

Excellence and Inclusion Scheme Launch: Q&A's from the morning session

Juliet, you said you're working at a special school with people who are maybe less verbal than others (so words are less important) but what about when you do get people where words are very important and want to work with scripts? That's kind of the challenge for working with people who have disabilities.

Juliet: The group I work with is school-based and within the projects of their school a lot of the communication styles are non-verbal. I think what is interesting, is that if the young people want to move out of working in that school context it is possible. Also what is interesting is how we develop practice that maybe uses more range of communication. I think our learning in that particular space in terms of theatre practice is quite intense at the moment. The school hasn't done a lot of extra-curriculum theatre before and a lot of the performances we are creating we're learning so much about how to work together, how to collaborate and that learning needs to happen in that space. What we are excited about is the relationship with the audience, how we go beyond the confines of the school and how you share that performance in other contexts. Something that was discussed as we went around the different groups and is explored a bit (in terms of the analysis of the Graeae work at the end of the Inclusion document) is the idea of how you create theatre that is able to communicate across different communication styles and how you progress with that work.

Jonothan: We didn't mean it as an "either, or". It is about respecting the work and finding ways that all people can achieve the highest standards because of who they are. This may mean an emphasis on words or an emphasis on other forms of expression. Don't think because we are suggesting we are denying any other types of working - just try to add to it.

If you've got someone who wants to join your youth theatre but you don't have the facilities to be able to support them, you want to say to them 'you're welcome, we welcome you, we want you to be here' but that experience could be very isolating and very alienating and sometimes damaging to that young person who's coming into the room and doesn't have the support that they need to be able to interact/work with the other students because the work is at a level which is difficult for them to understand.

Juliet: That is absolutely connected to what I was trying to say about the idea that everyone is welcome and that we should think of youth theatre as a house. You know how you welcome people, how you set out the front room and how you provide tea and hospitalities is absolutely crucial because it's one thing saying people are welcome but it's another thing

understanding how you welcome somebody and what needs to be in place. The example of a young person perhaps coming to one youth theatre session and then they don't come back and the asking 'why didn't you come back?' and the reasons are going to be very different. Sometimes it's that it isn't right for that young person, and we have to understand. What you're saying is a really good example of how do we provide for different needs in the room so that it is welcoming and that we are able to go forward in creating theatre that doesn't exclude certain young people.

This goes back to role models in professional theatre, I really welcome Michael's work with the RSC that's now ensemble working and I think it's about time it came back again and is important. I think that's something to do with being inclusive or not inclusive because I think a lot of working class young people, who don't access the youth theatre, see this notion of stars and when you come to a youth theatre that is about the ensemble and isn't about the star system the ones that try to access them want their 'little darling' to be a star. I think we are in a strange situation where we are in a very celebrity obsessed culture and that doesn't mean to say we don't try, we do try do go out and do outreach and we do try and do that transition and I wondered what Michael had to say about how are we going to get out there and make ensemble what is important about theatre and not about being a star?

Michael: It's tricky, I can completely see in kids a real appetite to be a king or queen or a pop star. It's a real desire, it's a natural thing and I think there's room for both. There are quite a few people within whatever you do and there are distributed moments to shine, inevitably that's not going to be absolutely egalitarian unless it's your mission in which case... maybe. For those young people who perhaps in the end production don't get to shine there are other ways that is possible to set up moments that are all about the individual e.g. people who have smaller parts in RSC productions, have the leading lines in unplugged nights. This is a great moment for directors to think 'oh my god.' They're achievers: they discover new things about actors and there are moments for people to shine individually. I don't think the egomaniac inside of all of us should be squashed.

Jonathan: I think that there are two energies going on in young people. There is that stardom but there is also a powerful need to belong and get a sense of power from belonging and the joke 'better to be an ensemble than in a gang' actually has some truth in it. It is offering you an alternative way of feeling the power of the collective in an artistic kind of way so I think it's about managing those two things together and being clear what you stand for.

My question is just to clarify with regards what you are talking about when you say everyone? In the last couple of years I've had to really define what our inclusive policy is. I find I can't be everything for everyone - it's not possible. So I think this may answer the other two questions I have various outreach events throughout the year and I bring the groups together under the SAVVY banner, at the same time it is in regards to inclusive practise keeping the dialogue open. Am I right when you talk about everyone it isn't about trying to be all things to all people but to keep the dialogue open?

Juliet: What we mean by everyone is the first question, I think, in terms of defining inclusive policies, exploring them, being open to everybody and defining what is possible and realistic for individual organisations/groups. Jonothan spoke about truth and I think being really honest about who you are and what you can achieve is good practice.

Can you explain one of your research principles: 'to identify national schemes of recognition and accreditation that will be appropriate for some but not all youth theatre' what does that mean because the principle seems to be contradictory to the nature of excellence and inclusion, if you are looking for accreditation that is not accessible to all youth theatres?

Jonothan: At the beginning of the project two years ago, there was a very strong feeling by some people that the way you achieve excellence is through accreditation and other people felt very strongly that accreditation was very important in youth theatre particularly if they were serving under-privileged young people because the qualification may be the only form of accreditation that the young people may receive. Other youth theatres felt passionately that this was not the case and is not what they are about. The wording of it really was saying; we looked at what we thought would be appropriate but weren't taking a position to say that every youth theatre must offer accreditation although when you read the document where it has been fully developed there is every encouragement to do so.