

Birmingham Repertory Theatre Pilot

The Young REP staff team

Director of The Young REP: Tim Ford

Youth Theatre Directors: Christopher Gorry & Rhys McCellend

Youth Theatre Apprentices: Steven Turner & Caroline Gray

The Young REP groups

Junior Young REP

16 + Young REP

Musical Theatre Group

New Plays Group

New Skills Group

Small Heath Group

2 x Shenley Group

Northfield Group

2 x Perry Beeches Group

2 x Phoenix Group

2 x Wrockwardine Wood Groups

2 x Charlton Group

2 x Abraham Darby Groups!

First Chance Group (Young at risk of being Homeless)

“Excellent Youth Theatre”

Indicator Set 3: Excellent Youth Theatre Projects

The staff team were given the paper to read and reflect on. We then set aside a two hour session to discuss the paper, its themes and how it related to our work. We wanted to use the process as a tool for evaluating our work and to see if we could find a more creative way of using the paper and the indicators than just working through the series of questions and statements.

We took as a starting point the quote on the paper from a youth theatre member “It is like a flower because each quality is like a petal.” We drew a large flower on a piece of paper, gave each staff member a block of post-it notes and asked them to think about projects that they had run and what had made them excellent or not excellent projects. Each post-it note that related to being the successful part was then placed around circle of the flower like a petal and each note that was about the unsuccessful things were placed below the line of the earth like fallen petals. We then cross-referenced our answers with the paper and the questions on the paper to come up with our final picture. We also discussed the difference between the artistic and the social development elements of projects.

Finally, we drew around a pair of hands to represent the green fingers of an excellent gardener and ask the team to pick what they thought were the most important elements that would make up an ideal excellent project and we discussed we would current do and what we could use in our work.

We liked the principle of the questions and found them really useful and thought provoking in focussing our minds on the work. It was very worthwhile and really helped us to take stock of our working practices. We will be using the results to help us to improve our current practices and to think about future projects.

“Inclusive Youth Theatre”

Section 3: Youth theatres, diversity and equality

The staff team were all given the paper to read and reflect on, we then set aside a two hour session to discuss the paper and the themes within the paper and how we felt it related to our work and how we currently recruit young people to The Young REP and how they are welcomed into our youth theatre.

Again we took a more creative approach to the work. We started with a picture of a large bus and ask the staff to think about current membership of The Young REP and who they thought was on our Youth Theatre Bus, each group or type of young person that represented our membership was then labeled on a post-it note and put onto the bus.

Next we drew a bus stop and thought about who we thought was missing from our youth theatre or was metaphorically speaking waiting to join us and again we labelled them on post-it notes and put them at the bus stop.

Next we drew up a minefield with two points on, firstly a starting point for a young person and secondly the goal of getting them to take part with a Young REP activity. We asked the staff to think about why the people at the bus stop were there and then what they thought were the barriers for them to engaging in youth theatre activity, we also thought about how easy or difficult it would be to change these factors.

Finally we thought about what the experience is like for a young person at The Young REP and what policies and procedures we have in place for them. We decided to draw up a house and discussed what it is like going to somebody's house and how we are made to feel welcome and at their homes and what rooms we felt we could go into, then we took this idea into where we thought young people were in our metaphorical youth theatre home. We also discussed where we felt they should and could be and what we could do change things.

We found this paper much clearer and easy to get to grips with and we found the questions and indicators very helpful in getting to the heart of the topic. Again we really liked the principle of the questions but also thought that maybe having a list of words, phrases or bullet points and sound bytes would of really helped focus our minds further. It would also be very helpful to have examples of other youth theatres policies and young people's membership packs and ideas of how other youth theatres engage them with young people, etc.

We will be using the results to help us to improve our current practices and to think about how we engage with young people and we hope that NAYT will be able to use a similar more creative process of delivering the indicator.

As a staff team we really got a great deal from the focused time of sitting down and thoroughly discussing and re-evaluating our practices and feel that other youth theatres would really benefit from the process.

Feedback from Young Rep Members on both sets of indicators/questions

Having ran the session with the staff team we decided to run the same workshop with members of The Young REP and then compare the results. We invited members from all of our twenty groups to attend a two hour workshop to work through the paper and exercises.

The young people found the paper hard going and preferred the more hands on practice approach to working through it. They found it a very useful way to think about their youth theatre and the work that they were producing. The session really helped the young people to take stock of The Young REP and to really evaluate it in a way that they hadn't done before. They concluded that they were happy with the current program and the way that things are organised and they came up with a few suggestions for improvements that we shall be taking on board.

The discussion that they got the most from was the diversity one and the process of encouraging young people to take part in youth theatre activities. This was clearly something that they hadn't ever thought about before and they were really surprised by the diverse nature of our youth theatre.

The group also really enjoyed the discussion about the REP house and where they thought that they fitted into our theatre and what they thought they could do to make young people feel more welcome at The REP.

The biggest outcome of the evening was their understanding of what taking part in youth theatre really gave them and the shift in them wanting to get more involved in developing the social side of our work. The young people concluded that the regular workshop and production work is important and helps them to grow but their social development and the taking part in social events is what really helps bonds them together as a company and makes them feel at home at The REP. This was on an equal par in importance for them as taking part in shows and workshops.

As a result of the discussions we are organising more events and trips outside of our normal workshops for them to take part in.