

# Action Research

## A study of the impact of creative processes on young people participating in youth theatre

The Centre for Applied Theatre Research is carrying out a year-long research project to explore the impact of youth theatre. The research has been commissioned by NAYT and presents a unique opportunity to generate evidence of the impact of youth theatre on young people. The research findings should have national scope and relevance and can feed into the development of future policy and youth theatre provision.

### Research aims

The aims of the research project are:

To ascertain the impact of creative processes on young people participating in youth theatre, with particular emphasis on impacts on personal, social and political development.

To explore youth theatre workers' awareness of the impact of youth theatre.

To carry out a review of current youth theatre provision to identify the range of models and approaches used.

### Research process

The most important and exciting part of the research is the peer research project. We aim to explore the impact of creative processes on young people participating in youth theatre by utilising the experiences and attributes of young people themselves. Approximately 10 young people from 5 different youth theatres will be invited to participate in the study as peer researchers. The peer researchers will explore their own experience of youth theatre and devise research workshops to be carried out with young people in other youth theatre settings.

The peer research project will ensure that young people's awareness, views and experiences are central to any research findings. The central role of peer researchers in the study draws on good practice in other areas of youth provision and is a timely response to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport's recommendation that the experiences of participants should be central to evaluation of arts practice.

In addition to the peer research project in-depth qualitative interviews with youth theatre workers will be carried out. The interviews will provide insight into the ways in which youth theatre workers understand the impact of youth theatre and explore workers' awareness of links between youth work aims and youth theatre practice. Finally, a review of current provision will be carried out, including analysis of existing databases and archives at NAYT. This review will provide insight into the theory and evidence base for current practice and perspectives on the various models and approaches that can be identified in current youth theatre provision.

### Research outcomes

The research findings will help us identify:

1. The impact of participation in youth theatre on young people, as perceived by youth theatre participants, including:

The impact on other areas of life (e.g. academic achievement, diversion from negative life paths, career development)

The specific impact of different activities within youth theatre - e.g. performance, skills development, residential, devised work

The objectives young people seek to achieve through participating in youth theatre projects and whether they succeed in achieving them

Young people's perceptions of the long term impact of participation in youth theatre

2. The range of projects young people take part in at youth theatres in participating regions

3. The range of models of youth theatre practice

4. Youth theatre workers' understanding of their own practice

5. How current provision is funded

### Research timetable

Work on the project began in September 2001, including some preliminary analysis of NAYT databases and gathering of literature and evidence that relates to current youth theatre practice. We will finalise all details of the

peer research project and begin to approach theatres to invite their involvement in the research early in 2002. A first draft of a report will be available by October/November 2002.

For more information about the research please contact Jenny Hughes or Karen Wilson at:

Centre for Applied Theatre Research  
Drama Department  
University of Manchester  
Oxford Road  
Manchester M13 9PL  
Telephone 0161 275 3784/0780 8773008  
Email: [catr@man.ac.uk](mailto:catr@man.ac.uk)

## Summary of definitions

**Youth work** The youth service provides for young people in their own time, outside formal education, training and employment. Youth services involve the use of a particular method and style of work, called youth work, designed to promote young people's personal and social development and their voice and influence in society. Youth work focuses on developing informal and voluntary relationships with young people and providing opportunities and activities that are participatory (young people as partners in the process) and inclusive (recognising the diversity within populations of young people). Youth work supports young people in their transitions from childhood to adulthood.

**Youth theatre** Youth theatre is a broad term used to describe a wide variety of organisations and approaches to engaging young people in theatre related activities. Youth theatre takes place outside of formal education, is adult led and based on the voluntary participation of young people aged 13 to 25 years. Youth theatre has a wide range of implicit and explicit impacts on young people, many of which positively contribute to their transitions from childhood to adulthood.

**Youth theatre models** A youth theatre model accounts for all the properties and characteristics of the youth theatre approach or practice it represents. Youth theatre models are detailed representations that signify the breadth and depth of youth theatre provision and can be used to facilitate further study and development of youth theatre. A youth theatre model can be shown to conform to particular standards and serve as an example of good practice, compared with other models and promoted as worthy of imitation and development.

**Creative processes** Creative processes are the effects of the range of activities that stimulate and develop the images, ideas, storylines, characters and atmospheres that make up any piece of theatre. These activities include individual and group games and exercises, skills training, group devising processes, performance, rehearsal and production processes.

**Impacts** The impact of a project is the sum of the outputs and outcomes of a project: an overall analysis of the results the project produced. Impacts can be explicit (clearly and distinctly observed) or implicit (implied, not plainly expressed and supported by further analysis of the outcomes of projects). Impacts can be short term (powerful but not lasting) and long term (powerful and lasting). The impact of a project may change over time as subsequent events unfold.

**Personal and social development** Personal and social development is not concerned with the pursuit of activities or interests as ends in themselves. Rather, its concern is with the use of such activities as developmental processes in the transition from childhood to adult life, to help young people make choices and negotiate their own futures whilst respecting the rights of others, to fulfil their potential as individuals, and to prepare them to participate as active citizens in society.

**Political development** Young people's political development refers to young people participating in society as informed, active and responsible citizens. It is facilitated by offering young people opportunities to engage in debates about moral, social and political issues and learn about their rights and responsibilities as individuals and members of communities.

## Definitions paper

The definitions outlined in this paper are put forward to clarify the concepts that will be used throughout the research project. Once agreed, they will provide clear terms of reference to guide the research process. A definition of the following terms is put forward for further discussion:

Youth work  
Youth theatre  
Youth theatre models  
Creative processes  
Impacts  
Personal and social development  
Political development

## Youth work

Youth work is a method and style of working with young people that can be characterised as informal, participatory, voluntary, and inclusive and that aims to support young people in their transition from childhood to adulthood. The following discussion offers a definition of youth work, a discussion of youth work aims and objectives, methods/style, youth work curriculum and finally, a brief summary of the current social and policy context for youth work.

### Youth work aims

The following definition summarises the main aims of youth work:

“the youth service provides for young people in their leisure or own time, outside of formal education, training and employment. Youth services involve the use of particular methods of work with young people, usually called youth work, designed to promote young people’s personal and social development and their voice and influence in society” (NYA 1999)

Youth work aims to support young people in their transition from childhood to adulthood. This definition refers to personal, social and political development of young people, therefore offers a good frame of reference for our research.

### Method and style

The method and style of approach used by youth work is as important as the activities young people take part in within the youth service. Methods and styles of working with young people are instrumental in facilitating young people’s engagement and inclusion in opportunities that aim to promote their personal and social development.

The key terms that can describe/summarise the method or style of approach within youth work are:

**Informal** Youth work operates outside of formal education, and is a planned intervention that remains flexible and adaptable to individual needs and local contexts. The informal approach includes a focus on equal, friendly, personal and involved relationships rather than authoritative, distant and detached.

**Participatory** Youth work is carried out in partnership with young people; the young person is a full and equal partner in determining their own development and progress towards achieving their aspirations. Young people’s control over activities is generally promoted and reflects the empowerment aims of the service.

**Voluntary** Young people engage with the youth service on a voluntary basis.

**Inclusive** Youth work seeks to reflect diversity in the young people that come into contact with services, to ensure equality of opportunity to all young people in their transition to adulthood.

The focus on method and style draws attention to the importance of the role of the youth worker, “while clarity of purpose and relevant content are important, the determining features are the values and skills of those engaged with young people”(NFER 1996). The success of youth work is often dependant on the personal qualities and awareness of individual workers.

### Youth work curriculum

Youth work delivers a planned set of programmes which, “support young people to understand and act on the personal, social and political issues which affect their lives, the lives of others and the communities of which they are a part.” (NYA 1999) Activities are pursued not as ends in themselves but because they contribute to the wider personal and social development of young people.

The youth work curriculum is wide ranging and adaptable to individual and local context. It includes: informal personal and social education, including learning about rights and responsibilities as citizens. Themes include creativity and the arts, justice and equality, health, sports, citizenship education, relationships, sexuality, self development, spirituality, access to information, advice and counselling to help young people make informed choices, provision of a safe space and environment for young people to make secure and productive transitions to adulthood.

Youth work is carried out in youth clubs, in particular communities or estates (detached youth work), information and advice centres and residential centres. Youth work is delivered by voluntary organisations and local authorities. It includes services that are concerned with crisis intervention and prevention.

### Youth work – current policy context

An important focus of youth work is to provide personal development opportunities that help keep young people ‘in good shape’:

“we want to help each young person to be somebody who not only enjoys life but is in good health, studying to the best of their ability, is challenged and stretched mentally and physically, is an active member of their local

community and capable of understanding the consequences of their actions...this 'good shape' comes from access to a rich variety of personal growth experiences" (DfEE Transforming Youth Work 2001)

The concept of young people 'in good shape' may be relevant/bear comparison with the impact of youth theatre. There is a general recognition that the transition from childhood to adulthood is now longer, more complex and presents more risks for many groups of young people than in the past. The concentration of poverty in some areas has led to debates about social exclusion and government sponsored strategies to promote social inclusion of young people (including the use of participatory arts). Youth work has responded to this debate by targeted youth work – aiming to facilitate the re-engagement of socially excluded young people. Targeted youth work can be, "a safety net for young people who experience institutional rejection and a springboard for their re-engagement in learning and development" (NYA 1999).

The development of youth work that provides opportunities to learn about and actively participate in society (reflected in citizenship education initiatives) also reflects current social/political context. It is stimulated by concern at levels of young people's disengagement from society, reflected in the unprecedented low turnout of young people at the last general election.

## **Youth theatre**

Youth theatre is a broad term used to describe a wide variety of organisations and approaches to engaging young people in theatre related activities. Youth theatre is adult led and is based on the voluntary participation of young people aged 13 to 25 years. Youth theatre takes place outside formal education and has a wide range of implicit and explicit impacts on young people, many of which positively contribute to transitions from childhood to adulthood.

The theatre related activities that young people take part in within youth theatre includes a wide range of processes and products, including: Creating, devising and performing their own theatre products to audiences of peers and/or outside audiences; working with already existing plays, musicals and scripts; taking part in drama games and exercises that prepare them for the personal and social challenges implicit in the process of making theatre with their peers; carrying out a wide variety of tasks to facilitate the production theatre; training workshops that aim to enhance theatre/arts skills; training workshops that aim to enhance personal and social development.

Youth theatres operate in many different ways and exhibits many different aims and objectives. The wide variety of organisations and approaches within youth theatre reflects the differentiated history of youth theatre in community, professional/ repertory and amateur theatre.

Theatre is a representation of life at a heightened, fictionalised, imaginary level and employs/draws on concrete experience, empathy with the experience of others and fantasy/imagination of individuals and groups. Through taking part in the creative processes within youth theatres young people bring into being, cause to exist, produce, effect, form, fashion original representations of life based on their own experiences, empathy with others and imagination.

## **Youth theatre models**

The research aims to identify and include the range of youth theatre models in current youth theatre provision. We want to explore the different and common merits of each model.

A youth theatre model accounts for all the properties and characteristics of the youth theatre approach or practice it represents. Youth theatre models are detailed representations that signify the breadth and depth of youth theatre provision and can be used to facilitate further study and development of youth theatre. A youth theatre model can be shown to conform to particular standards and serve as examples of good practice, compared with other models and promoted as worthy of imitation and development.

## **Creative process**

Creative processes are the effects of the range of activities that stimulate and develop the images, ideas, storylines, characters and atmospheres that make up any piece of theatre. These activities include individual and group games and exercises, skills training, group devising processes, performance, rehearsal and production processes. The term creative process implies a journey or passage - by the end of involvement in the activity something has changed, moved on or is transformed.

## **Impacts**

The impact of a project is the sum of the outputs and outcomes of a project; an overall analysis of the results the project produced. Impacts can be explicit (clearly and distinctly observed) or implicit (implied, not plainly expressed and supported by further analysis of the outcomes of projects). Impacts can be short term (powerful but not lasting) and long term (powerful and lasting). The impact of a project may change over time as subsequent events unfold.

The first part of this definition is based on Francois Matarasso's formulation of impact. He goes on to define outputs and outcomes:

Outputs are "the things produced as a result of an activity" e.g. a piece of art or the numbers of people attending workshops.

Outcomes "seek to identify what the result of an activity was - what change occurred because it took place. Outcomes may be partly or negative, or unexpected".

## **Personal and social development**

'Personal and social development' (and/or education) is a term much used in all areas of provision for young people. The following definition is from the DfEE:

"Personal and social education is not concerned with the pursuit of activities or interests as ends in themselves. Rather, its concern is with the use of such activities as developmental processes in the transition from childhood to adult life, to help young people make choices and negotiate their own futures whilst respecting the rights of others, to fulfil their potential as individuals, and to prepare them to participate as active citizens in society" (from Strategies for Success 1993)

National curriculum guidelines for personal, social and health education outline the desired outcomes learning opportunities for personal and social development within formal education. An awareness of these outcomes may help us identify relevant aspects of young people's accounts of their experiences (only the outcomes that seem most relevant to youth theatre are listed here).

Programmes of personal and social development should help young people to:

- take new and more adult roles in community
- take responsibility for choices/consider the consequences of choices
- take responsibility for future development
- develop self awareness and confidence
- become aware of own personal qualities, skills, achievements and potential
- develop belief in ability to succeed
- lead confident, healthy and responsible lives
- reflect on own experiences
- talk about relationships and feelings
- manage and recognise their own feelings
- reflect on and assess own strengths
- present themselves confidently in a range of situations
- give and receive constructive feedback and praise - manage praise and criticism and success and failure positively get information and advice when needed
- clarify their own opinions and attitudes
- understand and manage relationships with a wide range of people
- become aware of and explore moral, social and cultural issues
- respect diversity and differences between people
- learn about stereotyping, prejudice, bullying, racism - and how to challenge them to empathise with people different from themselves
- understand their own physical and mental health
- recognise and manage stress and pressure
- recognise and manage risk and make safer choices about lifestyle and activities
- recognise pressure from others and develop strategies to resist pressure
- make and keep friends
- negotiate
- recognise when others need help and offer help
- communicate confidently with peers and adults
- feel positive about themselves
- learn to participate

## **Political development**

The terms 'political development' and 'citizenship' have gained prominence in all areas of service provision for young people in recent years. The government has recognised the need to address issues of citizenship with young people, not least because of the unprecedented low turnout from young people at the last general election. In addition, there is concern at the levels of disengagement from society and 'anti-social' behaviour of some groups of young people.

Young people's political development refers to young people becoming informed, active and responsible citizens. It is facilitated by offering young people opportunities to engage in debates about moral, social and political issues and learn about their rights and responsibilities as individuals and members of communities. Initiatives that aim to promote political development of young people can help young people play full and influential roles in society.

National curriculum guidelines for citizenship education may facilitate the research process. Citizenship education programmes should provide opportunities for young people to:

- develop confidence and responsibility and making the most of their abilities
- prepare to play active role as citizens
- develop healthy, safer lifestyles
- develop relationships of mutual respect and understanding and respect the differences between people
- talk about their opinions and explain views on social issues and issues that affect them
- realise the consequence of anti-social behaviours on individuals and communities recognise the different risks in situations and decide how to behave responsibly
- learn about sources of pressure and how to resist behaving in irresponsible ways
- develop the ability to see things from other peoples' point of view
- learn about human rights and responsibilities
- learn about importance of playing an active part in communities and society
- use their imagination to consider other people's experiences and be able to think about, express and explain and critically evaluate views that are not their own negotiate and take part responsibly
- reflect on the process of participating

## References

Modern Services for Young People: Proposals for Action National Youth Agency 1999

Transforming Youth Work: Developing youth work for young people Department for Education & Employment 2001

Providing for Young People: Local Authority Youth Services in the 1990s National Foundation for Educational Research 1996 Strategies for Success: Personal, social and educational development in youth theatres NAYT/DfEE 1996