been made for children. Therefore one of my key aims, in undertaking the project as a worker-researcher, was that it should strengthen the company's awareness of current thinking, trends and successful practice in the wider fields of dance and theatre for young people. This, I believed, would help us clarify where the company 'stands' in relation to this body of work and assist us in articulating the rationale and philosophical, practical and stylistic approach to our work. In turn, this should support us in establishing a strong framework for the research and development, funding, and creation of the new production.

My professional background

My professional training was as a dancer and I now have nearly 25 years experience working very broadly in the fields of dance, dance education and community dance, including extensive experience with D/deaf participants and artists. In the past eight years I have conceived and co-/directed two original dance-theatre productions for young people, (including one for deaf and hearing children), which have toured nationally.

Attending a couple of events in 2007 helped set the scene and spark the process of formulating my research questions: seeing a production by a young people's theatre company, which through its theme and artistic approach appeared as if it should be highly relevant to young people, but which I found troublingly stereotypical, and attending a professional dance education and dance touring event at which varied attitudes and approaches to presenting and creating dance for children and young people was discussed.

My personal aims for undertaking the project are:

- To gain a broader professional perspective on dance and theatre performance for young people.

- To increase my awareness of the theoretical frameworks and paradigms which inform and underpin the above.
- To become clearer about my own philosophical / theoretical stance and approach to practice.

In undertaking this project I have been driven by a desire to learn more about the theatre sector by cross-referencing and comparing theatre work made for young people with dance, along with supporting literature review and discourse analysis to deepen my theoretical understanding.

Potential significance of my research

One of the longer-term objectives of my project is to advocate and facilitate the 'joining up' of two 'communities of practice': dance for young people and theatre for young people, and to increase awareness of dance and theatre that is accessible to, or inclusive of, deaf young people. I believe that there is more that both sectors could learn from good practice and theory within the other. My research could be of interest and use to professionals working in the fields of dance and theatre education and performance for young people; funding bodies and policy makers; as well as teachers and lecturers in the performing arts, community arts and arts education.

The wider context

Since starting work on this project three landmark government-commissioned reports have been produced on areas that are entirely relevant to my research: *Supporting Excellence in the Arts* (McMaster, 2008); *The Dance Review* (Hall, 2007); and *The Children's Plan*, (DCSF, 2007). It has been exciting to read these documents 'hot off the press' and to see within them material that reflects, sheds light on, or supports several of the key areas within the hybrid field of my enquiry and professional work. This has confirmed my belief that now is a key time to be undertaking this research.

Chapter 2: Aims, Objectives, Terms of Reference and Literature Review

AIMS, OBJECTIVES & RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Overall research aim

The main aim of this project is:

- To investigate and compare current practices, thinking and trends in the fields of dance and theatre performance for young people 11+ years, including work for young deaf people.

Research questions

The main research questions which guided the research were:

- Why, or to what degree, is it important to create or present dance and theatre performance specifically for young people?
- What defines, and what processes help to create 'excellence' in performance for young people?
- What defines, and what processes help to create, performance for young people that is 'relevant' as opposed to, for example, 'patronising' or 'stereotypical'?

Target audience

The target audience for my project was staff at Green Candle Dance Company and other professionals in the fields of dance and theatre for young people, including arts educators and funders.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Dance and Theatre Performance for Young People 11+ Years - by this I mean professional productions, performed by adult professional performers, which have been made, or presented, specifically, or predominantly, for young people over the age of 11, in the subsidised arts sector as opposed to the West End or commercial sector. Although also very interested in work made for children, this was not the focus of my research; neither was Youth Theatre or Youth Dance.

Young people 11+ years - I chose this definition as opposed to the broader term 'adolescents'; although I investigated the concept of adolescence in some detail within my literature search. I did not stipulate an upper age-limit; had I done so it would have been around 19 years of age.

Below are commonly accepted definitions of theatre made for young people adapted from definitions given in *Theatre in Education* (National Campaign for the Arts 1997). It is important to bear in mind 'distinctions are becoming less clear cut' (p6):

Theatre for (Children &) Young People (TYP) - the umbrella heading for theatrical work performed by professional actors for children and young people

Children’s Theatre (CT) – work performed by professional actors whose primary (not necessarily sole) aim is to entertain children (generally up to the age of 12 or 13); or increase their appreciation of theatre as an artform

Young People’s Theatre (YPT) – work performed by professional actors in an educational context or where young people form the audience. Often based on contemporary social issues and may include follow up. Generally refers to work made for young people approximately 11 – 18 years of age.

Theatre in Education (TIE) – work performed by professional actor-teachers in a school context with explicit educational goals. Usually this has included active participation by pupils in workshops as well as performances.

LITERATURE SEARCH & REVIEW

My literature search and review centred on the intersection between two key areas: the Arts (focusing particularly on Dance and Theatre) and Young People (embracing areas such as adolescent development, rights, needs and education).

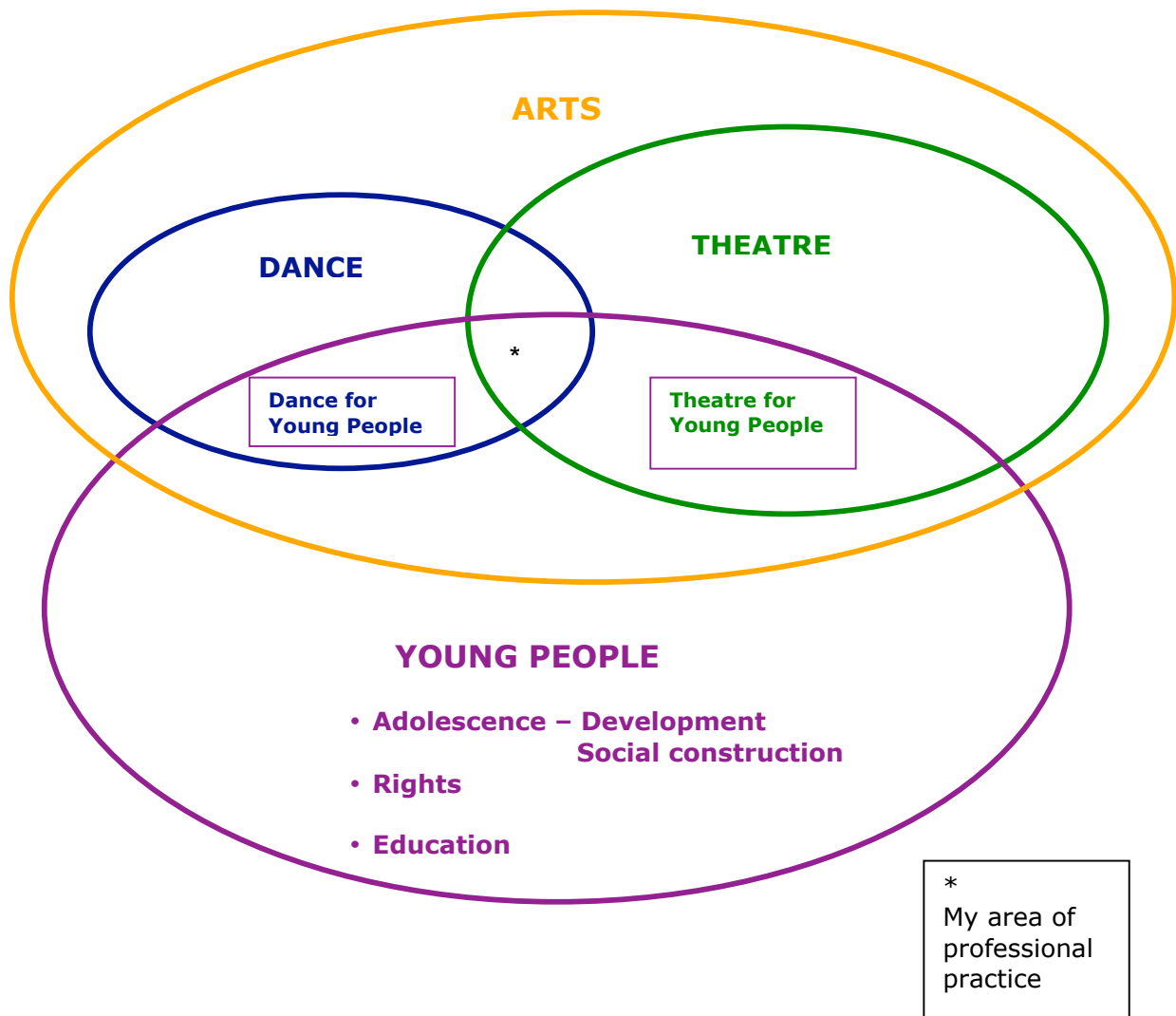


Figure 1: A conceptual diagram showing the relationship between the main areas of my research and the wider worlds of the 'arts' and 'young people' and my work context.

The Arts, Creativity, Education and the Economy

I began by surveying the current arts and arts education landscape within recent government (commissioned) reports, starting with McMaster (2008) who asserts that the plurality of British society is one of its greatest assets and should inform and be reflected in the arts.

'Just as the new society we live in has immense potential for the creation of art, so art has never before been so needed to understand the deep complexities of Britain today.' (p5)

McMaster also stresses the importance of striving for excellence within the arts, with the concomitant need for innovation and risk-taking. Of great interest to me is his examination of 'excellence' and its relationship to 'relevance': these concepts are at the heart of two of my research questions. His two key statements on which could be seen to be in opposition to each other:

'...excellent culture goes to the root of living and is therefore relevant to every single one of us' (p6); and

'...culture can only be excellent when it is relevant and thus nothing can be excellent without reflecting the society which produces and experiences it.' (p11)

These views are reflected by discourses in the field and which I examine more closely in Chapter 5.

Another influential and pervasive discourse, developed over the past decade or so, is the importance of creativity in maintaining and developing the UK's position as a leading player on the world economic stage, and, the resulting need for creative and cultural experiences within education:

'While this economic and regeneration driver is compelling it is matched by an equal and moral imperative – the intrinsic importance of giving children and young people creative experience – both to develop personal identity and confidence and to understand and prepare for [the] 21st century society' (Roberts, 2006, p12)

All these concerns – artistic excellence and relevance; the increasing diversity of contemporary multicultural Britain; the importance of creativity in the education of tomorrow's workforce – are bound up in, and central to, considering dance and theatre for young people.

Dance and Theatre

The second focus area of my literature search was dance and theatre. I examined the current 'state of play' within these art forms by looking at a range of documents, including current artform policies by Arts Council England, and literature relating to dance and theatre for young people.

Dance

The dance sector is visibly growing in volume, confidence and influence. Publications such as the *Dance Manifesto* (Dance UK, 2006) and *21st Century Dance* (Siddall, 2001) celebrate dance's achievements and contribution to society. Hall (2007) proudly declares: 'Dance has been the Cinderella of art forms for too long. Its time has come'.

Dance Performance for Young People

I searched long and hard for publications on this subject. Although there is a wealth of literature on dance education, it appears that very little has been written about creating or presenting dance performance for young people.

The literature that I have been able to gather is mostly in the form of work-based documents, websites of the handful of UK dance companies and organisations that identify as creating or presenting work specifically for young people, and a few articles written by practitioners describing the practice or history of creating dance for young people within the context of their own company. Only a small handful touched on wider issues.

One of these is Carol Anderson (2002) who examines the concerns and efforts of dance makers and programmers in Canada to develop 'dance for youth'¹. She sees addressing 'validation' and 'funding' as vital in addressing 'artistic quality' – the 'predominantly important' issue.

I found many of these issues, and others, taken up by Garcia and Warrack (1999)², albeit with a stronger sense of exasperation:

'The notion of dance as art for children seems to be problematic for the English. The comparison with other countries is embarrassing; the comparison with other artforms is humiliating.'

Gladstone (in Garcia & Warrack, 1999) reflects on possible reasons for this:

'It [dance] is still seen as a *Cinderella* artform and artists are still struggling for it to be seen as a serious and established form and that creates a sort of preciousness which does not encourage professional children's work.'

The Arts Council's current *Dance policy* (2006) recognises that among young people dance 'is the most popular physical activity after football'. However there is no direct reference within the Policy to work made for young audiences. Its emphasis is on developing the profession, 'identifying and nurturing talent' (p3)³.

¹ Anderson defines 'youth' as representing 'the different phases of childhood, teenage years and early adulthood' – from 3 years of age to the early 20's

² This article contemplates the value placed on children's dance and reports on the debate on Dance and Theatre Provision for Children in the UK and Abroad, as part of The Flying Gorillas Day at Ballroom Blitz 1999

³ which includes the importance of supporting Youth Dance England and the Centres for Advanced Training

This focus on widening access to dance participation, education and training is the central concern of *The Dance Review*, [see Appendix 7: Excerpt 9] in which there is one paragraph on dance performance as integral to this equation:

'The opportunities for children and young people to be part of an audience enabling them to experience the calibre of dance we have in this country, is vital in engaging them from a young age. Therefore: We recommend that every child or young person attends a performance at least once a year.'⁴ (Hall, 2007, p25)

The *Government Response* suggests that the DCMS 'Cultural Offer' for young people may be able to provide these opportunities. (DCSF, 2008, p8)

Theatre

As with dance, there is a sense that theatre is flourishing, is also increasing rapidly within Higher Education (Palatine, 2008) and is experiencing a 'renaissance' due to increased funding from the Arts Council since 2003⁵ (Arts Council England, 2006).

The current Arts Council England *Theatre Policy* (2006) makes an explicit commitment to work for young people:

'We believe that theatre has an extraordinary power to transform the lives of young people. Theatre in England has a long history of creating professional theatre for children and young people.... We want to help raise the profile of professional theatre for children and young people.' (p5)

A further search of Arts Council publications reveals that in recent years there has been a considerable focus on children's and young people's theatre. In 2000 the Arts Council undertook a *Review of Children's Theatre* (November 2000). This was followed by a major seminar on the subject in Birmingham (July 2002) and report: *The quality of children's theatre: After the Birmingham seminar* (November 2003). In October 2003 it published the 2nd edition of *Drama in schools*, which recommends that a good school policy for drama should ensure that:

'[T]here are regular opportunities to experience the work of professionals at theatres, other arts venues and through visits to school by theatre companies and individual theatre practitioners. Bilingual and multi-lingual performances are especially valuable, as are those using integrated casting and additional forms of communication, such as signing.' (p42)

Theatre for young people

⁴ Part of Recommendation 2 'An entitlement to dance at Key Stage 3: aim to get a dance teacher in every secondary school'.

⁵ 'By 2003 an additional £25 million a year had begun to revitalise the sector' (ACE Theatre Policy, 2006, p2)

A key part of my literature search involved my searching widely into the origins of professional theatre for young people in Britain and current thinking. There is a wealth of literature and developed pedagogy on this subject meaning I was able to refer to a substantial range of publications (see Bibliography) published over the past 30 years: those most helpful to my research are discussed below.

Bennet (2005) places its development within the historical context of Britain's social and educational system, as well as the influence of the emergence of children's literature. He follows the development of 'the two branches... theatre as an art form experience, and theatre within an educational context' (p.11).

Two books by Anthony Jackson were extremely helpful in helping me to gain an understanding of theory in this field. The first (1993) is a highly informative collection of essays on the emergence of Theatre in Education referring to formative influences such as the development of child-centred education, drama-in-education (Heathcote), [see Appendix 7: Excerpt 3] the welfare state; and radical educational and theatre practices (Freire, Boal and Brecht). Jackson also discusses the damage done to the sector by the 1988 Educational Reform Act (ch.1, pp17-37) an issue which is examined by the National Campaign for the Arts (1997).

Jackson's latest book (2007) reflects on theatre's educational role over the past hundred years, referring to theatre in education, forum theatre, theatre for development and the recently coined 'applied theatre'⁶, examining 'the tension between theatre as education and theatre as art' (p1).

Young People – constructions, rights and development

The final strand of my literature review examined contemporary thinking around young people themselves. It was challenging to narrow down a useful selection of texts in this huge area. Some of these are indicated briefly below.

My search began with Scott & Marshall (2005), which gave me useful insight into some key concepts and constructions of 'Childhood' and 'Adolescence' including the relatively 'new approach – stressing the rights, strengths and capabilities of children' which has arisen since the 1980's (p67).

Graham, (2004) an experienced child and adolescent psychiatrist, expresses his view that 'the teens have become the last group [in society] whose disempowerment is invisible because it is so much taken for granted' and suggests radical ways of changing 'their stigmatized position' (p1).

Roche & Tucker (1997), which examines the past and current experience of *Youth in Society*, and the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UN, 1989) provided a useful contextual framework for looking at the UK government's 'first ever' *Children's Plan* (December 2007): the latest step in a process of

⁶ 'Applied Theatre' (or sometimes 'Applied Drama') has emerged as a professionally recognised term since the mid-1990's to describe educational, community, performance theatre practice that is applied to specific contexts and communities. Helen Nicholson (2005) examines the origins of this work and the development of the term in *Applied drama: the gift of theatre*.

transformation of Children's Services in the UK, following The Children Act 2004 and associated governmental reports.

Goosens (in Jackson & Goossens, 2006, chapter 2) comprehensively traces the development of 'Theories of Adolescence' over the past century. In the same book Lahaille (chapter 7) identifies 'one of the main developmental tasks in adolescence' as the attempt 'to co-ordinate personal and social values' (p131).

Finally Deeny (2007) brings together many of the issues I had read on the rights, psychological and moral development of young people; questions raised by seeing plays for young people in performance; theory recounted and developed by Jackson (1993, 2007); and issues practitioners were raising in their interviews.

Chapter 3: Methodology

RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

My overall research approach was informed by a 'critical realism' epistemology advocated by Robson, 2002 (after Bhaskar, 1989), as it offers integration between positivism and interpretivism and, as Robson, referring to House (1991) indicates, it 'has the potential of incorporating features highlighted in the emancipatory approach'. I felt that this approach was relevant to my project as I aimed to investigate work made for young people (traditionally oppressed by adults) including deaf young people (doubly oppressed by society's disabling attitudes and practices).

Overall my project was of flexible design (Robson, 2002): based predominantly on qualitative research; employing mixed methods, using both fieldwork and deskwork. It was a descriptive, exploratory and comparative study, in which I sought, in keeping with the critical realism framework, to understand 'how' and 'why' performance for young people is created as well as 'what' defines it as successful. Throughout I reflected upon the similarities and differences in attitudes and practices between the dance and theatre sectors.

My main research method was case study in which I examined a couple of contrasting examples: a young people's theatre company and a dance company. I set out to choose cases that would illustrate key concerns within both sectors in relation to work for young people. My main case study was within theatre as that is the area I wanted to learn more about, in order to give me fresh insights and ways of examining my own area – dance. I felt that studying one or two cases closely would enable me to connect with existing theory and to make an 'analytic or theoretical generalisation... the development of a theory which helps in understanding other cases or situations' (Ragin, 1987; Yin, 1994; in Robson, 2002, p177).

Although I used an aspect of the 'ethnographic approach', namely participant observation, as I was a practitioner-researcher observing other dance and theatre professionals in the field, which I found useful when I was 'seeking insight into an area or field which is new or different' (Robson 2002, p190), it was not an ethnographic study due to the very short timescale for its completion and my wide rather than highly concentrated area of inquiry.

Through the use of discourse analysis I sought to listen carefully to what was 'said between the lines' in verbal communication as well as in a range of formal and informal writings.

WORKER-RESEARCHER ISSUES

At the outset of my research I undertook a Reflexivity Exercise [see Appendix 6; and Appendix 7: Excerpt 1]. I felt that this was very important as I was entering the enquiry with some strong views and 'hunches' and wanted to be honest to myself what they were in order to minimise their 'contaminating' my research. I

also to ensure that I remained as open and unbiased as possible throughout the process, using reflexivity, to increase 'awareness of the ways in which the researcher as an individual with a particular social identity and background has an impact on the research process' (Robson 2002, p.172). I was aware that this was an important way of increasing validity and reliability in my flexible research.

Generally I found my position as a worker-researcher to be a very positive experience as I enjoyed the physical and emotional support of my company, colleagues and wider professional associates. The main – very large – challenge I faced was, as predicted, 'Duality of Roles' and lack of time in particular (Robson, 2002, p.535), due to urgent work demands.

Throughout my research I had good access to data sources, benefiting from the way that I am well networked and have positive professional relationships within the dance, dance education and wider theatre education sectors.

Finally as a worker-researcher I was able to draw on the professional experience and good understanding I have gained of enquiry over the years. This includes skills in a number of research methods and data collection techniques, acquired through writing, commissioning and supervising: numerous evaluation reports, journal articles and academic documents, and through conducting previous enquiry projects.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

As my main research method was case study, I employed the appropriate range of primarily qualitative data collection techniques below:

- Observation (including participant observation) – I observed several dance and theatre productions for young people, in rehearsal, during live performance in school and theatre venues, and on DVD; to help with gaining a sense of current practice within these fields and look for possible connections or contrasts between the two;
- Interviews – I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with six dance and theatre professionals; to hear 'from the horses mouth' attitudes to current practice and where that fits within the wider contemporary, historical, cultural and theoretical framework of performance for young people;
- Questionnaires – I distributed questionnaires to the members of two 'parallel' professional networking groups: one for dance educators and the other for arts educators (primarily working within theatre). These were distributed by me personally to attendees at meetings of these two groups as well as distributed via email to their full membership lists. The questionnaires were also displayed for self-selection on the signing-in desk of a half day dance education conference. The questionnaires included gathering largely qualitative data, to support and extend data collected via interviews to assist with contextualisation and triangulation;
- Literature search and review – I conducted one extensive search (at the beginning of the project) examining discourses, definitions, practices and policies within the fields related to my project; and (towards the end of the project) to investigate further findings or issues, which came up during the research, and again to assist with triangulating and validating findings.

Sampling methodology and rationale

In my enquiry I was aiming for a 'purposive' sample (Robson, 2002, p. 265), in terms diversity of roles across both the theatre and dance sectors, enabling me to make an 'analytic' or 'theoretical' generalisation, (p. 177) as opposed to seeking a representative sample to enable statistical generalisation.

In practice it proved much easier to choose a case study within the area of theatre for young people than within dance. This was partly simply because there are far more theatre companies that specifically identify as making work for young people than there are in dance. Also I was aware that in choosing the second – dance – case study I would be advised to select a case 'where the theory would suggest *either* that the same result is obtained, *or* that predictably different results will be obtained' (Robson, 2002, p183).

In terms of interviewees, 3 were theatre practitioners and 3 were dance practitioners; they included a mixture of artistic directors and dance or theatre educators. I included a mixture of practitioners who worked specifically within the area of theatre or dance for young people and those who worked in a more mainstream dance or theatre context where they had experience of presenting 'adult' work to young people. The people I selected were all known to me through previous professional relationships. I asked them to participate in my research as I felt that it was likely that not only would they have interesting and diverse experiences and points of view but that they were intelligent and likely to feel comfortable reflecting on and sharing their thoughts and views. I took a great deal of time drawing up my original list of around 12 potential interviewees to ensure a range of perspectives and experiences. I thought carefully about what each interviewee could potentially add to the data collection process. As I had considered this thoroughly at the outset, it was more straightforward to edit this list as I was clear about my overall aims and objectives for this process.

I was originally intending to interview up to 10 people, however after six interviews I felt that I had 'saturated' the main categories indicated by my research questions.

Data Analysis

In practice I felt there was some connection between my research process and the general style of a grounded theory approach (Robson, 2002, pp492 - 497) where '[t]he aim is to generate a theory to explain what is central in the data.'

The six interviews were spread out over one month. This allowed for reflection and informal data analysis between each visit, which meant that I could ensure that the data I was collecting was the most useful possible. For me allowing the process of data gathering and development of theory to develop hand in hand and inform each other felt like a natural process that made sense to me.

'Throughout the analysis, theory is built through interaction with the data, making comparisons and asking questions of the data. It is sometimes referred to as the *method of constant comparison*' (Pidgeon and Henwood, 1996, pp.92-4, in Robson 2002, p493).

Additionally, as case study was my main research methodology, I kept in mind 'the importance of the sensitivity and judgement of the 'human instrument' in the process of data analysis (Robson, 2002, p. 479).

VALIDITY & RELIABILITY:

Robson (2002, p. 176) identifies being 'thorough, careful and honest' as the guiding principles in ensuring reliability and validity in flexible research. Another key component is ensuring that data collected is as accurate and complete as possible. In order to achieve this I kept detailed notes of observation sessions and, in addition to notes, used a digital voice recorder to record all interviews (after Maxwell, 1992 in Robson, 2002, p. 171). To help justify validity of my interpretation I also kept an 'audit trail', in my research diary tracking the actions and decisions I made in collecting and analysing data (after Padgett, 1998, p.95, in Robson, 2002, p.175).

As discussed above I used reflexivity at the outset and throughout the research process as another way of increasing the validity and reliability of my research.

I have also striven after Robson (2002) to 'introduce rigour into all aspects of enquiry' as I am aware that this greatly increases its validity and reliability, in other words its 'justified credibility and trustworthiness' (p9). I have kept in mind his assertion that both fixed and flexible designs can be scientific when they are carried out with a 'scientific attitude': that is '*systematically, sceptically and ethically*' (Robson, 2002, p5 & p18).

Triangulation

Another important way of ensuring validity and reliability in research is the use of triangulation. In my use of mixed methods, a certain degree of triangulation was built-in to my study, as I was looking at the phenomenon I was investigating from several points of view to minimise 'inappropriate certainty' (Robson, 2002, p370). This involved using: using observation (to look at practice in the field), interviews and questionnaires (to listen to practitioners) and literature review (to see the wider picture and existing theory). Robson sees the main advantage of using mixed methods as 'permitting *triangulation*' (2002, p.371, emphasis in original).

ISSUES OF ETHICS & CONFIDENTIALITY

There were no major ethical issues raised by my project that could not be addressed by implementing good practice research principles of honesty, confidentiality, anonymity, non-harm and informed consent. However I was aware that as the dance and theatre (for young people) worlds are small I needed to work hard to ensure anonymity for research participants. Also, as I was sometimes in situations where there were young people present, I ensured that I abided at all times by professional Child Safeguarding standards.

I set out to be as ethical as possible in my dealings with research participants [see Appendix 1: Ethical Release Form]. I created an Informed Consent Form [see Appendix 2] which I gave to all interview participants to read, usually several days in advance of the interview. I offered all interviewees a CD of the recorded interview in the absence of being able to offer a full transcript – which I

knew that I would not have the capacity to do. I also offered to email them a copy of my final research report. I wrote to all participants to thank them for their contributions. I informed all interviewees about the research with a letter [see Appendix 3] and attached a similar letter to the research questionnaire [see Appendix 4].

I had a generally positive response to my research as I believe that people could sense that they were being treated respectfully and that I genuinely valued their contribution and generosity, as busy professionals, in giving their time. In return, all interviewees, and several questionnaire respondents expressed how much they had enjoyed the process of reflecting on their professional area by participating in my interview. In this way I felt that the interview process was a valuable two-way exchange:

'In the interview, knowledge is created inter the points of view of the interviewer and the interviewee. The interviews with the subjects are the most engaging stage of an interview inquiry.' (Kvale, 1996, p124)

Chapter 4: Project Activity

Literature search and review

I found this part of the project activity by far the most challenging. This was because I felt that there was a huge amount of ground I needed to cover to ensure that I had engaged with the relevant areas in adequate breadth and depth. [See Appendix 7: Excerpt 6]. Due to extreme time restraints, I had to start organising and conducting data collection well in advance of completing my literature search.

It may also be that I feel confident and comfortable with my 'people skills' derived from years of working with groups and individuals within dance education and community dance. I also feel reasonably confident in my ability to communicate verbally and in writing; all these skills came to the fore in conducting questionnaires, interviews and observations. I am far less experienced and confident in academic skills and felt the need to really develop an awareness and understanding of key existing theory. I also found this process enormously time-consuming and difficult within such a short research project the sheer volume of days needed for this task. Reading mostly in short bursts made it difficult to keep concentration on a train of thought and reading on the tube, for example, did not allow for good notes to be taken whilst reading.

Choice of case study 1

The choice of a young people's theatre company literally came into my email inbox. It fit my criteria perfectly: they were touring a production made for young people over 11 to schools and theatre venues during my research period.

Choice of case study 2

After considerable thought I chose a pair of dance companies with a strong educational remit for their student and graduate members in terms in supporting access to the dance profession; this was useful for me to examine as it linked directly to the current concern about widening access to dance training and the profession. They seek to balance that impetus with the need to make work that is inspiring and appropriate for young audiences.

Observation

I enjoyed role of observer during my research. I found the process liberating in many ways as it required a more consciously open, unbiased and observant frame of mind, than the more typical expectation of being 'entertained' as an audience member or of 'evaluating' a performance (say) and making professional judgements about it. I also found certain observation sessions especially refreshing as it is a rare opportunity to see others rehearsing or performing in a closed environment (a school) for example.

Pre-research organisation

I found that the pre-research organisation was considerable, including factors such as: computer filing; creating a research timetable; conducting a reflexivity

exercise; writing a data analysis action plan; creating an Informed consent form, pre-interview letter; and drawing up a list of potential interviewees

Questionnaires

I took considerable time and care with drafting and piloting my questionnaire. Guided by useful advice from Robson (2002, pp241 – 251) and Bell (1999, pp118-134) on the need for careful preparation.

I piloted the questionnaire at work; receiving back 6 / 8 questionnaires distributed, with respondents varied from 20 to 60+ years of age, which I felt was a good enough sample. I did not change my questionnaire as a result of feedback, as I received no conclusive comments that I should make certain changes. I felt that the questionnaire gave me useful comments and most people were positive about it. I decided to use almost entirely open-ended questions.

To minimise the risk of low-return, I distributed the questionnaire at two professional networking meetings. I hoped that by personally introducing my research and asking for help I might get a somewhat higher response rate. I also offered both groups to come back at a later date to give a presentation based on my research; as an incentive to encourage people to participate and also out of a genuine desire (as stated in my research proposal) to share my findings with colleagues in the dance and theatre sectors.

I framed the questionnaire with a brief informal note (on coloured paper) on the top with a more formal and detailed letter underneath; hoping to find a balance between friendly informality to professional colleagues, and professionalism and ethicality in research. All hard copies of the questionnaire had a SAE attached for ease of return and courtesy.

In recognition that some people (myself included) prefer to respond to questionnaires via email I ensured that questionnaires were distributed to members of both groups electronically. It also served as a way of reminding people to respond.

I received a total of 11 responses with approximately 80 questionnaires distributed; it is hard to be precise because of using two e-distribution lists. Four of the responses were from the theatre sector and seven from dance.

In order to prepare the questionnaires for analysis, and to ensure anonymity I assigned a letter and number to each participant: for example, Q2-D (Questionnaire respondent number 2, dance sector).

[See Appendix 4: Questionnaire, Questionnaire letters, Pilot questionnaire feedback form]

Interviews

I encouraged all participants to choose the most convenient time and location for them. Often interviews ended up being shorter than the optimum 60-minutes; however I became adept at steering through the interview and ensuring that the essential issues were covered. Some people requested the questions in advance to help them prepare. I also realised that I needed to reiterate my

terms of reference at the beginning of interviews to ensure focused responses. I found out that although I had sent people formal information in advance about my research project it transpired that not everyone had had a chance to read this thoroughly and to fully grasp my parameters.

I conducted my first interview fairly early on in the research process so I treated it as a pilot and asked my interviewee to view it in the same light, checking his willingness to give me a second interview if I discovered gaps in the data collected. In fact the interview went well and I found that I really enjoyed the process. (See Appendix 7: Excerpt 4].

I produced two interview schedules – one for artistic directors and one for arts educators, although they were very similar. [See Appendix 3: Interview Schedules].

Interview participants are identified in this research by a letter and number: for example, IT-3 (Interview # 3, theatre). This is to ensure anonymity but also to allow for comparison across sectors.

I found some of the technical aspects of equipping myself to be research-ready were extremely time-consuming. At the outset I investigated the possibility of acquiring or using equipment that would enable me to upload the written or spoken words onto a computer as efficiently as possible. In the end I found it took a great deal of research to find the most appropriate digital voice-recorder. Unfortunately I could not find (even after extensive research) the ideal, affordable, compatible voice recorder / voice recognition software combination which I was hoping would make transcription much easier.

However I did manage to type up at least a partial transcript of each interview – summarising responses to each question, typing up some important quotes in full, and reflecting on the most important themes and points. As the interviews were recorded digitally it was easy to listen to them as much as needed via my computer. I received help to produce one full transcript via some administrative support I negotiated at work.

As my enquiry was small-scale and short in duration I did not feel it would be practical to access or learn to use a specialist qualitative data package such as NUD*ISD. Also through extensive reading of Kvale (1996) I began to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the processes and skills involved in interview data analysis and the limitations of transcription:

‘The transcripts are, however, not the rock-bottom data of interview research, they are artificial constructions from an oral to a written mode of communication. Every transcription from one context to another involves a series of judgments and decisions.’ (p163)

[See Appendix 7: Excerpts 11, 13 & 14a]

Chapter 5: Project Findings

CASE STUDIES & OBSERVATION

Case Study 1: Greenwich and Lewisham Young People's Theatre

My main case study focused on Greenwich and Lewisham Young People's Theatre (GLYPT) which 'creates theatre of integrity and quality for, with and by young people'; making both 'professional works for young audiences and participatory models', and delivering numerous youth theatre and drama education projects. It was established in 1971 as one of the UK's first Theatre-in-Education companies. [See Appendix 7: Excerpt 2]

During the period of my research, the company was rehearsing – and then touring to schools and theatre venues – *SK8 Angel* a new piece of theatre for young people over the age of 11, written by Michael Wicherek, directed by Jeremy James, with choreography by Rachel Deadman, and produced in partnership with Sixth Sense Theatre for Young People. The piece incorporated contemporary dance in specific scenes and a sense of movement and choreography throughout. The show was accompanied by an extensive educational resource and optional follow-up workshop. All shows were followed by a question and answer session with the audience.

SK8 Angel explores the connection between two ideas: the impact of bereavement on young people; and the focus and release of skateboarding. It tells 'the emotive and powerful story of Con, a fourteen year old boy coming to terms with the loss of his mother' (GLYPT: *SK8 Angel*, 2007).

GLYPT is committed to involving young people in the process of creating its professional productions. *SK8 Angel* was developed through around 14 development days over a period of two years including: two exploratory studio-based days; a creative week-long, multi-artform residency in a primary school and adjacent skateboard park; and a script development residency at East 15 Acting School.

'Young people have fed into the process and into the story.... This... has been a massively important part of the research and it reassures you that the story you are telling connects to people' (James, in Newby, 2008, p5).

Within the framework of the company's work, *SK8 Angel*, shone with a strong sense of respect for, and genuine love* of young people, coupled with striving for the highest artistic integrity, innovation and quality within highly constrained resources. (* 'Love' could be viewed as an old fashioned word, but in this context I feel it is very apt, as it encompasses the ideas of enjoying the company and energy of young people and having a sense of empathy with the stage they are at in life).

These values were apparent from my first contact with the company when watching a rehearsal at which the director described his aim in creating a 'whole piece of theatre' with 'education at its core'. After the rehearsal, in response to my comments about how sad I found the ending of the piece, he discussed the role of the writer and consultation with young people in deciding the outcome. He said that he left the final decision to the writer but asked him to make it clear and not leave the audience with an ambiguous ending: feedback from young people who had seen the ending commented that they wanted to know clearly what happened; whether that be happy or sad. For me this demonstrated a good balance between trusting the artistry of a creative collaborator with listening carefully to young people as opposed to *assuming* how they might respond.

Although clearly defining their young person-centred development processes, the artistic team behind *SK8 Angel* do not appear to identify a difference in the artistic craft skills, in areas such as writing and directing, when making a play for young people, as compared to making general adult work.

'The question, 'How do you write for young people?' is asked a lot. I don't know if I do to be honest. But I think that is what is great about this production; it's not me or Jez writing and directing 'down' to young people. Jez is being authentic in the way he directs and I think with the writing, that's how I write. We'd have been caught out if we were trying to create something formulaic.' (Wicherek, in Newby, 2008, p6)

Later, I went to observe an afternoon performance for year 9 students in a secondary school. The drama teachers told me that their students 'were riveted' and 'responded well' to the earlier morning performance: I was able to witness this reaction for myself. They also commented that it was a 'good theme' and that it was a good example of 'focus' and other technical aspects of theatre.

Observation: Platform Discussion on *Baby Girl*, *DNA* and *The Miracle*, 6pm, 10th March, Cottesloe, National Theatre

'The three playwrights Lin Coghlan, Dennis Kelly and Roy Williams, and their director Paul Miller, discuss the plays' evolution from the Connections programme to these new Cottesloe productions. Chaired by Dan Rebellato.' (Platform, programme notes)

Towards the end of the platform, the audience was invited to put questions to the panel. In response to my question, 'Why is it important to create theatre for young people and why do you want to do it?' there were a number of responses: I found Lin Coghlan's the most interesting as she raised the issue of representation:

'When I was growing up watching theatre in Ireland I didn't see [young] people like me represented in theatre. I wanted to tell stories where we [the audience] recognise each other.' [See Appendix 7: Excerpt 7a]

Roy Williams followed by saying that he uses 'real life incidents' as stimulus for his plays so that 'the audience recognises something from their lives' adding that they are often surprised by this, which is reflected by a 'yelp of recognition!'

Observation: *DNA* and *The Miracle*, 7pm, 10th March, Cottesloe Theatre

Following the Platform, I stayed on to watch two of the plays in performance: *DNA* by Dennis Kelly and *The Miracle* by Lin Coghlan. While watching the plays I was particularly interested in observing the audience's responses – as the young people were in a much less constrained environment for expressing themselves, as compared the school context in which I observed *SK8 Angel*.

They responded particularly strongly to *DNA* - a stark and sinister play about a group of teenagers covering up the 'accidental' death of a schoolmate [see Appendix 7: Excerpt 7b, 10] - vocalising enjoyment of jokes as well as gasps of disbelief and disapproval at some of the outrageous amoral / immoral actions of the characters. Playwright Kelly (in Reballato, 2008) explains his stance:

'...often plays for young people tend to be rather moralising, but I try not to do that in my adult plays, so why would I do it for them? Obviously the play asks moral questions, but I think, having lived through the first eight years of this century, that we've had enough of adults with moral answers.'

There were similar reactions amongst the school audience for *SK8 Angel* when Con swore at his mother: a collective outburst of simultaneous recognition and censure.

Case Study 2: Raw Skills and connectingvibes*

My second smaller case study was a pair of related dance companies: Raw Skills, a youth dance group for young men aged 14 – 18 years funded by Creative Partnerships London East and South and run by City & Islington College; and connectingvibes* a student, undergraduate and graduate touring dance company 'which provides high quality work experience... for young artists at the beginning of their career' (connectingvibes*, 2003): some members of Raw Skills progress onto connectingvibes*.

Connectingvibes* is led by co-artistic directors Rosie Lehan and Beverley Glean, with associate choreographer Denzil Barnes, in partnership with IRIE! dance theatre and City & Islington College. Both companies form part of a 'progression route', associated with the College's Performing Arts Department, which supports young people from predominantly black and ethnic minority, low income backgrounds into the dance profession and creative industries.

I was drawn into this case study by publicity for *Watch This Space*, at the Lilian Baylis Theatre, 5th March 2008, as part of the Sadler's Wells Connect Festival, promoted as 'the perfect night out for you and your mates... a triple bill of inspiring new work by three young companies, each with the finger firmly on the pulse...' (Watch This Space, 2008). This struck me as unusual as it appeared to be explicitly aimed at a youth audience, straddling the worlds of youth dance and professional contemporary performance in a mainstream venue. Raw Skills performed *Getaway.. to a new.. you!* choreographed by Denzil Barnes: it explored the 'desire to be free of the past'. The (mostly) black young men danced with daring and intense commitment, drawing on elements of contemporary dance, tumbling, capoeira and physical theatre. There was a

striking sense of urgency about the piece, very different from the usual theatre dance aesthetic. [See Appendix 7, Learning Log Excerpt 5].

Connectingvibes* prioritises 'the creative exploration of a diverse range of dance styles with an emphasis on a fusion of African, Caribbean and Contemporary dance forms, alongside the latest technology' (connectingvibes*, 2003). The company creates and tours work mostly to young audiences in secondary schools, colleges and venues, seeking to create work that is inspiring and appropriate for its culturally diverse performers and audiences.

'Dance as a creative tool can help us to define who we are as individuals, part of which belongs to our cultural heritage. If the cultural landscape has changed, and it clearly has, then dance needs to be seen in context and strive to create a shared language of multiple and diverse voices that will in the long term create a more reflective and interesting dance society.... In order to be attractive to newcomers there needs to be a connection particularly for young people.' (Glean & Lehan, 2005, p8).

I spoke with Lehan about the company's work and watched a DVD of its 2006 production *One Blood*; a 'gritty, commanding and engaging urban musical piece' produced in partnership with WAC Performing Arts & Media College. Lehan identified *One Blood*, which 'deals with issues of identity' and 'addresses many of the pressures faced by young adults in contemporary Britain', as being particularly popular with secondary school audiences (connectingvibes* & WAC, 2006). She felt that the mix of songs and dance; the diversity of styles from rap to capoeira, contemporary to hip hop; and the 'upfront' nature of the piece; gave these young audiences something to 'hook onto' in a way that a pure dance piece - in this challenging inner-city school context - would not have been able to do.

Dance and theatre for young deaf people

I did not pursue this as a separate area of research, rather I asked my research participants about their experience of this area. Neither of my case studies had any experience of creating or presenting work for deaf young people. Participants from the dance sector only quoted participatory work by Green Candle or Common Ground (both known to me). In theatre, again mostly educational work was referred to, by Polka Theatre, Unicorn Theatre and a children's play by Graeae. Only one participant referred to a company I had not heard of before 'Face Front Inclusive Theatre'.

One participant made the point:

'I do think lots of other dance theatre is actually accessible to deaf young people... as it contains no text. However, I am aware that a lot of Deaf young people might not get a chance to go, depending on their parents/carers.' (Q2-D)

ANALYSIS:

WHY DO ADULTS MAKE PERFORMANCE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE?

In my research I sought the views of professionals directly involved in making work for young people as well as those involved less directly, working in dance and theatre education. I now have a stronger sense of why the former -

directors, writers, choreographers and producers - make and present this work and what draws them to this area:

One of the main reasons is because they enjoy the reaction of young audiences; they find this liberating and inspiring artistically:

'[YPT is] something I've always done whilst doing other things and I think that's partly because that audience is instantly rewarding, instantly honest. If you don't engage that audience - if you've pitched it wrong or there isn't an authenticity [sic] to it - they let you know so quickly! There isn't that adult reserve. They're open for provocation and you can take more risks in this area of work. In a way you can push yourself more - they're open to things. Adults are innately more conservative.' (I2-T)

It is also because they like and have empathy with young people although participants didn't articulate this as a separate point; perhaps they thought it was too obvious or that it is not a serious or academic enough point. However I picked these attitudes up very strongly in the enthusiasm with which participants spoke about young people.

Associated with this there was also a strong sense of respecting young people as whole human beings at a particular stage in life: 'while people are young, they're so inordinately intelligent and open' (I1-D); also of being genuinely interested in 'all concepts of what young people are about, and what young people have to put up with' (I1-D).

THE IMPORTANCE OF PERFORMANCE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Most research participants stated that they did feel that it is important - mostly very important - but this was qualified by a number of concerns.

'Dance specific for young people is not necessarily essential, however I feel it is very important that dance companies present repertoire which is relatable to young people. If companies perform modern works with issues that young people can understand, education work around the rep is possible, and more beneficial.' (Q11-D)

'It is vital that young people are given the chance to experience culture within and outside school, and that this experience is excellent.'
(McMaster, 2008, p7)

Validating young people

Possibly one of the strongest reasons given for the importance of this work is that it both gives value to young people, and makes young people feel valued, 'special and chosen' (Q9-D). It gives validation to their life experience. A couple of participants referred to the importance of giving young people 'a voice':

'... in an ever changing world it is important that children and young people have a voice, what better way to have a voice than through being involved in the research and development of an art form, that eventually is going to find its way to your peers.' (Q1-D/T)

Changing and reflecting society

There was also a sense that making work for young people is important because it contributes to social change:

'...it's important because young people are the people who have the potential to change the world, and God knows we want the world changing!' (I1-D)

'The political and emotional centre of social change revolves around children and young people.' (Company of Angels, 2008)

Related to this is the belief that the work is necessary to 'reflect our contemporary society' as 'so much existing product for children is very traditional... We need to tell the old stories but also the new stories to make a healthy society.' (Q2-D)

This reflects the stance taken by connectingvibes* especially in relation to the increasingly culturally diverse profile of the young population.

Meeting young people's needs and inclusion

There was also a strong sense that it is important 'because it can target their needs more specifically' (Q9-D). Indeed in order to be important, it *must* do this:

'Young people have specific needs in terms of their intellectual and emotional development and so it is important that the piece is researched and pitched appropriately to engage young people at their level, using language and references that they understand.' (Q3-T)

However several participants highlighted the tension of balancing the importance of creating something to meet young people's specific needs with the importance of enabling them to feel truly included, as young adults, within mainstream venues and performances. Clearly practitioners working in these contexts feel this most strongly:

'I think this is a real double-edge sword. Partly I feel really strongly that it's a good thing but I also think it creates exclusion. I don't know... I think in the positives you can tailor something for them, you can really challenge them. If you're working on... political theatre – you can really address issues for young people that aren't relevant if you're 30 or 25, but they are *seriously* relevant if you're a young person. For those reasons I think it's really great... I think the negatives are that you then have to integrate them back into going to the theatre. And I think I'm slightly more keen personally on encouraging them to be independent theatre-goers from the start, so you know to try things out, but I guess it's the way that they are supported.' (I3-D)

Other participants stressed that although important, work for young people 'shouldn't always be entirely separate; inclusiveness across generations, social strata etc, is important too' (Q9-D) and that 'the best work is often enjoyed by an age range wider than that specified' (Q6-D).

Quality is crucial

Perhaps the most common dilemma from practitioners in the field is that it is important *but* that quality is crucial:

'[It is] extremely important but only if it is done to the same high professional standards that we expect from adult work and only if it is not patronising or based on assumptions on maturity.' (Q2-D)

'I think it's like a right – *if* it's a good play, but often they're not.' (I4-T)

Educational purpose

The majority of participants expressed that they felt the importance of this work is related to some kind of educational purpose: albeit generally in the broadest and most informal terms; not always using the word 'educational'; and with differing emphases: on education *about / in* the arts, and education *through* the arts. There was a broad consensus around the purpose of performance for young people as being concerned with personal, social and artform learning, at least to some degree, especially in terms of concepts such as enriching, extending and broadening as opposed to being 'taught' (I4-T) something. [See Appendix 7: Excerpt 12].

'... young people can be educated and learn a lot through the arts. It is important to young people's creativity to be exposed to works they can relate to and find interesting at a young age'. (Q4-D)

'... it broadens their views of society and culture.' (Q7-T)

'It is important – gets them into live performance.' (Q8-T)

'So part of what we can do as artists working with young people is to educate in an informal way, one that doesn't feel like formal education but contains a lot of things that you can learn - all sorts, mentally, emotionally, spiritually.' (I1-D)

The educational purpose of arts for young people has been a huge and controversial area for many years; especially in relation to work which is explicitly so, such as Theatre-in-Education. Deeny (2007, p337) refers to indications 'of a continuing divide between drama and theatre educators and professionals'. Alternatively playwright David Wood argues: 'there's no need to feel that there's a schism anymore ... between theatre-in-education and children's theatre, because... over the years we've cross-fertilised a tremendous amount' (Wood, D. in Theatre Voice, 2005, p11).

Jackson (2007) devotes a whole book to examining this issue; challenging the usefulness of the 'widely accepted' 'dichotomy' which 'appears to suggest that social and aesthetic functions cannot be equally at work in the same performance at the same moment' (p2).

There was a clear sense from participants that where performance for young people has an educational focus – it should be based on a dialectical, not a didactic, process.

'I think what's really important is that you're not leading – you're showing the different dimensions and then you're saying 'What do you think?' In fact the more balanced you make it – the more it is harder for the young people to make a judgement about what is the best way, the better it is – because they [are] then debating and discussing.' (I2-T)

'Young people turn off to blatant messages' (I4-T).

Equally, several participants stressed that performance for young people should not be expected to have educational goals - young people have a right to be 'simply' moved or entertained as much as adults - but neither should it be denigrated solely for the reason that it does. It is important that there is honesty about the intentions of work and to recognise that all types of performance can be excellent, albeit in different ways. [See Appendix 7: Excerpt 15]

RELEVANCE

This is an extremely complex issue. Indeed one participant responded (with justification!): 'Too complex a question to answer' (Q2-D). Young people are clearly far from being a homogenous group: 'There is a danger that "young people" are pigeonholed into the same category' (Q10-T).

Respect and consultation

There were many factors that participants felt contributed to relevance. One of the most important was the necessity of respecting young people, 'their views and interests and intelligence' (Q6-D).

Equally, so was consulting with them in a rigorous and non-tokenistic way:

'Asking them – using their ideas – not coming in with pre-conceived ideas of what is appropriate' (Q9-D).

Content, form and style

Most participants had clear views on what they felt made performance particularly meaningful and engaging for young people:

'Issues and themes that are key in their lives across a wide cross section of society: friendships, growing up, relationships with families, ambitions for the future...' (Q3-T)

'New works, (created in the modern environment we live in) – as young people can more easily relate to the issues covered, or can identify with modern fashions etc used in the piece.' (Q11-D)

However there was also a strong sense that the obvious – in terms of thematic content, form or style – doesn't necessarily guarantee that work is relevant and engaging to a young audience: 'There isn't one formula that makes something good for youngsters [sic]' (Q2-D).

One participant gave the example of the annual hip hop festival at Sadler's Wells:

'I think in terms of Breakin' Convention people think 'kids are going to love it!' But actually [it's] not presenting the bit of hip hop they know, which is MTV, bling, gangster rap culture: that's not hip hop culture. For a lot of them it's a shock! (I3-T)

Another participant (I6-T) made the point that it is hard to prejudge how young people will react to work made for adults - that they may find relevance in surprising ways - citing a South African play, featuring a sixty year old male protagonist, which had teenage audience members 'spell bound' due to its engrossing portrayal of issues of social realism and racism which they felt were entirely relevant to their own lives.

Patronisation and stereotypes

Participants expressed the perceived danger that relevance can readily tip over into patronising young people and presenting stereotypes especially: where the craft of the artists creating the work is weak; where there is artistic laziness or lack of imagination in the creative team; when the work isn't age-appropriate, especially if it underestimates the sophistication or maturity of its intended audience - or is marketed incorrectly; or where artists lack commitment to genuinely consulting with young people and considering their needs:

'Work that is stereotypical just takes a successful production/s as a good formula and churns out more of the same in different guises.' (Q1-D/T)

'[Relevant] performances... send messages or morals to young people without being overt. Young people should be able to relate to ideas or characters and not feel that they are being patronised.' (Q4-D)

... it's a delicate thing isn't it? I mean... you can easily be patronizing if you're trying to be relevant or think you're being relevant... In a way, you've got to come back to the artist. I think you've got to say... "I hope this is relevant to you, I think it is, but this is my truly felt feeling... this is what I actually think about this situation. Does that do anything for you?" You can only offer it in a sense... you've got to take responsibility for your own position as an artist if you're making the work and say, well actually this interests me and I think it probably is of interest to you.' (I1-D)

EXCELLENCE

Finally, it is impossible to discuss questions of relevance in isolation from excellence: it seems that they are inextricably linked:

'What do you feel makes excellent performance for young people?'
'RELEVANCE! and research and content they can relate to, coupled with the best possible set, costumes, props, visuals that a limited budget can buy.' (Q1-D/T)

'I don't think it's anything different from what makes everything else excellent, which is... excellent form, excellent content, and excellent execution, what ever this word excellent means.' (I1-D)

Defining excellence can be more difficult in small-scale work with limited resources – especially work with an educational purpose taking place in a school:

'It can be good work, possibly excellent work – but it's not going to be excellent work in the context of a piece at the Royal Opera House.' (I2-T)

Some participants appear to see excellence as an end in itself:

'There are clearly things that make work more or less accessible... However, EXCELLENCE is only achieved through professional rigour and risk taking and innovation (see Mr Brian McMaster...) and therefore the most excellent performances for young people are excellent full stop.' (Q2-D)

I would argue though, from having listened carefully to all the research participants, that in fact the meaning of excellence in performance for young people is more complex than that.

Issues of the inter-relationship of excellence and relevance, at the crux of my research, were brought vividly to life by one participant who made an interesting comparison between two young people's theatre productions:

'One I felt was weak, it had weak writing... It addressed pirate radio stations, inter-ethnic racial tensions between young Asians and young Afro-Caribbeans – but it felt to me quite schematic. It did well in terms of [volume of] audiences but it was very controversial: some of the young people who came to see it really didn't like it at all. They felt patronised; they felt they were watching stereotypes rather than something insightful.

This year [I saw another company] with a fantastically written play. ...[It was] artistically excellent, in terms of the writing and the production... [The response from young audiences was] really excellent, really good. They had a young protagonist who had mental health issues. It was a lot about the tensions between her and her mother. It was a really strong theme about parents and children... And it was morally complex as well – that's what I loved about it... Whereas the other play felt quite schematic – it felt like it was saying this is right and this is wrong.' (I6-T)

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Importance, excellence and relevance

In the course of my research I have developed a sense of the inextricability of the concepts of 'relevance' and 'excellence' in relation to dance or theatre performance for young people. The research has reaffirmed my belief that this work *is* important, however I feel that I now have a fuller picture of both the reasons for and limitations of its importance. I have come to feel that work for young people can only be fully important when it is excellent: and to be excellent it must comprise a sophisticated synthesis of 3 elements:

- Relevance – encompassing many concepts such as meaning, relatedness, connection, engagement, appropriateness
- Quality – artistic craft skills in creation, interpretation and execution; integrity and honesty about the purpose of the work
- Innovation – encompassing concepts such as originality, imagination, creativity

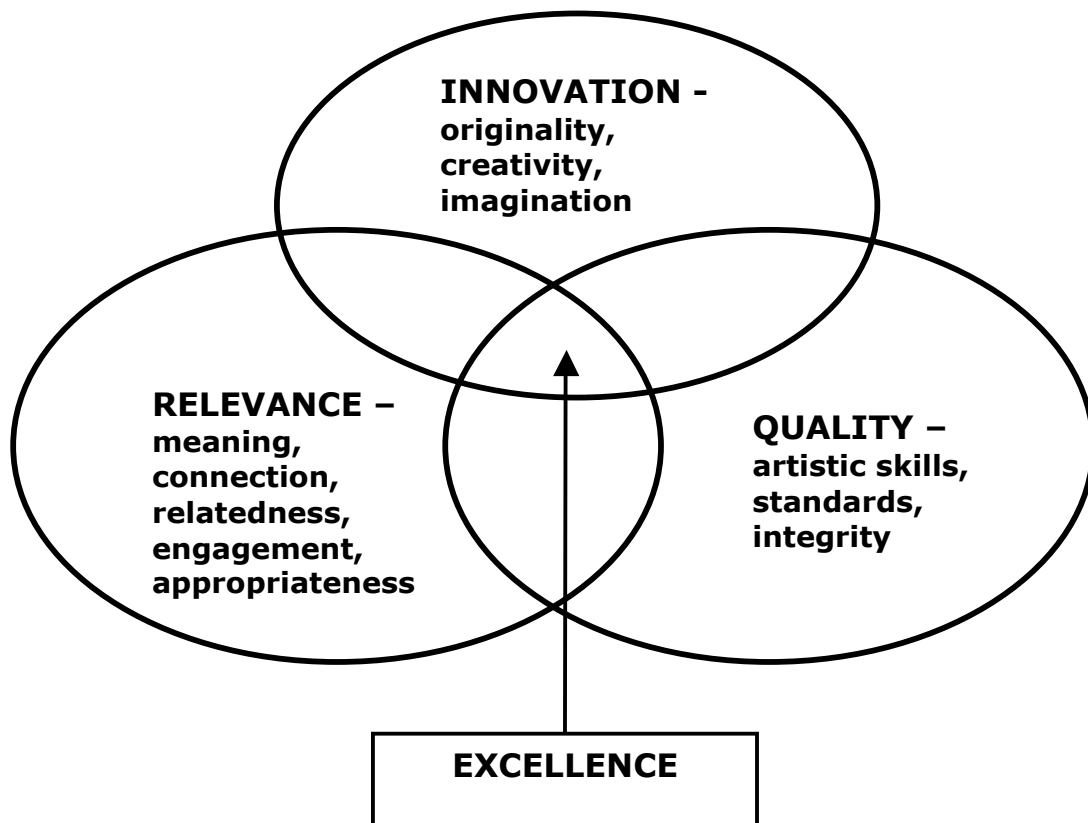


Figure 2: A diagram showing a possible relationship between 'Excellence' and 'Relevance' in dance and theatre performance for young people

Some practitioners, and forms of work, emphasise one or two of these 3 elements more than the other/s in the overall mix. However my research has led me to believe that in order to be truly excellent, performance for young people must embrace all three; although I am not suggesting that these 3 elements are the *only* ones that are important. The work may not have any type or degree of educational focus.

The fields of dance and theatre performance for young people

Through my literature review and through listening to many voices from the field I now have a much clearer picture of the sectors of dance and theatre for young people and have gained a fuller picture of the contrasts and convergences between the two: [For expanded information, see Appendix 5].

Dance for young people is smaller in relation to the overall dance sector than theatre for young people is in relation to theatre. It is also less developed in terms of the awareness of a body practice and sense of there being a 'field' of work. Dance for children, rather than for young people, is more commonly recognised as an area of professional work. The most striking difference with the field of theatre for young people is that there is no significant body of professional or academic literature on the subject and also that there is no mention of this work in the current Arts Council England *Dance policy*.

Theatre for young people is well established with developed theoretical frameworks and pedagogy. However it is less secure and validated than I originally thought: I now have a much fuller picture of the origins and history of this work; and of the ongoing struggle and advocacy by its practitioners to ensure its survival and development; over the past decade this has been reflected in a number of professional and Arts Council England documents, policies and events.

In terms of **performance for deaf young people**, I did not make this a major focus of my research as this is an area where I have fairly extensive professional experience. However I was interested and somewhat surprised to discover that most of my research participants had no first-hand experience of dance or theatre performance for deaf adolescents. All the examples quoted to me, except for one, were of participatory work, or work for children. However this is a useful finding as it has made me more convinced that this is an area that could usefully be developed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

My research has given me the tools and confidence to push forward with my recommendations:

- To play my part in helping to actively advocate for the field of dance for children and young people;
- To seek ways to encourage shared learning between the sectors of dance and theatre for young people, for example by sharing my findings informally within dance and theatre networking groups, in guest lecture sessions for under- and post-graduate students and more formally at professional seminars and events and in publications;

- To advocate for the 'validation' (Anderson, 2002) of dance and theatre for young people in both dedicated and mainstream contexts;
- To argue that performance that has an educational purpose, as well as that which does not, are both important in different ways for young people: having an educational purpose should not preclude performance from having artistic value or indeed being artistically excellent;
- To investigate the possibility of editing a publication with a collection of existing and newly commissioned articles and essays on different aspects of professional dance for young people. I feel this is needed to address the current dearth of literature; and to give focus and profile to the sector by celebrating, highlighting and reflecting on its achievements, practice and challenges.

LEARNING

On embarking on this project I had the following professional and personal goals:

- To gain a broader professional perspective on dance and theatre performance for young people.
- To increase my awareness of the theoretical frameworks and paradigms which inform and underpin the above.
- To become clearer about my own philosophical / theoretical stance and approach to practice.
- To learn more about the theatre sector by cross-referencing and comparing theatre work made for young people with dance, along with supporting literature review and discourse analysis to deepen my theoretical understanding.
- To strengthen Green Candle Dance Company's awareness of current thinking, trends and successful practice in the wider fields of dance and theatre for young people, to help pave the way for the creation of a new production for deaf and hearing teenagers.

I do feel that my project has helped me address all of these aims in useful ways. As I believe I have shown throughout this report, I have gained a much broader and deeper professional understanding of this field of work and related theory, especially in the area of theatre. I am clearer about my own philosophical stance to this work although I sense that this will continue to develop after completing this project.

The project has given me a lens through which to look more clearly at and contextualise Green Candle's work. Some of what I have learnt through the research has already been put into use for a funding application for a programme which includes the new production.

I do not feel that with the end of this project my research has ended. Having read, listened to and experienced so many different issues and areas, and having had the privilege of sharing the experience, insights and reflections of research participants, I feel that there is still a lot more that I can learn in this area. This research has inspired me to do this!

Completing this period of work-based and academic learning I value the research skills I have developed, the deeper theoretical knowledge, professional insights,

and enhanced confidence I have gained over the past two years. Although stretched, and at times exhausted, overall I feel energised by this intense period of study. [See Appendix 7: Excerpt 18 & 19].

In terms of Kolb's learning cycle (1984) I feel ready for next stage of 'active experimentation'. Following this research I will present my findings to colleagues, peers and professionals, including the theoretical model I have developed in Figure 2, to investigate whether, or to what extent, they feel it is useful in grappling with the issues it explores.

This brings me back to McMaster (2008), whose report I studied so closely at the start of my literature review and gave me a useful framework to use in investigating my research questions. I now have a much fuller understanding and appreciation of the significance of his comments in relation to performance for young people:

'If culture is excellent it can help us make sense of our place in the world, ask questions we would not otherwise have asked, understand the answers in ways we couldn't otherwise have understood and appreciate things we have never before experienced. The greater its power to do these things the more excellent the cultural experience.' (p9)

(WORD COUNT: 12,402)

OVERVIEW OF DANCE & THEATRE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Through my literature review and through listening to many voices from the field I now have a much clearer picture of the sectors of dance and theatre for young people and the similarities and differences between them.

I did not have the time or scope within this project to survey how many theatre and dance companies there are across the UK that make work for young people. However as a guide, the Independent Theatre Council (2008), of which many of them are members, says: 'Approximately 25% of ITC's 700 strong membership specifically describes itself as YPT whilst a further 10% regularly include work for children and young people in their output'. It is not possible to conclusively differentiate companies by artform. Between them they have varying degrees of focus on the educational, social or artistic purposes of this work.

Theatre for young people

There is a history of theatre for young people stretching back over 40 years: pioneered by companies such as Theatre Centre, London and Belgrade Theatre-in-Education, Coventry, in the field of Theatre-in-Education; and, within children's theatre, by organisations such as the Unicorn Theatre (Bennet, 2007). Over the past twenty years this sector has suffered blows from the effects of economic, political and educational changes (Jackson, 1993 & NCA, 1997). Dedicated work by practitioners has continued to develop and champion the field – often in adverse circumstances. In recent years there has been a resurgence of this work through the establishment of festivals such as *Ciao!* and *Imagine*. Arts Council England has stated a commitment to supporting this work in its current *Theatre policy*. However although TYP has a well documented history and developed body of practice, there is a sense that theatre for young people is still given a far lower priority in Britain than in many other European countries. There is ongoing frustration amongst its practitioners that the field is not given due respect and support: 'Theatre 'for young people' is sometimes depicted as if it were itself a 'junior' artform' (Company of Angels, 2008).

Mainstream theatres, through innovative partnerships with theatre education programmes and the youth theatre sector, are increasingly – some practitioners would argue belatedly (Ireland in *Theatre Voice*, 2005, p26) - programming intelligent work for young people, moving beyond considering them as mainly part of a schools' audience. A good example of this is The National Theatre's Connections programme, established in 1995, to increase the range and quality of plays written about young people, for young people to perform, by commissioning ten new plays each year from leading playwrights (NT Connections, 2008). In 2007 the Theatre decided to select three of these new plays to be performed professionally at the Cottesloe, presenting them to a mixture of schools audiences, members of the regular NT audience and engaged, older teenagers - the latter identified by director Paul Miller as a 'new constituency' for the Theatre (Miller at NT Platform, 10 March 2008) discovered since its staging of *His Dark Materials* in 2004 (Miller, in Cripps, 2008).

The Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA 2008)⁷ and a handful of other professional acting institutions have begun to address the issue of training their undergraduate students to work in the area of children's or young people's theatre, a factor identified as crucially important in changing attitudes towards the sector (Arts Council England, November 2003, pp5-6). I have not been able to uncover examples of this occurring in equivalent dance training institutions.

Dance for young people

The world of dance performance for children and young people is much smaller than the equivalent field in theatre, however it is growing. An early pioneer was the Royal Ballet's Ballet for All which from its establishment in 1964 took ballet to young people and adults in secondary schools, colleges and many non-theatre settings (Brinson, 1991, p66 & p128). One of the first companies to be established following a TIE model was Ludus Dance in 1976; describing itself as 'Britain's leading dance in education company' (Ludus Dance, 2008). Other companies active in the field include YDance, Tees Valley Dance and Green Candle. However the majority of dance is for children up to around the age of 12 – this includes work by companies such as the Flying Gorillas and BalletLORENT and the 'family' ballets by major classical ballet companies, both traditional and newly commissioned. Two European children's dance companies have made a particularly strong impression when touring to the UK in recent years: Introdans Ensemble for Youth from the Netherlands and Aracaladanza from Spain. It is worth pointing out that Introdans has a permanent company of 22 dancers and regularly commissions leading European choreographers: this scale of commitment to work for young people currently does not exist in Britain.

A number of smaller dance companies based in diverse forms from contemporary to South Asian dance tour their work to schools and colleges as well as smaller venues – with varying degrees of focus on actually *making* their work for a young audience, some of which is socially focused dance work for teenage audiences such as Wardrobe Dance's *Triangle* about sexual health and relationships (Ward, 2005), and *Hip Hopstory* by Kompany Malakhi, which depicted the infiltration of gun culture into Hip Hop (Johnson, 2003).

Mainstream contemporary dance companies, such as Rambert Dance Company, present selected pieces of their repertoire to young people in specially 'framed' matinee performances. During the course of my research the work of a number of UK companies / choreographers was cited as being especially popular with young people: these included Union Dance Company, Hofesh Schechter, and Matthew Bourne's New Adventures. Alongside this there is the tremendous growth of youth dance groups and the massive popularity of 'street dance' reflected in the programming of a number of venues and festivals, one of the most influential being Breakin' Convention at Sadler's Wells.

However there are few examples of dance work being created or curated with young people over 11 *specifically* in mind. One rare example is FRESH at The

⁷ RADA's second year students 'work with a professional director on a production for young audiences, staged in one of RADA's own theatres and also toured to primary or secondary schools' (RADA, 2008)

Place which 'dedicates one night per year exclusively to dance for and by young people' (FRESH, 2007).

In recent years there have been some successful partnerships between the TYP and dance sectors: including *Mischief*, 2007, Theatre Rites and Arthur Pita (for children); and *RISK*, 2007, Company of Angels, macrobert arts centre, Y Dance and The Tron Theatre (for teenagers). *SK8 Angel*, discussed in my Case Study below is also a good example.

Dance and theatre for young deaf people

I did not pursue this as a separate area of research, rather I asked my research participants about their experience of this area. Neither of my case studies had any experience of creating or presenting work for deaf young people. Participants from the dance sector only quoted participatory work by GC or Common Ground (both known to me). In theatre, again mostly educational work was referred to, by Polka Theatre, Unicorn Theatre and a children's play by Graeae. Only one participant referred to a company I had not heard of before 'Face Front Inclusive Theatre'.

One participant made the point:

'I do think lots of other dance theatre is actually accessible to deaf young people... as it contains no text. However, I am aware that a lot of Deaf young people might not get a chance to go, depending on their parents/carers.' (Q2-D)

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