Reframing the Discourse – How Effective Youth Theatre Recruitment Practice Can Minimise Engagement Barriers for Priority Participants

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Contents

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Declaration

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Abstract

Organisations who deliver youth theatre must consider not only how they recruit participants but who they recruit to ensure children and young people most in need of pervasive skill development benefit from funded extra-curricular provision. Drama facilitates the acquisition of a range of skills including improved self-advocacy, increased confidence and resilience and the development of teamwork and project planning strategies. Drama has also been shown to have a measurable impact on children's learning competencies which can lead to improved education outcomes. Access to drama provision can significantly improve outcomes for children and young people by providing the opportunity for those participants to develop skills which improve their cultural and social capital and their prospects for social mobility.

Youth theatre recruitment practice does not always consider how to make offers accessible to those children and young people most in need of the acquisition of those skills. The novel contribution of this research is the highlighting of this gap in practice, together with a positive reframing of the discourse and a proposed framework for recruitment in youth theatre. This framework builds on the elements of best practice isolated through an analysis of current youth theatre programmes by considering them in a practical context which, although focused on the need to recruit priority participants, would also cater for children and young people who are more experienced.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

In this thesis I examine how youth theatres recruit participants and why it is important that those organisations consider not only how they recruit but who they recruit. The principal question is a simple one, 'how can funded youth theatres ensure that they recruit the children and young people most in need of the pervasive skills taught through drama?'.

Firstly, I consider the impact education policy has had on the acquisition of pervasive skills in state schools and the role of drama as means of skills acquisition. The current landscape of youth theatre practice in England is then considered, through a close analysis of three organisations and a wider analysis of more than a hundred youth theatre offers to isolate both best practice and wider trends. Finally, recommendations for youth theatre recruitment practice are proposed as a way of sharing this learning and provoking a discussion about the importance of this single important step in youth theatre practice.

Within this introduction, I will explain why I developed a focus on recruitment for youth theatre, provide some wider contextualisation and give a brief outline of the chapters to follow.

1.1 - Background

When recruitment works well and youth theatre thrives, I have seen the benefits of that success first-hand for the young people who are participating in it. There are proven benefits for children and young people when they experience high quality youth theatre provision both in educational attainment and their prospects for employability (DICE:2010). Drama facilitates the acquisition of a range of skills including improved self-advocacy; increased confidence and resilience and the development of teamwork and project planning strategies (Batra, Parimoo: 2017). However, as will be demonstrated in the following chapters, recruitment practice does not always consider how to make offers accessible to those children and young people who would benefit the most from the acquisition of those skills.

The novel contribution of this research is the highlighting of this gap in practice together with a proposed framework for recruitment in youth theatre. This framework builds on the elements of best practice isolated through an analysis of current youth theatre programmes by considering them in a practical context which, although focused on the need to recruit priority participants, would also cater for children and young people who are more experienced.

My own interest in recruitment practice has developed through my experience as a creative engagement freelancer, youth theatre director, arts manager and latterly, as an Arts Council Relationship Manager. During my career, the difficulties of effective recruitment have been clear, not only is there is an attendant cost, for example, employing an experienced producer or engagement manager; but time and space are needed for outreach sessions; building effective relationships with external partners and connecting with community spaces and organisations. A desire to ensure equality of access to youth theatre offers is something which has been a part of my practice throughout this time. Whilst the theatre sector is widely held as being at forefront of social justice (Nicholson: 2011 p101), I was concerned that many organisations had neither the time nor the funds to focus on the work needed for a robust recruitment process for their young participants and, as a result, this area of practice had not been given much attention.

I have also been interested in several other questions: 'What is the impact of the reduction of arts teaching hours in schools?', 'Why are so many successful creative practitioners from similarly advantaged backgrounds?' and 'Why are the skills taught by creative subjects seemingly undervalued?'. These core questions which underpin this research, and the widening disadvantage gap are all issues which are regularly discussed in media, arts, and cultural periodicals and which have had numerous separate studies examining them[1]. By connecting the growing disadvantage gap (EPI:2020) resulting from problematic education policy, with the measurable benefits of drama provision, and the need for funded youth theatre to have structured best practice recruitment models, practical recommendations can be made. Funded drama provision which prioritises first engagements with priority

[1] Friedman et al (2016); Cultural Learning Alliance (2019); Warwick Commission (2015)

participants cannot be a whole solution to decades of reduced state school arts provision. However, best practice in recruitment underlined by changes to reporting requirements by funders could make a real difference in the youth arts sector and for the young people accessing the programmes. By analysing how accessible youth theatre programmes are from the perspective of participants who have little cultural experience, best practice can be highlighted, and key measures recommended which could improve and widen access for children and young people. That access provides the opportunity for those participants to develop skills which improve their cultural and social capital and their prospects for social mobility (Goldthorpe: 2016).

1.2 Wider Context

An Audience Agency report in 2020 showed that the highest demographic marker for engagement with theatre was the level of educational attainment of the theatre goer, with a significant bias towards higher socio-economic groups (Audience Agency: 2020). That report shows that a child or young person is far more likely to engage with theatre if they are from a middle class family. Logically, for a young person to develop an interest in participating in theatre they must have some experience of attending theatre. Therefore, young people accessing youth theatre provision are more likely to be from a middle class background (Ibid, p16).

Where a young person is not given access to cultural experience or opportunity through their home setting, then the only other consistent element during their development is their school setting. If they are then unable to access cultural experiences and develop interests through their education then, as Bourdieu argues (1995), they are far less likely to introduce their own children to cultural and creative opportunities when they become parents themselves. This means that access to those opportunities will be siloed within specific demographics which repeated studies[2] indicate will be middle class.

Cultural capital has been defined as emanating both from educational background and from class boundary drawing (Savage et al: 2013). Jen Harvie defines it in a neoliberalist context

[2] Savage et al: 2013 p3, Friedman et al: 2016; Arts Emergency: 2018

particularly pertinent to this research as 'the power of those who have the skills, the resources and contacts – the cultural capital' (Harvie: 2013 p4). With the evidenced reduction of drama teaching in schools, the diminished role of state education as a cultural gatekeeper will impact on the 'cultural capital' of those young people who need it the most, those who do not have cultural gatekeepers within their family settings, as they have no access point to cultural experience other than that provided in school.

Whilst the area of cultural capital acquisition and its impact upon social mobility is widely researched and documented and there is significant research documenting the impact of education policy and mobility (Ball: 2017; Harvie: 2013) I have connected these areas together with proposals for positive change that could potentially deliver measurable benefits to young people. It is the examination of delivering youth theatre programmes from an operational perspective, combined with an understanding of the impact of funder expectation, which contributes to this area of study.

The discourse relating to drama and how the skills it develops are classified is a key part of the context of this research. In particular, how the discourse can be improved to become more accurately reflective of the benefit to young people of the acquisition of those skills. A report by the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) (2019) found skills 'such as creativity, originality, problem-solving and the ability to learn, give people the advantage' and argued that whilst these skills 'may be the hardest to teach and learn' it remains 'vital that the education and skill system develops ways for people to master these skills' (Ibid). Drama not only teaches all those skills but has been shown in multiple studies to increase confidence, presentation skills and employability[3]. These skills are often classified as 'soft skills' as opposed to 'hard skills' which are those specifically related to subjects or practical tasks (Tewari; Sharma: 2016).

It will be argued, through an analysis of the discourse surrounding both educational and cultural policy making, that the language utilised when categorising subjects is employed as an instrument of power and change. The use of the word 'soft' to describe such important

[3] DICE: 2010; Kalıpcı, M. (2016); Koyluoglu, N. (2010).

skills, diminishes both their power and the necessity to acquire them. I propose that rather than describe these skills as 'soft skills' they should be widely classified as 'pervasive' skills - those skills and attributes which impact all areas of life and work.

I have not originated the term, pervasive skills, which is already utilised in a limited way, particularly in South Africa (Viviers et al; 2016) within the sphere of human resource management. However, the term is not widely used within the arts and cultural sector or indeed the education or human resource sectors both within the UK and internationally. It has been noted that the alternate terms of soft skills and transferrable skills are much more commonly applied (Shalini & Alemelu: 2021).

Cultural capital is not accumulated solely through education, whilst schools can certainly help develop pervasive skills and provide some cultural experiences they cannot act as a panacea when socio-economic issues, class, parental support, and knowledge also play a role in the development of cultural capital as will be discussed further in Chapters Four and Five.

1.3 Analytical Framework

To examine recruitment to funded youth theatre programmes I have classified the young people who attend youth theatre into four categories.

- Group One are participants who as younger children were taken to dance or drama by culturally engaged parents or guardians keen for them to develop skills. These young people then either become engaged or have the advantage of some involvement before ceasing generally due to lack of continued personal interest.
- Group Two are young people who have had the opportunity to experience some drama or dance at school or a youth centre, and out of that developed an interest which they then pursued with the support of parents or guardians who perhaps have no prior experience of theatre themselves, but who wish to support their children's interest.

- Group Three are young people who meet the criteria for targeted engagement such as young carers; children within the care system; NEET[4] young people and young people in areas with strong youth services who fall into a protected characteristic bracket.
- Group Four are the rarest in youth theatre participation – young people who have had few cultural access opportunities, whose parents are not culturally engaged and/or unsupportive of their attendance and who may not fall within targeted classifications.

Group Three and Four young people are often classified within organisations as 'hard to reach' (Good Governance Institute: 2021). 'Hard to reach' is a phrase widely used within engagement settings for communities perceived to be disengaged or 'inaccessible to most traditional and conventional methods for any reason' (HSE: 2004). In a theatre context this can be aligned to the Audience Agency data referenced above which isolates the least likely groups to attend or engage with theatre as those from low socio-economic backgrounds and those from ethnically diverse communities (2020). The phrase 'hard to reach' essentially builds on the cycle of culture classifications in which parents' own cultural experiences in childhood shape their behaviour as parents in relation to the arts, as posited by Bourdieu with his theory of habitus, (Bourdieu; Passeron, 1990), and Stephen J Ball's classification of parents as informed or disengaged 'choosers' (Ball: 2017). In essence, where a young person has not been introduced to cultural activity[5] by their parents or guardians they are less likely to introduce their own children to that activity and this is a cycle of behaviour which perpetuates and becomes not only generational but also replicated within communities.

Nothing better illustrates the barriers faced by some young people to cultural access than the use of the phrase 'hard to reach'. Labelling a young person as 'hard to reach' suggests their lack of cultural engagement or that the responsibility for the deprivation of their local

[4] Not in education, employment, or training and aged 16 – 24 (ONS:2021)

[5] This research acknowledges that 'cultural activity' is a very broad term which could apply to many activities such as attending football or other sporting events or associated with committed religious practice or even attending the cinema. For the purposes of this research 'cultural activity' is that associated with the arts, specifically, drama, music, dance, poetry/literature, visual art from an audience and participatory perspective.

area lies with them. Where arts professionals are being funded to widen their engagement model, particularly through Arts Council England's Let Create strategy, those groups previously named 'hard to reach' should be renamed 'priority groups'. A semantic shift perhaps, but one which reframes the focus on the urgent need to ensure that the 'disadvantage gap' does not continue to widen (EPI:2020,) and that funding given to arts organisations for youth programmes is properly focused and delivers effective first engagement strategies. Those first engagements should then be built upon with youth theatre programmes which are practically focused on pervasive skill development as a principal goal, whilst also allowing for the creative development pathways which would naturally lead to more disadvantaged young people emerging professionally into performance, technical and creative careers.

In the proceeding chapters, a historiographical and discourse analysis of the development of educational policy is undertaken to examine how the discourse relating to creative subjects has been repeatedly framed, and how the discourse relating to employability has developed. This will provide greater depth of understanding of the issues facing priority participants and contextualise the importance of equity of access to opportunities.

The issue of place will also be utilised as a framework in this research, not from a geographical perspective but based on the necessity that arts organisations understand the imperatives of the communities which they serve and the need for successful engagement strategies to be place focused.

These wider questions are explored to deliver perspective to the central practical problem of effective recruitment and retention strategies in youth theatre. The following chapters will interrogate these interconnected questions both theoretically and practically. Firstly, through an analysis of the policy flaws which have diminished the status of arts education whilst simultaneously overlooking the value of the skills which drama teaches. Secondly, through a practical analysis of the way in which arts organisations and youth theatre programmes seek to redress the balance of access to cultural capital. Thirdly, through the identification of best practice and suggestions of how that could be disseminated into both

policy and practice guidelines and basic requirements applied by funders as a pre-requisite for their support.

To propose policy and models for best practice, an examination has been made of current youth theatre recruitment practice. Close analysis of three youth theatre programmes, Contact Theatre Manchester, Burnley Youth Theatre and Stage Directions in Salford shows that youth Theatre provision can support the development of social and cultural capital for disadvantaged young people. All three are analysed as examples of best practice which work closely within their place settings to create a space which serves the community with peer to peer working, co-creation with artists, technical cohorts etc. and whose output has high artistic value. An examination of the positive and negative elements of their recruitment methods serves as a benchmark for a wider analysis of more than a hundred offers across England providing a robust sample of the offers available to priority participants and whether they are accessible.

1.4 Outline of Thesis

The underlying focus of this thesis is an examination of the structural inequality of drama provision which reduces the acquisition of cultural capital and pervasive skills for disadvantaged young people. In this chapter I have outlined the development of my interest in youth theatre recruitment, provided background information, an analytical framework and indicated what I set out to achieve. The proceeding chapters will develop the research as follows.

Chapter Two is a literature review which considers the wider context through three thematic areas, education policy and its impact on the teaching of creative subjects, the benefits of drama as a taught subject and cross curricular teaching tool and the impact of pervasive skill acquisition on children and young people. Examination of previous research within these three areas provides useful insight and highlights the need for a connection between the loss of drama provision within state-funded education and the need for open access and excellence in recruitment practice in funded youth theatre. This connection underpins the novel contribution of this research.

Chapter Three sets out the research methodology summarising the approach taken to the analysis of the thematic areas utilised within the literature review and to the data collection and comparative analysis of youth theatre best practice.

Chapter Four undertakes a historiographical analysis of education policy with a particular focus on the way in which pervasive skills are considered within policy making. This examination adds essential context to the necessity of access to drama provision for young people and provides insight into the impact of reduced cultural provision within state funded education.

Chapter Five considers the funding landscape within which youth theatres operate and analyses how this impacts what they offer their participants. This analysis draws conclusions which are taken forward into the consideration of best practice to ensure that the recommendations are informed from a practical, operational, and realistic perspective.

Chapter Six provides a detailed analysis of three youth theatre programmes, Contact Theatre Manchester, Burnley Youth Theatre and Stage Directions Salford. These three organisations have a similar ethos but different operating models and recruitment methods providing an opportunity to examine best practice within a range of approaches. This analysis is then used as a comparator for the wider data set considered in Chapter Seven.

Chapter Seven examines the findings from the wider youth theatre analysis undertaken. One hundred and fifty organisations were considered and of those thirty youth theatres offers were chosen for closer analysis and comparison. This wider comparison is necessary to ensure that the recommendations of best practice are well considered and robust.

Chapter Eight takes the key points of the best practice analysis from the preceding two chapters and uses these to propose best practice recommendations for youth theatres. These recommendations are also informed by the findings of Chapters Four and Five by considering both educational and practical funding perspectives.

Chapter Nine provides a final overview of the research drawing together key findings and making wider recommendations for more structural change beyond those which single organisations can make to improve access for children and young people. To improve the effectiveness of the discourse pertaining to the impact of drama on children and young people I will propose the reclassification of the skill sets it teaches to highlight the impact of those skills and the importance of acquiring them. To improve the ease of access for all to youth theatre provision I will propose a reframing of the discourse used in participatory engagement and highlight both strengths and deficiencies in the practices of organisations and funders. To share the learning from this research I will make best practice recommendations which may provide a starting point for organisations to consider how they approach youth theatre recruitment.

Each of the Chapters detailed illustrates the necessity for excellence in engagement practice in youth theatre, from considering the need for access to cultural provision via an analysis of education policy to providing proposals for both future practice and future study. This responds to the central theme that it is not only important for youth theatres to consider how they recruit but who they recruit to ensure that the skills developed through drama are accessible to as many children and young people as possible.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

To effectively interrogate the research question, 'how can funded youth theatres ensure that they recruit the children and young people most in need of the pervasive skills taught through drama?', a range of background literature requires critical review and consideration.

There are several key areas which provide the background to this research, education policy, the impact of drama as a subject, pervasive skills development, and youth theatre recruitment practice. These are extensive research fields, and the principal function of this literature review is to reduce these topics to their specific relevance to the research question. Within this literature review these areas[6] are divided into three thematic sections:

- education policy and its impact on the teaching of creative subjects.
- the benefits of drama as a taught subject and cross curricular teaching tool.
- the impact of pervasive skill acquisition on children and young people.

Whilst there are epistemological threads which run throughout the research there are also topics which are core to the contextual background to each section. It should also be noted that whilst there is a focus on the benefits of both taught and extra-curricular drama, when policy relating to education is being examined this will necessitate referring to the broader spectrums of 'arts teaching' and 'arts GCSE's' etc. This is due to the available literature on educational trends classifying non-compulsory arts subjects together (as they are classified within the national curriculum), and as such it is often not possible to isolate the specifics relating to drama provision.

This classification is indicative of the way in which all arts subjects are treated as a homogenous group within education policy, rather than individual subjects which provide students with specific creative and pervasive skills. The problematic nature of this grouping is also reflected in major creative sector reports, such as those from Sutton Trust, Warwick

[6] Save for youth theatre practice which is considered through the findings of this research and therefore not incorporated into the literature review.

Commission, Arts Emergency etc[7]. Whilst these reports are a valuable resource in their assessment of the reduction of creative subjects within the curriculum, they do not analyse the specific benefits of the various arts subjects and how these can positively impact young people's employability and social mobility.

2.1 Education policy and its impact on the teaching of creative subjects

To effectively analyse the development of educational policy and detect the impact of underlining trends, a breadth of knowledge of those policy changes and trends is essential. Also relevant is an analysis of the purposive approach to the 1988 Education Act which implemented the first ever legal curriculum requirements. Education policy is determined by government and the review of the literature in this area draws from policy documents, political rhetoric and manifestos, and cultural sector reports and studies on policy impact.

In August 2019, the Cultural Learning Alliance published a briefing on the declining number of hours of secondary school arts education confirming that between 2016 – 2018 the number of arts teachers in schools and the number of hours of arts subjects being taught had both dropped by seven percent (Cultural Learning Alliance: 2019). Their latest report highlights that between 2010 and 2022 there was an overall percentage decrease in the number of arts subjects being taken to GCSE of forty percent with a reduction of thirty five percent in the number of students taking GCSE drama (Cultural Learning Alliance: 2022).

There are also numerous articles citing concern over falling GCSE numbers in Creative Subjects (Lough: 2019; Steers:2013; Hardy: 2016) together with articles and analysis in the educational and arts press. There has not however been a major study analysing the impact of reduced arts teaching hours on children and young people.

More widely focused reports by the Warwick Commission (2015) Sutton Trust (2016/17) and Arts Emergency (2019) have suggested that educational policy since 1988 has developed a curriculum in which arts education is declining.

[7] Sutton Trust (2016) (2017); Warwick Commission (2015); Arts Emergency (2018)

In 2017 the Durham Commission found that ‘teaching for creativity confers personal, economic and social advantage’ (p7: 2017) and that 'an education that stimulates [young people’s] creativity can help them thrive, enjoy, and achieve in their lives, and shape a better future for themselves, as well as for the nation as a whole’ (Ibid p10).

Despite this the report also found

> A huge disparity in teaching for creativity between schools, often reflecting socio-economic factors. We have found that the independent sector is better resourced in schools that teach for creativity. The evidence shows that teaching for creativity confers personal, economic, and social advantage. As a matter of social justice and national interest it should be available to all young people, not only to those who can afford it. (Ibid p9)

To explore this trend further, the relationship between arts education in schools and the educational policy which provides the framework in which those trends are occurring must be examined. In doing so, it is necessary to clarify which policy groups and types of discourse are relevant, as policies relating to arts education could be classed as both cultural policies and educational policies.

To respond effectively to the research question, the policy discourse framework contains political rhetoric, statutory instruments, and legislation relating to educational policy. There is also limited reference to cultural policy within the context of the frameworks of government funded organisations such as Arts Council England.

When defining cultural policy Bell and Oakley (2015, p.4) class education within a group of ‘non-cultural policies’ such as urban planning and immigration although they concede that ‘cultural activities in recent decades have arguably been more affected’ by these branches of policy making. They do however indicate that anyone examining cultural policy should be aware of the wider implications of such ‘non-cultural policies’. Therefore, Chapter Four considers the wider impact of education policy on cultural policy which is defined by

Mulcahy as 'governmental strategies and activities that promote the production, dissemination, marketing, and consumption of the arts' (2006, p.320).

In analysing the hegemonic threads of the development of education policy, the works of Ball (2013; 2017; 2019), Fuller (2008), Hoskins & Barker (2014) and Harvie (2013) are relevant, particularly when considering the idea of 'human capital'. Human capital is defined by the Office for National Statistics as:

> the value of individuals' skills, knowledge, abilities, social attributes, personality, and health attributes. These factors enable individuals to work, and therefore produce something of economic value. It is measured as the sum of the total potential future earnings of everyone in the labour market (ONS: 2021)

This underlines a central theme that education is entirely geared towards providing human capital which fuels economic expansion, a proposition that sits within an analysis of neoliberalist policy making and finds threads within the political rhetoric of Jim Callaghan (1974), Kenneth Baker (1987), Tony Blair (1996) and Nick Gibb (2010; 2014). Whilst the neoliberalist foundations of these policies, most particularly in the core tenet of 'self-actualisation' (Taormina; Gao: 2013), are relevant when examining policy themes, responding to the research question does not extend to an in-depth analysis of neoliberalism. The impact of specific policy agendas on the long term outcomes of education policy could form a separate study in itself.

The work of Stephen Ball (2013; 2017; 2019) is particularly relevant in his consideration of the marketisation of education after the 1988 Education Act and the subsequent impact on the children of the parents categorised as 'disconnected choosers'. This finds a parallel in Bourdieu's work on education, in particular his theories of the preservation of cultural capital by the middle classes which has a negative impact on the acquisition of cultural capital by the working classes, and consequently reduces their ability to be socially mobile (Bourdieu:1964).

Fuller when assessing the changing goals of international educational policy since the 1950's, noted that the advent of technological advancement resulted in a change in policy makers key aims from an initial desire to make the population literate, to a focus 'on achieving technological superiority' until 'the fundamental purpose of schooling was fused to the capitalist yearning for economic expansion' (2008 para 3). This highlights that the policy trend linking education with the economy was not solely confined to the UK but is a long term global trend, a phenomenon which will be examined more closely in Chapter Four.

A report titled 'The Arts in Schools – Foundations for the Future' (Tambling & Bacon: 2023) was commissioned by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation as a follow up response to Ken Robinsons original Arts in Schools Report (1982) and is described by one of the authors as 'bleak reading' (Bacon: 2023). The report provides an interesting overview of the devaluation of the arts in schools and the wider impact that creative learning can have. This report is of significant value in understanding the broader timeline and background to changes in creative education. Whilst the report does make recommendations relating to Local Education Partnerships and extra-curricular programmes, the principal focus of the report is on schools and curriculum initiatives. The report, similarly to those listed earlier, does not differentiate between creative subjects, although reference is made to the connection between centrally funded short term projects, such as the Youth Performance Partnership Project[8] being utilised as a means of deflection from inadequate core curriculum policy.

Chapter Four looks at this theme in more detail and examines the policy making and rhetoric which has built the current curriculum requirements in state education. This demonstrates how a focus on an academic approach which is not balanced by pervasive skills acquisition is defeating the purpose of providing a skilled workforce. The analysis also highlights the devaluing discourse surrounding drama and other creative subjects which is contradictory to their proven benefits (Tambling & Bacon: 2023 p.89).

[8] The Youth Performance Partnership Project was an Arts Council England funded pilot scheme which supported five regional projects to improve engagement with children and young people (ACE: 2023)

2.2 The benefits of drama as a taught subject and a cross-curricular teaching tool

In isolating the skills gained from drama provision, the range of skills obtained from drama requires consideration. There are of course specific skills related to performance such as characterisation, vocal projection, movement, etc., but the training of future performers is not being examined, the focus is a wider concept, whether drama confers more holistic learning outcomes to a young person via the development of pervasive skills.

As set out in Chapter One, I recommend the reframing of the commonly used 'soft skills' to a more accurate classification of 'pervasive skills'. Soft skills were defined in 2019 by the Society for Human Resource Management as 'problem solving, critical thinking, innovation and creativity; the ability to deal with complexity and ambiguity; and communication' (2019). That report, entitled 'The Skills Gap' also indicated that there is a current shortage of graduate candidates with a range of those skills with seventy three percent of graduate employers indicating they were struggling to find a range of applicants with the skill sets they require (Ibid, p.4). This is at odds with the rhetoric and policy trends highlighted earlier which are focused on 'employable skills' and a reduction in creative subjects.

In 2010, the findings of a two year European Study considered the impact of drama as a taught subject and cross curricular tool on the Lisbon Key Learning Competencies[9] within twelve partner countries (DICE: 2010). The study was conducted with more than five thousand participants aged between thirteen and sixteen and concluded that drama had a measurable impact on five of the eight key learning competencies, specifically:

- Communication in the mother tongue
- Learning to learn
- Interpersonal, intercultural, and social competences, civic competence
- Entrepreneurship
- Cultural expression (Ibid, p12)

[9] In 2005 the European Commission set out eight key competencies *'in the shape of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to each context which are fundamental for each individual in a knowledge-based society'. (European Commission: 2005/0221 p2).*

The DICE findings will be considered further in Chapter Four. They are supported by other international studies which highlight the benefit of drama on the development of pervasive skills and link this with employability. In 2017, Batra and Parimoo highlighted the role of drama as a key tool increasing employability amongst college students in India, and similar research was used to improve the performance and employability of business students in Malaysia (Kalidas: 2014). A 2002, US study by Marsh & Kleitman examined the effects of participation in extracurricular school activities on young people aged sixteen to eighteen. Their findings were that school based extracurricular activities were more beneficial than out of school activities and that some of the most beneficial were non-academic e.g., performing arts and sports (Marsh & Kleitman: 2020 p501). The results of their study also suggested that participation in these extra-curricular activities gave diverse academic benefits to participating students, 'particularly for socioeconomically disadvantaged students who are least well served by the traditional curriculum' (Ibid p504).

The Social Mobility Commissions Report 2019 also looked at the impact of extra-curricular engagement on a young person's well-being and academic performance and concluded that participation in non-academic activities whether that be sport, performing arts or other clubs 'gave young people the confidence to interact socially with others, to extend their social networks beyond existing friendship groups and provided them with new skills and abilities' as well as 'further positive outcomes in relation to educational aspirations' (Social Mobility Commission: 2019).

When analysing the literature pertinent to educational policy drivers it became clear within the discourse that employability was a key factor. Careers theory research has a range of frameworks which analyse the key skills relevant to employment and these are useful background and context for this research. The 'Developmental, Learning, and Transition Theories' theory grouping, is most relevant as it highlights the impact of pervasive skills on career progression. Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1989), The Theory of Circumscription and compromise (Gottfredson: 1981) and Happenstance Learning Theory (Krumbolz, 2009), are all applicable to the utilisation of learned pervasive skills, most particularly the 'planned happenstance' model which focuses on cultivating the ability to make the most of

opportunities as and when they arise. Krumbolz recommends the development of the following personality traits, curiosity, persistence, flexibility, and positivity. He proposes that if an individual can develop these traits over time, and work on other skills such as networking and financial planning through training and feedback then they will have the ability to capitalise on chance events which occur to them. Krumbolz recommended personality traits are very similar to those isolated in a 2006 study, which identified five 'creative habits of mind' (Claxton et al: 2006). The five habits: Collaboration; Imagination; Inquisitiveness; Persistence and Discipline were identified as habits learned through creativity and are the framework for the evaluation process of Stage Directions, one of the key Youth Theatre programmes analysed in this research. The similarity between the two suggests that creative habits, and specifically those taught by drama, link positively with employability.

This conclusion appears to be an unremarkable one to draw, that the skills shown in repeated studies to be learned through drama improve a young person's employability. An unremarkable one perhaps for those within the cultural sector who can see those benefits through their work, but it is not one drawn by educational policy makers as the discourse within that area repeatedly shows. There is a devaluation of creative subjects which is highlighted by the policy decisions made to reduce them to an ancillary subject grouping in the curriculum and as concluded by the most recent Arts in Schools Study (Tambling & Bacon: 2023 p.94). The most prominent educational policy announcement of the last year was Rishi Sunak's professed intention that all young people should study maths until the age of eighteen (GOV.UK/PMO: 2023). Devaluing one subject at the expense of another is counter-productive and unnecessary but it should be highlighted that discourse on educational improvement is focused on STEM subjects being the most important for improving employment prospects, as further explored in Chapter Four. Whilst the cultural sector may hold the worth of the teaching of arts subjects to be self-evident, that is not the case within wider societal discourse, and the need to promote the benefits of drama provision are set out in Chapters Eight and Nine.

2.3 The impact of pervasive skill acquisition on children and young people

Reduced cultural opportunity impacts a young person's acquisition of cultural capital and consequently their expectation of social mobility (Goldthorpe: 2016). I have therefore considered studies undertaken to address the issue of a creative education such as the Durham Commission[10] and the Warwick Commission Report entitled "Enriching Britain: Culture, Creativity and Growth" (2015) which opened with a statement from the Head of the Commission, Vicki Heywood,

> The key message from this report is that the government and the cultural and creative industries need to take a united and coherent approach that guarantees equal access for everyone to a rich cultural education and the opportunity to live a creative life. (Ibid p.2)

The report agrees there exists a downward trend in arts education provision highlighted by the Cultural Learning Alliance and calls for policy action. There is a significant amount of research highlighting the issue of inequality of opportunity in the creative professions with multiple studies from the Arts Council (2014; 2019), Sutton Trust (2016; 2022), Welcome Trust (2015), and 'Panic' commissioned by Arts Emergency (2019) that also address the issue of arts education and the difficulties of transitioning to a creative career.

In relation to drama education specifically, research published by London School of Economics analysed data from the Great British Class Survey and concluded that someone who is privately educated is three times more likely to gain a place at one of the 'big four' drama schools in London (defined in the study as RADA; LAMDA; Guildhall and Central) than a state educated working class contemporary (Friedman et al: 2016). There is also a significant amount of grey literature and editorial commentary on this issue as it relates specifically to working class actors and artists. Although the intention is not to focus on drama as a pathway to a creative career, rather to look at the benefit of drama in its provision of pervasive skills, a reduced creative talent pipeline is a consequence of reduced access which bears comment within a wider context.

[10] Durham Commission (2017)

That wider context confirms the findings of Friedman et al who titled their paper comparing the prospects for working class actors to "Skydiving without a parachute" (2016: p1). Their conclusion was that working class actors were grossly underrepresented within the profession and that when a working-class actor did enter the profession, they were at a significant disadvantage due to less economic, cultural, and social capital than their middle and upper class peers. This consequently made working class actors far less resilient in a very competitive job market. Cultural capital is a significant asset for an emerging actor comprising not only educational attainment but a wider awareness of the cultural landscape. This provides an actor with a shorthand to cultural references e.g., sector terminology, background knowledge of plays and practitioners, all of which could prove invaluable to the actor asked to prepare a script at short notice for an audition or to discuss the same confidently with an artistic director or casting director within the audition room itself. Those skills also translate to young creatives, writers, and directors and whilst the simplest benefits of drama to a young person e.g., increased confidence, presentation skills, and teamwork, (Batra: 2018) remain the focus under consideration, the advantage to a young person of a wider cultural education in developing their awareness of creative career pathways is clearly beneficial to them.

All these studies show that participation in something other than the academic can raise aspiration and provide positive outcomes for young people and the studies which reference drama specifically make a clear connection between the skills taught and increased employability. A side by side analysis of the commercial and funded sector effectively draws comparisons between those parents actively encouraging and organising the acquisition of skills for their children, those Ball would classify as, 'active choosers' (1993 p.16), and those young people whose parents are 'disconnected choosers', (Ibid, p.17), who may be reliant on funding within their area.

Such analysis will reference research relating to applied theatre and socially engaged practice from Jackson (2011); Prentki and Preston (2009) and Helen Nicholson (Nicholson: 2013) with the idea that theatre has the potential to 'address something beyond the form itself' (Ackroyd: 2000) although in this case, it is the possibility of societal improvement

through the increased acquisition of pervasive skills. Applied theatre and socially engaged practice is relevant to this research as it deals with the recruitment of participants, including children and young people and the creation of work. However, this is not from a perspective of much recent research which relates more closely to the experience of creating work and connection of the community participants and the artist, (Jackson, 2011 p.44), (Mackey, 2016 p.478).

Neither does this research identify with Jen Harvie's definition of applied theatre that

> 'The primary aim of applied projects is to collaborate artistically and socially with a (often socially marginalised) group of people. Applied projects tend to emphasise socially meaningful (and usually "positive") processes, sometimes more than artistic outcomes' (Harvie: 2013 p20).

Whilst this definition could apply to targeted youth engagement work by theatres such as the Young Carers programme at The Lowry, (Lowry:2020) or the Local Exchange programme at the Royal Exchange (Royal Exchange: 2023), such targeted work focuses on a narrower group of participants. Responding to the research question focuses on the benefits of drama and youth theatre attendance on young people who are not necessarily socially marginalised but who simply have limited access to cultural experience, categorised as Group Four children and young people.

The literature does not separate distinctively between performance based work and process based work (Nicholson: 2013 p.5) but process practices can be drawn upon as a base of study of youth theatre recruitment methods and elements of this framework can be applied to an assessment of different types of recruitment strategies.

2.4 Summary

Examination of a range of literature in three key areas has facilitated the distillation of this research to a basic question, namely, 'how can funded youth theatres ensure that they recruit the children and young people most in need of the pervasive skills taught through

drama?' Firstly, an analysis of education policy development and impact has highlighted policy discourse perpetually focused on employability and in particular the channelling of children and young people away from creative subject pathways. There are multiple studies and reports which highlight the problem of the disadvantage gap in schools, (Arts Emergency: 2019; Sutton Trust: 2016, 2022; Tambling & Bacon; 2023), but gaps in the literature in connecting these with problematic creative education policy.

Secondly, research on pervasive aka 'soft' skills and their acquisition within the classroom and outside of it has shown the clear benefit of drama provision for young people on their classroom learning (DICE: 2016; Kalidas: 2014; Marsh & Kleitman: 2020). Thirdly, there is a wider benefit to young people of the acquisition of pervasive skills which improves their cultural and social capital and improves prospects for social mobility (Goldthorpe: 2016; Batra & Parimoo: 2017; Friedman et al: 2016).

Where there is work to be done is in the connection between these three areas and the way in which practical steps can be taken to improve access to creative delivery (Gainer: 1997). Once it is acknowledged that access to drama and other creative subjects is a means by which disadvantaged children and young people can start to thrive, as evidenced by the range of studies quoted within this chapter, the logical next step is to consider how that is practically achieved. This is where this research is quite distinct from that which considers the delivery of applied theatre projects or other forms of community or participatory practice. Those studies, as indicated above, are focused on pedagogy, delivery methodologies, the outputs of projects and the impact upon participants at the end of a creative journey.

The contribution of this research is one of practical steps to support the start of creative journeys for children and young people. The way in which this is demonstrated is twofold, firstly by best practice guidelines which are a provocation to youth theatres to think about the need for robust recruitment. This is achieved by providing a clear rationale for the need for effective first engagement strategies, through the linked analysis of education policy and the impact of pervasive skills. Secondly, by carefully considering both the language and

practice used in the engagement of children and young people from the perspective of the prospective participant. Final recommendations have been refined through a lens of practical application, considering how best practice can benefit organisations and participants whilst working effectively within already constrained budgets. The disadvantage gap can be mitigated by excellence in youth theatre practice but will be demonstrated, only when those funded youth theatres are using recruitment models which focus on priority groups and place based strategies can that work effectively.

Chapter 3. Outline of methodology

To respond to the research questions, I utilise discourse analysis and 'policy sociology'[11] as well as qualitative methods including text and source based analysis, timelines, historiographical analysis, and comparative analysis alongside the use of published statistics and quantitative data. These methods test a range of deductive themes which prompted the undertaking of this research. Firstly, that education policy has reduced arts provision significantly since the introduction of the Ebacc; secondly, that the reduction of arts teaching hours in schools is impacting some children and young people more than others, thirdly, that funded youth theatre is not focused effectively on first engagement recruitment practice, finally, that these themes were interconnected.

Those deductive themes are tested within this research using a range of methodological approaches and in this Chapter these approaches are summarised under the following headings:

1. Analysis of Education Policy Trends
2. Analysis of drama as a tool of pervasive skill development
3. Data collection of Youth Theatre Recruitment Practice
4. Comparative analysis of youth theatre recruitment best practice.

3.1 Methodological Approach to Analysis of Educational Policy Trends

The approach to this focus area is text and source based, utilising timelines, historiographical analysis, critical discourse analysis and the use of published statistics to draw conclusions.

The analysis of policy trends is achieved via a critical discourse analysis of rhetoric in manifestos and political speeches leading to the implementation of the National Curriculum via the 1988 Act and to the rhetoric and policy which have led to subsequent curriculum changes and refinements.

[11] Policy sociology is defined by Ball as the utilisation of sociological concepts, ideas, and research as tools for making sense of policy. This may take the approach of a heuristic device as a method for considering how things may be. (Ball, 2017)

Discourse analysis is an appropriate methodological response to this research as its focus is the examination of power structures and ideologies particularly as they relate to social and political problems involving inequality between groups (Van Dijk: 2001 p355). Rogers et al's review of critical discourse analysis determines that the practice developed from intellectual traditions focused on linguistics in the social sciences: discourse studies (Foucault: 1969/1972), Pecheux's inter-discourse theory (Helsoot & Hak: 2007) and critical linguistics (Hodge & Kress, 1979/1993; Willig, 1999). Critical discourse analysis determines how the structure of language mediates relationships of power and privilege in social interactions, institutions, and bodies of knowledge (Bourdieu: 1977). The 'critical' element of the analysis moves beyond simple description and interpretation of the discourse and progresses to explain why and how language is constructed in a particular way to understand, uncover, and transform conditions of inequality (Rogers et al: 2005).

When utilising critical discourse analysis to analyse power structures within social hierarchies the work of Michel Foucault is a route of examination which works well as an epistemological foundation as it forces the researcher to assess all sides of the power balance. Foucault theorised that

> 'What defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action that does not act directly and immediately on others instead, it acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on possible or actual future or present actions' (1982; p540).

Using critical discourse analysis as a means of assessing the impact of a power imbalance can show how a lack of opportunity to access specific skill sets impacts not only on young people's attainment but also on their aspiration and aid the understanding of how external models could bridge the cultural provision gap and/or whether they are already doing so. This is a key reason that Foucault has often been applied in education theory (Graham: 2011) a pool of research closely akin to that of careers theory both of which are highly relevant to this research.

To avoid reconfirming pre-existing 'knowledge' and underscoring 'widely held' viewpoints, Foucault used critical discourse analysis himself to examine power structures through the historicised deconstruction of systems or regimes. By doing so, he sought to determine how and why some categories of thinking and lines of argument have come to be generally taken as truths while other ways of thinking/being/doing are marginalised (Foucault 1980a:237). Thus, discourse analysis can be used to challenge existing knowledge and create better practice. For example, when analysing the phrase 'hard to reach' and its application to communities with low cultural engagement, I ask does the phrase reflect the communities referred to or act as commentary on the cultural offers provided for them and the outreach models applied. Out of that analysis comes my rationale to propose replacing this widely used term with the phrase 'priority groups'. In doing so, I acknowledge that those groups that have the least current access to cultural opportunity should be made a priority by funded arts organisations rather than being specifically diminished from the outset by a categorisation that presents them as problematic.

Critical discourse analysis also provides a methodology which encourages statements to be analysed objectively, seeking evidence, and not simply accepting repeated tropes which, if accepted at initial reading can result in lines of argument being accepted as truth. For example, the article "GCSE reforms are squeezing out arts and technical subjects says man who created qualification" (Turner: 2019) demonstrates that "the claim to truth can itself be seen as a powerful rhetorical practice" (Edwards; Nicholl: 2001), particularly in editorial and grey literature sources. This article is about Kenneth Baker, one of the architects of the GCSE, but the headline makes a definitive statement purely based on that single measure. Whilst Baker's qualification as former Education Secretary may be persuasive of his expertise, he had left that position thirty years prior to the article being written (Chitty: 1991), which is an important consideration when analysing both the truth and weight of his assertion. When assessing such statements, the power balances within the sphere of discourse must be considered, for example, the motivation of the person making the statement, and how the discourse has been framed pursuant to that motivation (Ruiz: 2009).

Foucault further invites his readers to consider his own experimental process stating, "Each of my books is a way of carving out an object and of fabricating a method of analysis" (2000a [1980], p. 240). Thus, he suggests when undertaking analysis, it is the object of the analysis that dictates the chosen method. Foucault himself used numerous qualitative methods from simple data collection to historical analysis via documentary research (João Leite Ferreira Neto, 2018). In this regard, research for him was about experimenting with ideas and adopting approaches dictated by the nature of the subject matter he was studying. Thus, any methodology this study adopts follows in the footsteps of Foucault simply by examining the subject of the research and using various methods (as indicated above) with which to interrogate it.

The work of Bourdieu on both discourse analysis and educational theory is also particularly applicable to this research. Bourdieu's interrogations of political discourse and power structures within politics via his approach both to empirical investigation via quantitative data and discourse analysis are particularly concerned with the exercise of power (Bourdieu: 1991). Bourdieu (1964) wrote extensively about the acquisition of cultural capital and the process by which the power imbalance between both social classes and the populace and government retains the status quo between social groups. An application of these theories has provided additional insight when considering how power balances impact both policy making and the process of policy change.

3.2 Methodological approach to analysis of drama as a tool of pervasive skill development

An examination of definitions, studies and impact reports, forms the basis of the analysis by collating an array of research including studies undertaken by organisations working with young people within youth theatre settings. There had been an initial intention to design and utilise questionnaires to be distributed between youth theatre participants, facilitators, and other stakeholders. There is however a wealth of material available in published data and in the data gathering and evaluations undertaken by both Stage Directions and the other Youth Theatres which have been analysed. This data, which focuses on delivery and impact, is of huge benefit to this research both in the analysis of young people's recruitment

pathways and in assessing whether there were any measurable benefits of attending the youth theatre programmes.

Discourse analysis has been used to examine participants evaluation responses and the methods employed for the analysis of rhetoric and speeches works just as efficiently on less formal speech. Where this is used effectively is in the analysis of speech patterns and language used before and after delivery to evaluate differences in responses.

3.3 Data collection of Youth Theatre Recruitment Practices

The strategies used for recruiting young people to participatory programmes, and the way in which organisations connect with young people accessing a cultural offer for the first time, are defined within this research as a 'first engagement'.

When determining which organisations to analyse I have done so from two perspectives, firstly, through a detailed analysis of three youth theatre programmes which have different approaches to recruitment, but which also have key criteria which are the same to facilitate comparison and to provide a benchmark. Secondly, a macro overview of the landscape of youth theatre in England utilising a defined set of criteria related to their recruitment practices. In designing the analysis in this way, I have drawn on the work of Bartlett and Vavrus (2020) who suggest frameworks for comparison in social policy research. This proposes a research metric which engages different logics of comparison,

> a horizontal look that not only contrasts one case with another, but also traces social actors, documents, or other influences across these cases; a vertical comparison of influences at different levels,…..to the national to regional and local scales; and a transversal comparison over time' (Ibid p11).

Whilst this method was developed to compare international educational models and to take account of significantly different cultural and educational structures between institutions, I use it within this thesis to examine the impact of a range of approaches to recruitment in organisations of differing sizes and operating models and set in different locations.

To gather the data for both the micro and macro analysis one must consider which youth theatre programmes should be included. For the micro analysis a 'Purposeful Sampling' approach was taken. Here, the researcher having prior knowledge of good examples of practice, uses this knowledge to create a sample for case study (Patton: 2002). As set out in the introduction my own experience of the sector, working with organisations both as a Creative Producer, facilitator and Arts Council Relationship Manager has informed my selection of these organisations. Scharn and Thomas highlight the importance of researchers assessing how their own experiences both impact and contribute to interpretation of both the qualitative and quantitative data (2019). My experience working in youth theatre delivery and for a principal funder provides insight from both sides of the organisational power balance in funded youth theatre and facilitates a practical perspective. However, being reflexive and recognising my own epistemological assumptions about what constitutes best practice is necessary to ensure that the conclusions reached, and recommendations made are robust (Holmes: 2020). The choice of the three organisations examined was influenced by my knowledge of their practice and in particular their focus on equity of access. When choosing organisations to provide a benchmark of good practice those organisations must be 'information rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study' (Patton: 2015). The organisations chosen have variances in delivery model but good outcomes in terms of priority participant access and accordingly provided a range of approaches to analyse and act as a benchmark for the wider analysis.

A criterion sampling methodology was used to determine which organisations data would be considered for the comparative macro analysis. As theorised by Patton,

> If one wanted to precisely document the natural variation among programs, a random sample would be appropriate, one of sufficient size to be representative and permit generalisations to the total population of programs (2015. p.1)

Accordingly, a data set of one hundred and fifty theatres and organisations: producing and receiving houses, arts centres, community and amateur companies and specialist youth

theatres, was assembled. The data set was taken from the published data of a range of umbrella organisations: The Theatres Trust; Arts Council England; National Association of Youth Theatres; Greater Manchester Drama Federation; National Operatic and Dramatic Association and the Society of London Theatres (including national affiliates). Each organisation within the data set was then considered and all organisations without a regularly operating youth theatre were disregarded.

The remaining eighty-five organisations were then assessed for their barriers to priority participant access by gathering the following data: application and/or audition process; fees charged; recruitment frequency; whether they operate a waiting list and whether they allow drop in participation. This data is set out in a table in Appendix Three. The data was then considered for trends across the whole data set, for similarities in the different groupings (e.g., producing theatres; community youth theatre etc); and compared with the data from the three youth theatre offers chosen as a benchmark. Thirty organisations were then selected from the wider data set to analyse more closely. From this group, a best practice offer was determined to be one that would have the fewest barriers to recruitment in place, for example: free at the point of access or subsidised places; outreach or engagement which enabled the participant to try the activity easily; peer to peer recruitment; a clear pathway for participants to develop their own voice.

This creates a mixed methods approach which avoids the selective search confirmation basis which could result from the initial deductive approach together with the use of purposeful sampling and my positional closeness to the topic as a researcher working within the sector (Jones & Sugden: 2001).

3.4 Methodological Approach to best practice analysis

The analysis of best practice was undertaken from the perspective of a participant with no experience of youth theatre as this reflects the children and young people highlighted as priority participants. When analysing youth theatre recruitment pathways from the perspective of the participant it is important not to treat those participants as if they are without individual agency and any recommendations of best practice must be clear in the

balancing of the relationship between the creative offer, how it is offered and the ways in which it can be responded to.

Foucault repeatedly stressed the two way nature of power structures (1982, p. 542). This methodology seeks to not only analyse the power of the policy makers, influencers, and gatekeepers but also to analyse the agency of those navigating those pathways. Foucault, when discussing his lack of provision of a methodological roadmap spoke repeatedly of researchers experimenting with ideas and methods to interrogate spheres of knowledge. He argued, “an experimental attitude is necessary; at every moment, step by step, one must confront what one is thinking” (1984 [1983], p.374). This was something I considered during analysis as the importance of easy access for the participant is a concept which provokes a strength of feeling in me as a researcher. The temptation then could be to act as an echo chamber and consequently to arrive at findings which support the deductive theories held at the outset of the research (Dubois, Blank: 2018). The aim is to identify best practice against a set of criteria that objectively improve access for participants, consider these and compare them with a closer analysis of organisations who are successful in recruiting priority participants. This combined analysis is then used to draw final conclusions and recommendations.

The analysis of best practice also draws on my own experience of youth theatre making over the last thirty years, acting as drama teacher in a dance school for a decade, community youth theatre director and producer, and youth engagement specialist. Over the last five years, I have worked as Community Engagement Liaison at the Octagon Theatre; Engagement Consultant with a focus on Youth Projects at Touchstones Rochdale; Programmes Administrator at ACE Northwest Bridge Organisation Curious Minds; Youth Arts Manager at The Lowry and currently as a Theatre Relationship Manager for the Arts Council. Whilst at The Lowry, I wrote and implemented two new programme strands - a younger years devising company and Lowry Young Technicians which ran until the impact of Covid-19. I also worked in partnership with the National Theatre as Producer of the Regional Hub Youth Festival for the National Theatre Connections programme a three day, twenty company Youth Theatre Festival. This experience provides an understanding of the

practicalities of youth theatre recruitment which in turn, provides insight to the delivery of practical recommendations.

The output of this research is an isolation of the most effective recruitment strategies identified within the Youth Theatre offers analysed, which once gathered, are then formalised into best practice recommendations for funded youth theatres. Recommendations will also be made about the framing of the wider discourse related to the provision of drama for children and young people and policy measures which could be undertaken by funders to focus funded organisations on priority participants.

Chapter 4: Education Policy and Pervasive Skills: Perpetuating the Disadvantage Gap

In the Introductory Chapter and Literature Review of this thesis I have set out the core research question, 'how can funded youth theatres ensure that they recruit the children and young people most in need of the pervasive[12] skills taught through drama?'. I have also identified a gap in the literature, there is a lack of connection between the multiple studies which highlight the growing disadvantage gap for children and young people and those studies which highlight the impact of drama and pervasive skill acquisition on attainment and employability outcomes. If children and young people would have generally improved outcomes by developing pervasive skills, why aren't they being taught them through the proven methodology of drama?

The first step in responding to my research question is to clearly connect these two areas of research, firstly by examining why some children and young people have reduced opportunities to acquire pervasive skills at school and secondly, why it is important for their prospects and the reduction of the disadvantage gap that they acquire them. I then connect this analysis with the benefit of taught drama on pervasive skill acquisition to bridge the identified gap. This chapter answers the question, 'why should funded youth theatres make their recruitment practice a priority?'. This is a key consideration, not only because it responds to that underlying question, but because it informs a principal recommendation, namely, the reclassification of the skill sets drama teaches to highlight their impact and the importance of acquiring them.

Within this chapter I will firstly highlight the need for children and young people to acquire pervasive skills. I then analyse three key points in education policy development from the last sixty years which show the disconnection between the purported aim of education i.e., to equip a young person with the skills necessary for employment, and the outcome of the implementation of that policy which is a reduction in the acquisition of those skills. This analysis highlights the similarity in policy between successive administrations despite the growing disadvantage gap to demonstrate how embedded the approach to skills acquisition

[12] As set out in Chapter One – 'pervasive skills' is my recommended reframing of the commonly used terms 'soft skills' or 'transferrable skills'.

is and why a change in the discourse is needed. This analysis is then linked with consideration of the measurable benefits drama has upon children and young people's educational attainment and wider skills. Whilst the analysis of education policy may appear removed from the core examination of youth theatre recruitment, it is key to understanding the necessity for barrier free access for disadvantaged children and young people. This chapter also highlights the wider implications of education policy which has failed to keep pace with the changing face of employment requirements which has a further impact on disadvantaged children and young people once they leave school.

In 2019 the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) published the results of a 2018 global survey of employers who had been asked what they looked for as key skills and qualities in prospective employees. The survey found that skills 'such as creativity, originality, problem-solving and the ability to learn, give people the advantage' (CBI:2019). These are qualities which fall within the definition of pervasive skills, a definition which will be expanded upon later in this chapter. The report goes on to say that 'key drivers of success for young people in their working lives are attitudes and attributes such as resilience, enthusiasm, creativity, and communication skills (Ibid, p23).

The above survey states clearly what the canvassed employers believe are the 'key drivers' of success for young people entering the workplace. They do not list technical, or knowledge based skills within these key drivers but pervasive skills which they consider 'may be the hardest to teach and learn, but it is vital that the education and skill system develops ways for people to master these skills' (Ibid p38).

As summarised in Chapter Two, education policy has failed to develop in a way which supports state educated children and young people to master pervasive skills. This failure has had a particularly negative impact on children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who have reduced cultural and social capital and consequently, on their employability and equality of opportunity (Tambling & Bacon: 2023). This Chapter links policy making history to the growing skills gap to highlight the need to alter the discourse on pervasive skills. Emphasising that the acquisition of pervasive skills is a necessity provides

the ‘why’ of this research – ‘why do we need to ensure that youth theatre recruitment is both free from barriers and engaging effectively with the communities they serve?’.

Policy development and policy change are widely researched areas with a range of theoretical approaches including path dependence, policy learning and coalition advocacy (Cerna: 2013). This research is however concerned less with the incremental changes of policy development and more with policy reform which reflects major systemic changes (Ibid p.4) providing insight into the reduction of creative teaching in schools. The consequent impact on pervasive skill acquisition has created the landscape in which youth theatre currently operates. The problem of slowing social mobility and reduced cultural capital (Goldthorpe: 2016), underlines the importance of equity of access to funded cultural programmes for children and young people.

4.1 Education Policy and the focus on ‘Basic Skills’.

The connection between education and the acquisition of skills to support employability and social mobility is a key theme of twentieth and twenty-first century education policy. This link is often used in political rhetoric as a herald to policy reforms which are ostensibly designed to resolve the problem, but which have created an ever widening disadvantage gap and the necessity for external organisations such as youth theatres to attempt to plug the gap in provision.

I have highlighted three key reforms, the rhetoric leading to the 1968 and 1988 Education Acts and the move towards the Ebacc which all illustrate this phenomenon. These reforms span a sixty year period from 1963 to the present day and have created the current educational landscape from which organisations seek to engage children and young people. Analysis shows that the incorrect assumption that acquiring ill-defined ‘basic skills’ and reducing creative provision will lead to improved human capital has been a consistent theme and is not an issue which has arisen in more recent history.

In 1963 Labour had been out of power for twelve years when Harold Wilson, Leader of the Opposition spoke at the Labour party conference. Wilson was keen to stress that the Party

not only opposed the selective eleven-plus system because it was divisive, but because it failed to ensure young people joining the workforce were equipped with the skills needed to advance the nation as a technological power:

> As Socialists, as democrats, we oppose this system of educational apartheid because we believe in equality of opportunity. But that is not all. We simply cannot as a nation afford to neglect the educational development of a single boy or girl…. The Russians do not, the Germans do not, the Americans do not, and the Japanese do not, and we cannot afford to either. (Labour Party Archive: 2020)

Discourse analysis shows this language is high rhetoric, the phrase 'educational apartheid', is extreme in its classification of the selective system. Wilson was suggesting that the selective education system was the educational equivalent of being a segregated, second class citizen. He goes on to suggest that unless the system changed the result would be 'to neglect the educational development' of young people. This phrase moves the discourse from the extremity of the word apartheid to the emotive pull of the fear of neglect. The final link that Wilson makes is that this is not just about equality but about affordability, about remaining internationally competitive. The countries that he uses as comparison are also telling. This speech was made eighteen years after the end of World War Two and Wilson uses the axis powers, and the allied powers to make his point, evoking a need to compete and to win. When analysing the cohesion of the sentence structure, the conjunctive points are key. Wilson uses the words 'we oppose' linked with 'educational apartheid' which connects his audience of Party members with a positive struggle against an oppressive regime. Given the context of the speech and the setting – a keynote speech in a Party conference – this is a deliberate attempt to create a connection in the minds of the listeners with a battle which must be won.

The speech sets out a clear link between education and national output and the use of hyperbolic rhetoric shows the importance placed on education in the lead up to the 1964 general election. The dissatisfaction of the parents whose children had not gained a grammar school place and of those children themselves who were now of voting age, was

significant political currency. However, it was not working class voters to whom they were aiming the rhetoric but those middle class parents whose children had failed to gain a grammar school place and who were themselves lobbying for reform -

> it was these knowledgeable, middle-class parents who ... built up the necessary national impetus for action. By the time Labour came to power, the country was not only willing to accept comprehensive reorganisation: it was demanding it' (Pedley: 1978)

Leading members of the Labour Party were prepared to 'exploit the alarm from middle-class parents' (Chitty: 1991), and their manifesto called for 'a revolution in our education system which will ensure the education of all our citizens in the responsibilities of this scientific age' (Labour Party: 2020). This rhetoric utilises the hyperbole of a desired 'revolution' to ensure that 'all citizens', were educated to meet the demands of the scientific age. The use of 'citizens' is an important word choice as it is a classless, equalising descriptor which is coupled with the word 'responsibilities' to denote that everyone is accountable and must prepare for the new 'scientific age'.

This was the Labour Party's approach to securing centrist middle-class votes by mobilising the power of existing discourse, enabling it to be 'recognised by a numerous and powerful group that can recognise itself in it' (Bourdieu: 1991). Labour finally completed the slow moving change from the selective system to the comprehensive system with the Education Act 1968 (Chitty: 1991).

The only other significant policy development prior to 1987 came during the Labour administration of 1974 to 1979 with Callaghan's Ruskin College speech of 1976. The speech began the so called 'Great Debate' on education reform and focused on the nature and purpose of public education (Education UK: 2023). Callaghan's speech underlined the purpose of education as a means of securing employment and continued the policy thread commenced with the Labour manifesto of 1963 that education and industry needed to be closely aligned:

> Clearly, life at school is far more full and creative than it was many years ago. I would also like to thank the children who have been kind enough to write to me after I visited their schools: and well written letters they were. I recognise that teachers occupy a special place in these discussions because of their real sense of professionalism and vocation about their work. But I am concerned on my journeys to find complaints from industry that new recruits from the schools sometimes do not have the basic tools to do the job that is required (Ibid)

A discourse analysis of this speech splits it clearly in two – what is said before and after the 'But'. Prior to it there are vague but positive descriptors of a full and creative school life, producing children who can write excellent letters and professional and dedicated teachers. The phrasing is light, utilising bland words like 'kind' and 'well-written' and the praise for teachers makes no comment upon their teaching skill or the attainments of their pupils. The words after the use of 'but' are far more direct and significant, referencing 'complaints' that school leavers are unable to do the 'basics' when they start work.

The use of the word creative is notable here. Callaghan indicates at the opening of the speech that life is more 'full and creative' but, concludes whilst this is the case students are unable to satisfy employers with even basic skills. As this is a carefully drafted speech and not impromptu remarks the inference must be drawn that the use of the word creative has specific meaning. Utilising Beaugrand's criteria[13], this word choice must be viewed in its context and setting – a speech by the Prime Minister in an educational setting about educational policy. The use of the conjunction 'but', serves to contrast what has preceded, with what follows and, in this structure, makes the implication that a full and creative curriculum is one which cannot produce effective workers. The speech goes on to say,

> Why is it that thirty thousand vacancies for students in science and engineering in our universities and polytechnics were not taken up last year while the humanities

[13] Robert de Beaugrand 1981 – the discourse analysis criteria are fully detailed in Chapter Three which sets out the methodological approach of this research.

> courses were full? ……The goals of our education, from nursery school through to adult education, are clear enough. They are to equip children to the best of their ability for a lively, constructive, place in society, and also to fit them to do a job of work. Not one or the other but both (Ibid para 17)

An analysis of these sections of the speech is also illuminating, whilst Callaghan does not criticise the teaching of humanities, his concern lies with the unmet STEM university places. The speech is peppered with 'recurrences', (Beaugrand: 1981), repeated phrases and lexical elements which link employability to STEM subjects and the clear statement that education has a responsibility to 'fit young people to do a job of work'. The speech also shows a clear understanding of the need for young people to develop pervasive skills, for them to be 'lively' and 'constructive' and 'well adjusted', although this is tempered throughout with the need for young people to be able to earn a living and that the ability to do so lies within specific subject areas:

> There is little wrong with the range and diversity of our courses. But is there sufficient thoroughness and depth in those required in afterlife to make a living? (Ibid para 13)

This speech repeats the theme identified in the Wilson rhetoric and policy pledges of 1963 and 1964, that of policymakers placing a premium on specific subject areas because of the perception that they are more likely to lead to employment. This is defined by Bruce Fuller as educational policy 'fused to the capitalist yearning for economic expansion' (2008), and far removed from Bourdieu's ideal view of a system of state education which would use the pedagogic process as a means of securing a collaborative socialisation and social consensus, without the structures of a formal curriculum (Bourdieu: 1964a; Robbins: 2006).

The central theme identified throughout this analysis is that of policymakers shaping an educational system which is designed to serve the economy. This is not new knowledge, researchers and academics have previously identified this trend[14] however there is an

[14] Spring: 1998; Sahlberg: 2006; Macdonald: 2005; Davies: 2002

additional dimension to this, the small group of advisers and policymakers involved in this continuous policy refinement are also able to shape curriculum direction to what they perceive to be key occupations and industries. The rhetoric and policy already analysed shows a desire to shape and channel pupils towards subjects which promote STEM and technological advancement at the expense of creative subjects. This policy direction is also at the expense of pupils experiencing a holistic curriculum, and this is particularly impactful where those pupils' primary provider of cultural and social capital, as defined in the opening chapter, is their state funded education. This further demonstrates how important extra-curricular opportunities such as funded Youth Theatre are in filling that gap in provision. Indeed, it is of note that two of the youth theatre programmes analysed within Chapter Six of this thesis were founded in the 1970's, Contact Theatre and Burnley Youth Theatre, which were both designed to provide that extra-curricular provision in areas of place based need.

The rhetoric of 'basic skills' continued through the next stage in policymakers' commodification of education (Ball: 2017 p.7), with the policies enacted by the 1988 Education Act including the National Curriculum. The Thatcher Conservative administration, despite being in government from 1979, proposed no changes to education policy until the general election campaign of 1987. The election manifesto gave the first indications that the curriculum would be standardised. (Conservative Party: 1987):

> Increased resources have not produced uniformly higher standards. Parents and employers are rightly concerned that not enough children master the basic skills, that some of what is taught seems irrelevant to a good education and that standards of personal discipline and aspirations are too low (Conservative Party: 1987, p.18)

This manifesto extract is again centred on the value of the curriculum only in terms of employment and repeats phraseology used in the Ruskin speech. There is repetition of the idea that some subjects are less valuable and dismissed as 'irrelevant' to a 'good education'. There is, however, never any real explanation or definition of the phrase 'a good education' other than one designed to equip a young person with the 'basic skills 'which would satisfy an employer. The key phrase 'basic skills' is also never defined within any of the policy or

political discourse analysed with the implication being that everyone is aware what those skills constitute. Whilst it could be surmised that this phrase equates to simple literacy and numeracy, those subjects were taught in schools a hundred years prior to the commonality of educational opportunity supposedly afforded by the twentieth century. Consistently I have found that the repetition of this phrase has been used, and continues to be used, in political discourse to communicate that change is required and precedes policy reform without any clear definition of what that policy is seeking to achieve.

The Education Act 1988 was the most radical change in education policy for half a century, implementing the national curriculum, establishing Ofsted, and implementing standard attainment tests (SATS), at ages four and eleven. The publication of league tables was also introduced which advanced the process of educational marketisation. Schools effectively started to compete with one another for government funding, the better the school performed the previous year the more money they received the following year. This also commenced the competitive recruitment of pupils; schools that provided parents and pupils with what they wanted, i.e., strong exam results, began to thrive and those that were not able to provide such measurable results began to fail.

Now that all state schools were following the national curriculum, the core principle behind the publishing of league tables was to provide an effective comparison which would enable parents to choose between schools. The net result of this policy, within the first five years of the Education Act, was a widening of the attainment gap between middle and lower social stratifications (Ball:2005). This was caused by the new open enrolment system where parents applied to the local education authority to send their children to a shortlist of schools but specified one as their first choice. In the wake of school league tables, some schools became oversubscribed and were allowed to select pupils according to additional criteria including sibling preference and catchment area (Education England: 2021).

The 1988 Education Act was the decisive step towards the production line education system, the roots of which were clear in the policies and rhetoric of both the post war Conservative and Labour administrations. However, this was achieved more by the

restructuring of the educational marketplace through league tables and auto-enrolment than the initial implementation of the national curriculum.

This focus on marketisation and the production of human capital did not change with the advent of the 1997 New Labour administration, regardless of Tony Blair's 'education, education, education' party conference speech in 1996. The rhetorical content showed that there would be very little hegemonic shift from the incumbent Conservative administration as seen from the extract below:

> Ask me my three main priorities for government and I tell you: education, education, and education... …I will tell you my vision of the future. I would like a state education system in Britain so good, so attractive, that the parents choose to put behind us the educational apartheid of the past, private, and state, and I do not believe anything would do more to break down the class divides that have no place in a modern country in the twenty first century (Labour Party: 2021)

Blair echoes previous Labour speeches, coupled with confirmation of Conservative policy changes which aligns his administration with a neoliberalist approach (Harvie: 2013)
The rhetoric closely echoes that of Harold Wilson at the Labour Party conference of 1963 with its use of the extreme phrase 'educational apartheid'. Whether this was designed to speak to those voters with unpleasant memories of the eleven plus or foster the idea that state education could rival private schools is unclear. What is clear is that the method New Labour proposed to achieve that aim was a refinement of the model implemented by the preceding Conservative administration.

There were positive elements to these policies with a reduction in class sizes, the establishment of literacy and numeracy hours in primary education and the leaving age being raised to eighteen, but ultimately there was no measurable improvement in the equality of educational opportunity. The gap between middle class and working class educational attainment continued to grow, with middle class parents able to move into better school districts where schools became heavily over-subscribed. Ball and Youdell's

report to the international education conference in 2007 analysed the hidden privatisation in public education which had been developing internationally over the preceding twenty years. They concluded,

> As some schools secure a desired student population and a strong position in the market, others become residualised, with an undersupply of students, and an over representation of those who have been rejected by or selected out of the higher status, higher performing schools. The circumstances lock such schools into cycles of poor performance and student and teacher attrition. (Ball, Youdell: 2007)

Essentially, twenty years after the implementation of open enrolment the consequences had been to facilitate greater and effective choice for the middle classes because of their greater social and cultural capital. Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe categorise middle class parents as 'skilled choosers', who can utilise their social and cultural capital to deal effectively with schools, utilise their own social networks to ascertain the best methods of entry to schools and are far more likely to gain a place for their child at an oversubscribed school (1994). Working-class parents are categorised principally as 'disconnected choosers', who lack social and cultural capital and routinely settle for the choice presented to them by the local education authority (Ibid p.3).

This is a further manifestation of Bourdieu's philosophy of the reinvention and perpetuation of the middle classes through its ability to maintain advantage. This cycle is a manifestation of the failure of the one of the core tenets of neoliberalism, self-actualisation.
The concept of self-actualisation derives from the hierarchy of needs theorised by Maslow in 1943 which proposed that happiness was related to the fulfilment of specific needs which he categorised in five-tier model (Taormina; Gao: 2013). The five tiers are hierarchical levels with physiological needs (food and clothing) at the bottom of the hierarchy and self-actualisation at the top (Ibid p.1). Self-actualisation was described by Maslow as 'people's desire for self-fulfilment' (Maslow 1987: p.22). However, the pathway to self-fulfilment may have obstacles, such as the need for a good education to enable them to fulfil their potential.

The idea of self-actualisation fails to address the issue of a person's starting point. The OED triangle is an established sociological means of assessing the role of education within social mobility (Bukodi: 2016). Briefly summarised the 'origin' position is subject to an improvement of opportunity within the labour market via 'education' and as a result an improved 'destination' is achieved. The model has at its basis the theory that educational reform and expansion, lead to improved educational attainment and diminishes the relevance of an individual's origin upon their destination.

This echoes Foucault's theory of education as a gateway to opportunity -

> Education may well be, as of right, the instrument whereby every individual, in a society like our own, can gain access to any kind of discourse. But we well know that in its distribution, in what it permits and in what it prevents, it follows the well-trodden battlelines of social conflict (Foucault: 1972 p224)

Where young people are not able to gain access to the discourse which would improve their cultural and social capital then, as Foucault asserts, the problem becomes one of social conflict and in this case one which exacerbates existing class boundary issues.

This concept of ordered liberties, in effect that individuals have liberty to choose only within those options which are acceptable to the goals of the economic whole, sits beneath all the rhetoric and policy making analysed so far (Bruff; Tansel:2018 p4). The most simplistic and basic analysis being that educational policy serves as a production line of human capital, a phrase utilised by a wide range of cultural policy commentators and sociologists (Ball:2003), (Harvie: 2013), (Hoskins & Barker 2007), (Bruff, Tansell 2018), in which the needs of the economy and not the individual is paramount. This resulted in a system where for parents to access the best education for their children they were expected to make choices which relied on 'social, cultural and economic capitals that are unevenly distributed across the population' (Ball: 2018 p.207). This then becomes an illusion of choice, those middle class parents already able to navigate the system could do so effectively and disadvantaged parents were left unable to either relocate or advocate for their children. This

categorisation is one which also directly mirrors the categories of audiences attending theatre as per Audience Agency data[15] and consequently who are more likely to introduce their children and young people to both attendance at and participation in theatre and drama. Therefore, those pupils attending the lower performing schools who received less funding and were less able to support a wider curriculum were more likely to be the pupils with less access to creative provision and pervasive skill acquisition at home. This again shows the importance of youth theatre organisations understanding who they are connecting with and the impact that hyperlocal place factors, such as school catchment areas can have on their engagement strategy.

In 2010, the coalition government led by David Cameron introduced the final policy reform to be considered, the EBacc. This is current policy and has accelerated the reduction of arts teaching in schools and consequently exacerbated the need for creative education to be undertaken through extra-curricular delivery. The Department of Education describes the EBacc as, 'a set of subjects at GCSE that keeps young people's options open for further study and future careers' (DfE:2021).

To achieve the EBacc a young person is required to achieve a GCSE in each of the following subjects:

- English language and literature
- maths
- the sciences – a pupil must take either double combined science or three single sciences
- geography or history
- a language – this can be either a modern foreign or ancient language

However, if a student does achieve those GCES passes they do not receive anything in recognition, there is no EBacc certificate or additional benefit. The impact on young people

[15] See Audience Agency engagement data from 2020 – 2023 (Cultural Participation Monitor | The Audience Agency: 2023)

is entirely focused on the matrix by which they choose their GCSE options at the end of Key Stage 3. The purpose of the EBacc is to simply measure school performance,

> Secondary schools are measured on the number of pupils that take GCSEs in these core subjects. Schools are also measured on how well their pupils do in these subjects. (DfE:2021)

The key word in the above description of the EBacc suite of subjects is 'core'. These are the subjects which this policy views as educationally key for young people. Within the syllabuses of those courses there are no requirements for young people to speak (with the obvious exception of modern language verbal tests), to make a presentation or produce any topic based student directed study. Save for a limited creative writing element of English, each subject is based entirely on factual knowledge retained and reproduced in an exam setting (DfE:2021).

This exemplifies the current administrations decade long commitment to a 'knowledge based curriculum' which the Secretary of State for Education in 2010, Michael Gove, confirmed had been 'heavily influenced by the work of E D Hirsch on cultural literacy (Abrams: 2012). Gove's policy, of widening the national vocabulary, sought to implement cultural literacy through an examination system based on the level of retention of a set of facts. In doing so this policy relegated subjects which require verbal skills, teamwork, and presentation skills, as well as creative and critical thinking skills to the status of optional extras (Bath et al: 2020).

With the EBacc counting as seven subjects and pupils generally taking nine or ten subjects to examination level it initially appears that there is space for a young person to be able to take two or three creative subjects at GCSE. However, there is also a statutory requirement for young people to study Faith and Ethics up to the end of Key Stage Four and the timetabling requirements of this additional subject generally mean that schools require pupils to take this as an additional GCSE (DfE:2021).

It is an unremarkable conclusion to draw that when young people have the freedom to choose a range of different options some would choose arts subjects just as others would choose additional sciences or humanities. Teaching hours will fall, and GCSE entrance decline where a young person, interested in arts subjects, who previously would have three options choices now only has one, and must choose between drama and music or design and dance. Whilst the EBacc framework purports to provide a broad education essentially it extends the range of subjects taught in Key Stage 3 into Key Stage 4 for every child and reduces the opportunity for a young person to develop interests into qualifications if those interests are arts focused.

Another significant factor in the reduction of arts in schools are the financial implications of maintaining staff and activities which support subjects which are not part of the core national curriculum. According to The Education Policy Institute's 2019 report on school revenues –

> a significant proportion of all state-funded schools – 48 per cent of primary, 54 per cent of secondary, and 45 per cent of special – spent more than their income in the 2016/17 academic year (the latest year for which data is available for all schools). (Education Policy Institute: 2019)

The bleak conclusion of that report is that more than half of all Secondary Schools must find ways to reduce their overheads to balance their books. One way to limit costs is to reduce the number of subjects offered by focusing on the core subjects which will be 'points scored' and by which the school will be deemed to be successful. Regardless the intention to provide an education keeping 'young people's options open for further study and future careers.'(Gibb:2015), the result of the arts being made optional at GCSE is that further study and those future careers are being channelled in the direction dictated by the curriculum policy rather than the aptitudes of young people or the needs of employers.

Performing well for Inspectors is another key driver for school leadership teams. Amanda Spielman, Ofsted's Chief Inspector, gave her clear views of arts subjects, during a 2018 speech to the Association of Colleges Annual Conference -

> Arts subjects promote unrealistic career prospects for young people. Arts and media does stand out as the area where there is greatest mismatch between the numbers of students taking the courses and the employment prospects at the end. There is a point up to which courses that engage learners have value, but ultimately there have to be viable prospects at the end. (Snow: 2018)

Spielman's concern is the professional uncertainty that can be a defining characteristic of the acting profession as she set out in a letter, written to qualify the statements she had made in the above speech, to The Stage, saying -

> I want to make sure that we are fair to these young people, and do not use the glamour of jobs that they are very unlikely ever to attain to encourage them down a path that could turn out to be a dead end. With a family member who spent more than a decade as a frequently under-employed actor, I have seen at close quarters quite what a demoralising experience that can be (The Stage: 2018)

The qualification of her initial remarks raises several issues, firstly, an individual in a position of significant power using a single personal experience to inform policy. Secondly whilst there is little doubt that many actors do not earn much (Friedman et al: 2016), this statement suggests an endeavour is only worthwhile if it is financially profitable. Thirdly, the use of the words 'dead-end' as a resolution to a career in the arts can only send a message, particularly to disadvantaged young people, that such paths are without merit. There is also a key link made between the study of performing arts and the necessity to undertake a performance based career, rather than learning pervasive skills which could be utilised in a range of careers not only those within the creative industries.

HESA figures for postgraduate employment show that 28.9% of graduates with performing arts degrees are employed within the performing arts industry, which may look like a low figure until it is contrasted with the example of 9% of physics graduates being employed within that scientific field (HESA:2021).

The message that policy makers are giving to schools is that performing arts are neither an educational priority nor a meaningful career path. If the continued extension of the EBacc results in the loss of provision of some arts subjects within the regular school framework, then this may also mean that subjects like music and drama can only be studied to GCSE level by children who are educated at state schools prepared to fund them. The artistic education of children may become limited to whether they are introduced to arts and culture by parents/guardians and whether their families can afford to pay for them to attend paid clubs or schools outside of usual school hours. This creates the landscape in which Youth Theatres are recruiting and underlines why that recruitment should ensure that funded programmes which are able to offer free or reduced places should be focused on children and young people who do not have access to any other provision.

The EBacc framework creates a 'cookie cutter' educational framework where, regardless of aptitude or inclination each pupil must follow an almost identical educational path and in creating this pathway opportunities for students to increase cultural and social capital have been minimised. This echoes Bourdieu's idea that neo-liberalism is responsible for 'the progressive disappearance of the autonomous world of cultural production' as we need the next generation of 'cultural producers' to be educated but the opportunities for cultural education are disappearing (Bourdieu (1998b: 102). This conclusion is significant as the hegemony of neoliberalism promotes the ideal of individualism though self-actualisation and entrepreneurialism (Harvie: 2013) yet the aim of education policy seems to be the creation of acceptable pathways to channel that individualism and as such develop 'soft social engineering' (Ibid: p9)

4.2 Pervasive skills and Employability

The preceding analysis of education policy has demonstrated the repeated connection made by policymakers between the curriculum and employability. The rhetoric examined has frequently referred to the acquisition of basic skills and yet universally fails to connect employability with the acquisition of other skillsets which are frequently grouped together under the heading of 'soft skills'.

As set out in Chapter One, I recommend that rather than describe these skills as 'soft skills' or 'transferable skills' that they should be classified as 'pervasive' skills'. Pervasive skills are those skills and attributes which impact all areas of life and work. The non-exhaustive examples, of self-advocacy; persistence; presentation skills and self-critique are all attributes which contribute to effective functioning as an adult in and out of the workplace. The Society for Human Resource Management has reported that there is a current shortage of graduate candidates with a range of those skills, with 73% of graduate employers indicating they were struggling to find a range of applicants with the 'soft' skill sets they require. (SHRM: 2019, p.4).

The current knowledge based educational framework achieves the opposite of the professed intention to ensure 'a good job and a fulfilling career' (Gibb, N GOV.UK 2015) as the skills required to enter the workforce in 2025 are dramatically different from those required when entering the workforce in 1965 or even 1995. ONS figures show a continued trend towards service industry jobs with eighty five percent of all employees working in the service sector (ONS:2018). The pervasive skills of teamwork, communication, flexibility, and positivity are those prized by employers as the National Careers Website indicates,

> Soft skills[16] are general skills that most employers look for when recruiting and are needed for most jobs. They are sometimes called transferable skills or employability skills by employers (National Careers Service: 2021)

[16] NB Whilst this research proposes to reframe the language to categorise these skills as 'pervasive skills' the widely used term in quoted sources remains 'soft skills'.

Discourse analysis throughout this research underlines the power of language when it is used within policy making and the use of the word 'soft' to describe such important attributes both diminishes their power and the necessity to acquire them. Reframing the skill set as pervasive skills draws attention to the reach of those skills into all areas of life including employment. This reframing should also be used by those stakeholders who promote arts education but articulate that as a personal preference to improve a young person's experience of school, rather than a necessity to acquire skills for life. This was apparent in the response to Rishi Sunak's January 2023 announcement relating to his intention to extend Maths tuition until the age of eighteen (GOV.uk: 2023). A social media response to the announcement by actor Simon Pegg garnered 4.9 million views, in which he stated 'what about arts and humanities and fostering this country's amazing reputation for creativity and self-expression…what about the kids who don't want to do maths'. (Instagram:2023).

Analysis of this statement shows that the wider discourse is framed as a preference, a young person who does not 'want' to do maths but might prefer to do arts and humanities. The reality is that children and young people do require some maths skills to effectively function as adults, although the extent to which they need to develop those skills is not the focus of this research. However, it is argued that children and young people also require pervasive skills as a matter of necessity and that a reframing of the language used to describe those skills is necessary to reflect the importance of their acquisition.

Not only are pervasive skills important in and of themselves but there is a wide range of research which underlines their cross-curricular benefit. The "Taking Part" survey by the Department for Culture Media and Sport as discussed in Scherger and Savage's 2010 paper, 'Cultural Transmission, Educational Attainment and Social Mobility', highlights the benefit of cultural activities in the attainment of young people. A key feature taken from that report was that young people who were encouraged to participate in cultural activities had a greater chance of social mobility.

The impact made by education on the social stratification which is a person's eventual 'destination' has already been examined above through consideration of the OED triangle (Bukodi et al: 2011). Educational success could therefore be measured by who is socially mobile and which young people achieve a social stratification destination higher than their point of origin. If the repeated link with education and the economy is also considered, then successful employment must contribute to the economy.

With that premise educational success could be measured simply in terms of employment within a growth industry. In 2019 the Creative Industries contributed £115.9 billion which was a rise of 5.6% which again was better than the UK economy as a whole. Between 2010 and 2019 the gross value added amount of the UK Creative Industries increased by 43.6% and has been growing faster than the UK economy as whole year on year since 2011 (ONS:2021).

Throsby notes in The Economics of Cultural Policy, "the creative arts can be seen as an essential element of the cultural industries" (Throsby:2010). Indeed, the current government acknowledged in 2018 that the creative industries are a growth market, publishing press releases setting out the creative industries record contribution to the UK economy.

> Looking forward fifteen or twenty years to what our future economy could be like, in every scenario the Creative Industries are of central importance to the UK's productivity and global success… Not only are the Creative Industries themselves likely to grow as a proportion of our economy, but other industries also rely on creative disciplines – such as Design and Advertising – to thrive. The cultural and creative sectors are the engine of the UK's international image and soft power (DCMCS: 2017)

These remarks, taken from Sir Peter Bazalgette's review of the Creative Industries on behalf of the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport, were unequivocal about the importance of this sector to the UK economy. The government's subsequent 'Industrial Strategy' white

paper, which Sir Peter's review fed into directly, went a step further. In her foreword, the then Prime Minister Theresa May declared that the Strategy:

> Identifies the industries that are of strategic value to our economy and works to create a partnership between government and industry to nurture them […in order to] help propel Britain to global leadership of the industries of the future. (GOV.UK:2021).

The creative industries are detailed within that white paper as of 'strategic value', (Ibid. p6) and according to the then Prime Minister, 'require nurturing' however, this is at odds with the analysis of education policy presented in this Chapter which has shown that successive strategies since the Education Act 1988, have pursued policies which work in precisely the opposite direction to this stated 'industrial strategy'. If 'the cultural and creative sectors are the engine of the UK's international image and soft power' (DCMCS: 2017) and the current administration's industrial strategy seeks to 'help young people develop the skills they need to do the high-paid, high-skilled jobs of the future' (GOV.UK: 2021) then successive education policies leading to a reduction in arts teaching hours and dramatically reduced arts GCSE entries will not be able to deliver that strategy.

If the push for the Ebacc continues to exacerbate the decline in Arts GCSE's, then a further decline in the creative workforce would seem to be inevitable. It is an established fact that obligatory core science to the age of sixteen has not produced more science graduates (DfE:2019) and yet, not only the reduction of arts provision in secondary schools but the repeated cuts to higher education arts funding (OfS:2023) will inevitably reduce the opportunities for young people wishing to pursue a career within the growth creative industries. Education policy may impact significantly on future growth within the creative industries if generations of young people simply do not have access to study or simply the opportunity to experience, creative subjects.

As highlighted in Chapter One, a team at LSE and Goldsmiths concluded that working class actors were grossly underrepresented within the profession and that when a working class

actor did enter the profession, they were at a significant disadvantage due to less economic, cultural, and social capital than their middle and upper class peers which made them far less resilient in a very competitive job market (Friedman et al: 2013). A wide and rich cultural education can be the key to the confidence and knowledge that makes an actor more competitive but there are other transferable benefits to cultural education which have already been demonstrated through applied examples and research studies.

Building the arts into the curriculum has been shown to provide clear and measurable benefits to young people. Drama has been shown to have a significant impact on pupil attainment, the Institute of Education conducted a three year study which found that when drama was undertaken as a core subject in primary schools, not only did children's listening and oratory skills improve but also their self-esteem (Turner et al: 2004). The same study also assessed the impact of the National Theatre in schools programme and discovered that the children undertaking it 'enjoyed school more, gained self-esteem, and recognised, through experience, the value of working with other people towards a goal' (Ibid p3).

Access to a creative education and the merits of the pervasive skills that it provides appear to be being utilised within the primary system as the study above shows, but this is not translating to Key Stages 3 and 4 at Secondary school. This may be because there is much more flexibility regarding the implementation of the primary curriculum. It should also be noted that whilst not every child might be interested in drama, music or art as a subject, the social and community building element of working in a group, learning a skill together and the wider community interaction of sharing the results of that work has benefits over and above that delivered by the lessons themselves.

4.3 The Value of Pervasive Skills: not a soft option.

Disadvantaged children and young people, those with lower economic and social capital, are having their opportunities to develop cultural capital eroded due to the long term effects of the implementation of education policy which has failed to recognise the importance of a creative curriculum. This is despite the evidence of a range of studies which show the cross-

curricular benefit of creative subjects such as music and drama[17]. This is a failure to recognise the value of creative subjects both in terms of employability within the creative industries and in terms of the acquisition of pervasive skills which are beneficial across a range of industries.

Drama teaches pervasive skills including communication, empathy and teamwork and has been shown in multiple studies to increase confidence, presentation skills and employability (Batra; Parimoo: 2017). There are multiple studies[18] which demonstrate the effectiveness of drama in developing pervasive skills. There are also studies which highlight the impact of that skill acquisition when drama is used as a cross-curricular teaching method[19] . In a 2020 study undertaken in Saudi Arabia, results showed that the application of drama upon the teaching of English as a foreign language improved the development of communicative language skills and yielded higher proficiency levels through more motivated engagement levels (Alasmari; Alshae: 2020).

> Simply put, the findings of this data analysis indicate that the experimental group, which was taught English using drama, was more successful on the post-test than the control group. The former displayed significant improvements attributable to dramatic activities. This strongly supports the assumption that drama has an important role in developing young learners' language skills. (Ibid p65)

These 'significant improvements' are examined in work by Maley and Duff (2005); Stinson and Winston (2011) and Koyluoglu (2010) who states, 'using drama in the classroom is a powerful tool to motivate students and help them to understand materials being taught' (p. 31).

In 2000, Smith's research to support teacher development, 'Using drama as a resource for

11 Marsh, H W; Kleitman, S. (2002); Scherger, S., & Savage, M. (2010); Southgate, D. E., & Roscigno, V. J. (2009).

[18] Maley and Duff (2005); Stinson and Winston (2011) Koyluoglu (2010)

[19] Batra; Parimoo: 2017),

giving language more meaning' confirmed that drama offers young learners the opportunity to practice key language skills and thus reach a higher proficiency level.

> Drama is used to practice language or give learners the opportunity to proceduralise language from their developing inter-language to make it more available for future production. (Ibid para 14)

Whilst some studies focused on drama's ability as a teaching tool in language settings, there are also others which have focused on the employability pervasive skill benefits of drama as examined in a 2017 study in India:

> Drama Intervention as a Learning and Development tool most significantly enhances the employability antecedents of self-confidence; self-esteem; emotional intelligence and self-efficacy. A learning and development tool of Drama Intervention can develop the factors that contribute to discovering developing and improving the employability attributes in ever dynamic business environment. (Parimoo: 2017)

A 2016 Greek study also showed that the use of drama in education (DiE) was instrumental in improving teachers' professional competencies across a range of curricular subjects, (Papavassiliou-Alexiou., & Zourna 2016)

> Since its initial use, DiE has strengthened their professional identity, improved their instructional and organisational skills, enhanced the achievement of learning goals for all stakeholders – teachers and learners alike – reinforced their belief in the necessity of lifelong learning, and helped them develop cooperation and effective interaction in and out of the school environment. (Ibid p.767)

With this breadth of research, it has been established that drama teaching has clear benefits to teacher development, students' academic studies and significantly in respect of this research, pervasive skill acquisition. One major international study concluded that there

were significant lifelong benefits to the incorporation of drama throughout the curriculum. 'Drama Improves Lisbon Key Competences in Education (DICE, 2008–2010)'was a cross-cultural research study within the European Union's (EU) Lifelong Learning Programme, which, over the course of two years investigated the effects of educational drama and theatre on five of eight Lisbon Key Competences in Education[20].

The study concluded that educational drama and theatre not only increased cultural competence within school, but also delivered measurable benefits as a communication subject, thereby increasing competency in the student's mother tongue. The study measured an increased competence in universal learning skills (a desire to learn); increased social, intercultural, and civic competence and from a perspective of creativity and innovation, an increased entrepreneurial competence (Eriksson et al: 2014)

The statistically significant conclusion of the DICE study was that pupils who experienced educational drama and theatre during the research period scored higher in the measured competences than their peers in the control groups (Ibid, p.404).

The study consortium then made the following recommendations:

- All children should have regular access to educational theatre and drama in their schooling, mandated throughout the national curriculum and taught by well-trained theatre and drama specialists.
- Ages 4 – 18: educational theatre and drama should be realised in the national curriculum – as a learning medium across the curriculum as well as a subject.
- All teachers working in European schools, including kindergarten and nursery teachers, should have a basic knowledge of what educational theatre and drama is and how the subject area can contribute to the enhancement of teaching and learning. (DICE: 2021)

[20] The research targeted state schools in 12 European Countries with 4475 young people aged between thirteen and sixteen as project participants.

The DICE Consortium makes it clear that they hope that their study will be a catalyst for further interrogation into the imbedding of drama into the curriculum for the benefit of students (Ibid p104). There is also a clear acknowledgment of the risk of simplification, of quantitative data, 'as the real nature and often magic effect of educational drama and theatre can surely not be quantified and put into hard data' (Ibid p.75).

When the findings of the DICE Consortium are considered alongside those of careers theorist, John Krumboltz, most specifically his theory of 'Planned Happenstance' (Krumboltz:2009) the result is a clear parallel between skills taught in drama and the skills that improve an individual's employability. Planned happenstance recommends the development of personality traits which enable an individual to take advantage of career opportunities as they arise, those traits are curiosity, persistence, flexibility, and positivity. Krumboltz theorises that if an individual can develop these traits, and in combination with what he describes as 'more prosaic skills' such as networking, financial planning, and self-development, then they will have the ability to capitalise on career opportunities which occur to them (Ibid p.24). Drama not only provides pervasive skills which develop the requisite personality traits but also supports development of skills such as networking with peers, training discipline and understanding feedback which provide a holistic skills base to boost employability.

The competencies which the DICE study showed are improved by the teaching of drama are consistent with increased curiosity, desire to learn, and positivity through improved cultural and social connection. The DICE study also found that students who regularly participate in educational theatre and drama activities are both better at problem solving and are better at coping with stress, (Kupper:2011). This would suggest that these students are more likely to be persistent both with difficult tasks and setbacks. Finally, the study showed that these students were also 'more willing to change perspectives, (DICE: 2010 p7), which would indicate that they have developed flexibility. The Dice Study together with a range of other studies[21] , including careers theory, has evidenced that drama within the curriculum promotes the acquisition of a range of pervasive skills which boosts students' employability.

[21] Parimoo:2017; Papavassiliou-Alexiou., & Zourna 2016, Eriksson et al: 2014

Arts education in schools is declining through an educational policy framework which has reduced art subjects to the periphery of the curriculum. Education policy is therefore not feeding the creative career pipeline by ensuring access to creative experience and cultural capital acquisition for state educated young people.

The creative industries are growth industries which, according to recent government policy, require nurturing. There are a wide array of creative career pathways and options for young people to consider with the component industries including Architecture, Advertising, Arts and Culture (which includes Heritage; Performing and Visual Arts) Fashion Design, Craft Technologies; Game and CreaTech design and TV and Film (Creative Industries UK: 2021). In 2022 the creative sector was outperforming the UK economy as whole with growth of 1.4% showing that the sector is resilient despite the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Whilst this is of concern in respect of the creative industries, there are more significant deficiencies within the curriculum when the acquisition of essential pervasive skills is considered. Pervasive skills have been highlighted by industry and careers theorists to be essential for effective entry into the workplace and to navigate a career path. Where drama and music are used as cross curricular teaching tools a variety of academic studies have shown significant cross curricular benefits and these benefits are empirically shown in studies relating to Maths, English and Foreign languages. The specific use of drama as a cross curricular educational tool has shown measurable benefits for young people both academically and socially. If drama were more widely utilised as a cross curricular teaching tool, then this would be an effective method of improving attainment and skills acquisition for a wide range of young people within the state education system.

This chapter has highlighted the socio economic disparity of young people's cultural experience. The cycle whereby middle class attainment is perpetuated from parent to child through access to better schools and to wider cultural experience, as theorised by Bourdieu (Bourdieu:1964), has been confirmed in several studies and within a range of research[22].

[22] Ball:2017, Friedman et al: 2013, Savage et al: 2015

Evidence shows that the socio-economic disadvantage gap continues to widen in education (Tambling & Bacon: 2023). The young people who would potentially see the biggest improvement in their prospects for mobility from access to drama provision are those from lower socio economic groups who have no cultural gatekeepers outside of their school environment. The evidence of multiple studies shows that this improvement would only be the accrual of cultural capital but, most importantly, the development of pervasive skills which would significantly enhance mobility and career prospects.

I have also connected two areas of research, firstly children and young people's reduced opportunities to acquire pervasive skills at school and secondly, the importance of acquiring those skills to fulfil their potential. By doing so I have answered the question, 'why should funded youth theatres make their recruitment practice a priority?'. The current curriculum and EBacc framework do not support greater access to drama provision, one way in which young people can access this is through extracurricular youth theatre. As the young people who are most at need of pervasive skill acquisition are from lower socio-economic backgrounds, funded organisations offering free participation or modest class fees will be the most likely to make positive change by engaging with this group of young people. In those circumstances it is key that funded organisations ensure that they reach these groups to bridge the gap between inadequate curricular provision and the need for young people to develop the pervasive skills necessary to increase their employability and mobility prospects.

A range of evidence and connective analysis has been presented in this Chapter to illustrate why youth theatre organisations should connect with disadvantaged young people. Proceeding Chapters will analyse the practical funding and delivery landscape within which funded youth theatre operates and provide an analysis of current practice to isolate where this is effective and how it could be improved to the benefit of priority participants.

Chapter 5: A Full Waiting List is not a measure of Success

The preceding chapter highlighted the impact that drama provision can have on the acquisition of pervasive skills as evidenced by a range of studies[23]. Education policy has, over several decades, resulted in reduced arts teaching hours in state schools (JCQ:2019), which reduces access to creative provision for students. Funded youth theatre can make a significant impact by ensuring that the needs of children and young people most affected by the disadvantage gap, those without cultural gatekeepers at home and those from lower socio-economic groups, are considered as a priority during recruitment for participatory programmes.

In this chapter I examine the marketplace of extra-curricular drama provision and the funding landscapes in which that market operates, considering what, if any, impact their funding models have on their recruitment and delivery practices. Practical factors and pressures that impact an organisation operationally are the basis of the individual approaches taken to engagement practice. Analysis of these practical factors and approaches ensures that the best practice recommendations made by this research are feasible and realistic. As well as these operational specifics, within this Chapter I also consider how the language used in engagement practices (including recruitment and delivery) impacts the process itself and make recommendations to alter the discourse to connect more positively with participants and communities.

This chapter connects the need for ease of access to drama provision identified in the preceding chapter with the context in which that access is currently being delivered. I will begin by confirming the classification of children and young people introduced in Chapter One and summarise the necessity for a change in the discourse relating to priority groups. A brief overview of the commercial youth theatre sector followed by an analysis of the funding requirements of Arts Council England gives context to the operational practices of funded organisations. Proceeding chapters will use that context to facilitate a close analysis of three best practice models of recruitment and delivery which provides a benchmark for the wider analysis of the funded youth theatre recruitment model in England.

[23] DICE (2016); Batra & Parimoo:2017; Eriksson et al: 2014

5.1 The need for a first engagement strategy in funded organisations

As set out in Chapter One, I classify youth theatre participants as being from one of four groups, this classification builds on Ball's identification of parents as 'choosers' within the educational marketplace[24] as considered in Chapter Four of this research:

- **Group One** – participants who as younger children were taken to dance or drama by culturally engaged parents or guardians keen for them to develop skills. (This group of children and young people will now be referred to as Group One)
- **Group Two** - young people who have had the opportunity to experience some drama or dance either at school or another setting and developed an interest which they pursued with the help of supportive parents or guardians. (This group of children and young people will now be referred to as Group Two)
- **Group Three** - young people who meet the criteria for targeted engagement such as young carers; children within the care system; NEET[25] young people and young people in areas with strong youth services who fall into a protected characteristic bracket. This group are often called 'targeted groups' those who need provision which is targeted to them with specific programmes. (This group of children and young people will now be referred to as Group Three)
- **Group Four** - young people who have had few cultural access opportunities, whose parents are not culturally engaged and/or unsupportive and who may not fall within targeted classifications. (This group of children and young people will now be referred to as Group Four)

Group Three and Group Four children and young people are those groups who would be most likely to see a significant improvement in their attainment and social mobility outcomes after participating in youth theatre given their lack of easy cultural access with its evidenced commensurate benefits[26]. The difference between these two groups is the

[24] (Ball; S:2017 p.207).
[25] Not in education, employment, or training and aged 16 – 24 (ONS:2021)
[26] Batra & Parimoo:2017; Papavassiliou-Alexiou., & Zourna 2016, Eriksson et al: 2014

identification of specific need, as set out above within the Group Three classification, which drives funding and creative/cultural programmes specifically for targeted groups.

Whilst it is of clear and obvious importance to ensure that Group Three children and young people have access to cultural provision, there is already a network of high quality examples of targeted work within the North-West of England alone. For example, The Lowry's award winning Young Carers Programme who worked with LUNG Theatre Company to produce the verbatim play 'Who Cares?' which was performed at the House of Lords to highlight the issue of Young Carers[27]. Appendix One of this research details examples of the excellence and range in targeted engagement throughout the country. This research does not have the scope to consider the range of needs of Group Three children and young people as a specific demographic. Instead, the focus is on Group Four children and young people – those without cultural access who do not fall into targeted categories who may have been labelled for engagement purposes as 'hard to reach', (Good Governance Institute: 2021), but, whom I argue, should be identified as 'priority participants'.

As prefaced in Chapter One, 'hard to reach' is a phrase widely used within engagement settings for communities either perceived to be disengaged or as described in a 2004 Home Office report as 'inaccessible to most traditional and conventional methods for any reason' (HSE: 2004). However, despite the wide use of the term both in policy and practice (Flanagan; Hancock; 2010) there is no clear definition of who is described.

> Hard to reach is often synonymised with other terms and the sheer multiplicity of alternatives reflects the divergence in the discourse as well as the difficulty in arriving at a definitive description of its meaning. (Ibid: p.1)

Given the difficulty in defining the phrase within the discourse as set out above, it is important to isolate what the term might mean within the context of this research i.e., which participants might be described when considering youth theatre recruitment strategies. In a theatre context this could be aligned to the previously referenced Audience

[27] About us | The Who Cares Campaign

Agency data[28] which isolates the least likely groups to attend or engage with theatre: those from low socio-economic backgrounds and those from ethnically diverse communities (Audience Agency:2020). The phrase 'hard to reach' therefore connects to the 'cycle of culture' classifications in which parents' own cultural experiences in childhood shape their behaviour as parents in relation to the arts, (Bourdieu; Passeron, 1990), and Ball's classification of parents as informed or disengaged 'choosers' (Ball: 2017).

It could be argued that by categorising a group of participants as 'hard to reach' it frames the discourse as if the lack of cultural engagement is a specific problem which places barriers between the community it names and an organisation which is trying to connect with them. The inference is that the group is making itself 'hard to reach' and therefore the responsibility for the disassociation with cultural opportunity is theirs as they have made themselves difficult to reach.

I argue that the use of the phrase 'hard to reach' is a barrier to engagement as it frames the discourse in a negative way. There are a range of psychological studies which show that word association related to groups reinforces stereotypes and underlines preconceptions (Spencer-Rogers et al: 2007). The definition of the adjective 'hard' is 'difficult to understand, experience or deal with' (CMBS:2023), consequently, at the outset 'hard to reach' is stating that these groups of potential participants have those characteristics and are 'difficult to deal with'. This places the root of that 'difficulty' with the potential participant rather than simply identifying demographics of people within an organisation's community as people who simply do not yet have an association with the organisation.

Where an organisation is seeking to widen their engagement model, then that organisation is the active party and the 'hard to reach' group is the passive party. The organisation is actively seeking to connect with a particular demographic who have no associative relationship with them, and the passive party are not creating any barriers to an organisation of whom they may not even be aware. There may be some wider perceptions

[28] Until 2023 the Audience Agency provided the framework by which organisations funded by ACE reported their engagement numbers and demographic reach.

within the ‘hard to reach’ group for example ‘the arts aren’t for me’ (Arts Emergency: 2019) but given that a study in Australia reported that this was a view of a third of Australian citizens (ifacca.org: 2020) it could be argued that this perception is not isolated to so called ‘hard to reach’ groups.

Not only does the phrase ‘hard to reach’ ascribe a negative descriptor to the group it labels but it is also a nebulous and undefined term which may differ across the country. Does this group contain similar demographics in London and Bradford or in Bristol and Lincoln? As referenced earlier in this chapter, the closest broad definition would be the groups the Audience Agency data classifies as ‘the least likely groups to engage with theatre: those from low socio-economic backgrounds and those from ethnically diverse communities’ (Audience Agency:2020). It should be noted that I have not considered engagement factors related to ethnicity, although there is an unequivocal acknowledgement that factors related to racial discrimination play a significant role in creating barriers for global majority children and young people (Barnardos: 2020). I also recognise that there are cultural differences between different communities which may impact engagement and outreach work, however, consideration of that area is complex and would constitute a separate research study. It must also be considered that the place and community in which each organisation is situated has differing demographics and needs, and therefore the recommendations of this research must be tailored to those specific place based settings.

There is a need to redefine the phrase ‘hard to reach’ to better reflect an aim of widening participation and reflecting communities. By renaming these groups as ‘priority groups’ or individually ‘priority participants’ the focus of engagement work is reframed with a positive adjective, ‘priority’, defined as ‘something very important which must be focused on before other things’ (CAMBS: 2023). From a funding perspective, confirming these participants as a priority reinforces the need to deliver effective first engagement strategies which, if used effectively, might also mitigate a widening ‘disadvantage gap’ (EPI:2020). I will now refer to demographic groups who may benefit from access to cultural provision but who are currently under-represented as ‘priority participants’, i.e., those participants which an organisation should prioritise engaging with.

Having established that Group Four children and young people are more likely to be from lower socio economic backgrounds[29] and can be considered priority participants, it is also reasonable to state that funded organisations will impact this group the most by providing drama provision pathways which are free at the point of access. Where an organisation seeks to engage with priority participants, i.e., where cultural democracy[30] is a core aim, and where participation in a programme is free then the cost of delivering that programme must be found outside of the programme itself either from organisational budgets or external funders. If an organisation is applying to an external funder, then they will have to meet the criteria and delivery framework of that funder/funders if they are to be successful. These strictures do not apply to commercial organisations.

Organisations providing drama provision roughly fall into three categories, firstly, small scale dance and drama classes provided by community groups, amateur theatre, or sole trader provision in traditional dance school settings. Secondly, larger commercial organisations such as the Pauline Quirke Academy and Stagecoach models which operate on a franchise system. Finally, funded provision offered by arts organisations or community and place led organisations via charitable grants, philanthropic funding, and/or Arts Council England (ACE) funding.

To accurately analyse the landscape within which funded organisations deliver youth theatre a benchmark was taken of the principal commercial offers to provide a comparator. The widest reaching commercial offers are through the franchise operations of Pauline Quirk Academic (PQA) and Stagecoach.

Commercial offers of drama tuition, via large franchise models or smaller independent schools would be unlikely to engage priority participants given their need to both cover costs and make a profit. Their target demographics will be within Group One and Group Two children and young people. If an organisation usually achieves its target level of places with fully paying participants, it is unlikely to work hard to make first engagements where it does

[29] Sutton Trust (2018); Arts Emergency (2019), Durham Commission (2019)
[30] Cultural Democracy at its simplest definition is the concept that every person has the right to participate in cultural activity (Hadley; Belfiore: 2018)

not need to[31]. Commercial models will essentially, seek to recruit paying customers without any altruistic or charitable aims. It should be clarified that there will be young people within Groups One and Two who are unable to attend such schools because of their financial circumstances, e.g., £360 per child per twelve week term for three hours teaching per week at Stagecoach (Stagecoach: 2022) may be beyond the means of many families.

These commercial models are highly successful businesses, PQA has more than two hundred individual academies across the UK (PQA: 2022) and Stagecoach have over three hundred schools across the UK and in international schools overseas (Stagecoach: 2022). Both franchise organisations, they market their work as pervasive skill acquisition creating confidence, resilience and developing a range of skills. They provide a network of creative extra-curricular teaching and whilst their participants are more likely to be from culturally conversant, 'skilled chooser' (Ball: 2017) households, the impact upon their participants is still of value.

Commercial offers are an example of the reproduction of the middle class cycle of culture, in which parents who are skilled choosers[32] ensure the retention of the advantage that cultural capital bestows, by ensuring their children acquire the same level of capital. This would also exclude Group Four children and young people whose parents would fall into Ball's bracket of disconnected choosers[33], those who do not advocate for their children within the educational marketplace and are unlikely to be focused on their children attaining skills outside of state mandated education. It should be made clear that parents of Group One and Group Two children can also be working class parents who are culturally conversant, socially aspirational and recognise the benefits of creative participation for their children and the cost of attendance will also be a factor across a range of demographics.

By contrast, it is much more unlikely that Group Four children and young people, would be

[31] This research will use the term 'first engagement' as a definition of those instances where young people access theatre or drama provision for the first time and 'secondary engagement' for those instances where young people are accessing drama provision with prior experience.
[32] Ball (2019); Bourdieu and Passeron, (1990 p.494)
[33] Ball (2019 p204)

from a middle class background, given that the criteria of children who have had few cultural access opportunities and whose parents are not culturally engaged and/or unsupportive of their child's participation. As already concluded, the growing socio-economic disadvantage gap suggests deficiencies with the current curriculum which has marginalised creative subjects and underlines the necessity for young people to have access to those subjects which have proven cross-curricular benefits[34] such as drama.

Whilst commercial models clearly set out the benefits for young people and offer a broad training in drama, the cost of attendance is significant and, as identified, parents of Group One and Two young people unable to meet these costs may have to seek provision at cheaper independent provider or through funded organisations. This is described in a Department for Work and Pensions report,

> a number of studies suggest that middle class parents seek out opportunities to maintain the social advantages of education for their children... In doing this they may limit the opportunities available to working class children. (Nunn et al, 2007, p.23)

This should be a consideration for funded organisations when developing recruitment strategies as Group One and Two parents are, as skilled choosers, more likely to seek out ways to support their child and develop their skill set.

This is one pathway in which funded offers may become oversubscribed with young people who already have a significant amount of cultural and social capital, leading to the phenomenon that a full waiting list may not always be a measure of success unless the only success measure is a full youth theatre programme. If a youth theatre programme is fully subscribed, and the participants are secondary engagers then the improvement in pervasive skills that they will gain from the programme is significantly less than Group Four children and young people who have limited or no cultural capital. This is something I have seen occur regularly within my own practice in youth theatre, an offer might take place in an area

[34] Batra & Parimoo:2017; Papavassiliou-Alexiou., & Zourna 2016, Eriksson et al: 2014

of socio-economic need but where the participants in non-targeted youth theatre are secondary, experienced engagers from non-priority groups. There is value to the attendance of those more experienced participants, who also need extra-curricular provision, but this creates a landscape where, organisations are more likely to be recruiting Group One and Group Two children and young people unless they have a clear strategy to engage with priority, Group Four participants.

Accordingly, if the organisation wishes to widen participation, they must develop a considered recruitment strategy which has some focus on first engagements. Delivering a first engagement strategy has a cost to it both in administrative planning and physical delivery which is in addition to both the costs of standard recruitment and delivering the principle offer. This will be considered further later in this chapter, but it should be noted that this is a key conclusion of this research, the necessity of additional funding provision for first engagement strategies to improve outcomes for children and young people caused by educational policy deficiencies.

In England, funded arts organisations who deliver youth theatre and drama workshops are often in receipt of Arts Council England (ACE) funding awards. They include many of the nine hundred plus national portfolio organisations, across England whose funding is guaranteed for a period of four years[35]. Alternatively, these may be arts organisations who have obtained National Lottery Project Grant funding or from one of a range of philanthropic organisations such as Esme Fairburn, the Victoria Wood foundation, the Paul Hamlyn foundation, and others to whom arts organisations can apply for short and long term project funding.

Funded organisations usually apply to an external funder to deliver work which may not be supported commercially e.g., because it is free at point of access. As previously indicated, the criteria of the external funder and their willingness to fund the work is therefore of significance, as are any application or monitoring conditions attached to a funding award.

[35] The current funding period is three years from 2023 – 2026, this resolves the delay in the application process for the current portfolio which was caused by the Covid 19 pandemic and resulted in the preceding portfolio of organisations having their status extended by a year from 2018 – 2023.

The three organisations to be examined in detail in the following chapter are all Arts Council funded and they are all based in the North-West of England, accordingly, an analysis and comparison of their differing recruitment and delivery practices is simplified as they are all subject to the same funding framework. None of those organisations would be able to continue to offer their current level of participatory delivery without the continuation of their external funding and their principle external funder is the Arts Council. Therefore, their ability to offer a culturally democratic delivery model which would engage Group Four children and young people is dependent on maintaining that funding relationship.

5.2 The influence of funders on operational strategy

ACE have been through a period of change between two funding strategies, Great Art and Culture for Everyone (Great Art & Culture) which ran from 2010 until March 2023, and the new strategy, Let's Create which commenced in April 2023. There is no requirement set out in either strategy stating that organisations must seek to engage with specific demographics of young people, but it is made clear that a key aim is the development of young people's creative skills and more equitable access routes to the acquisition of those skills.

In formulating 'Let's Create', ACE surveyed more than 5000 people across the country including 'members of the public, children and young people, artists, curators and librarians, leaders of cultural organisations, and those working in local and national government and in education'. (ACE:2020)

This survey identified key issues facing the cultural sector, among these key factors were:

- Significant variations in the definition of arts and culture in different communities. 'Many people are uncomfortable with the label the arts and associated only with the visual arts or high art…. at the same time most people in this country have active cultural lives and value opportunities to be creative' (ACE:2023)
- Widespread socio economic and geographic variances in levels of engagement with publicly funded culture

- That the opportunities for children and young people to experience creativity and culture inside and outside school are not equal across the country.
- A persistent and widespread lack of diversity across the creative industries and in publicly funded cultural organisations which includes ethnic, gender orientation, sexuality, socio-economic and disability diversity. (Ibid: p.9)

If, after the ten years of Great Art & Culture, such issues were apparent, then that strategy could be said to have failed. However, this could also simply be a consequence of the scale of the imbalance within the industry and more widely in a society in which 'cultural capital is linked to the possession of economic capital' (Ball: 2017 p.208). In any event having identified these key factors the Arts Council developed a strategy which aim to address these imbalances in cultural opportunity.

Let's Create (and by extension Arts Council England and DCMCS[36]) is clear in its definition that children and young people have a key focus:

> For most young people, access to high quality creative and cultural opportunities outside of the home is too dependent on their social background and their post code. This has to change. We will make the case for a stronger focus on teaching for creativity and critical thinking across the curriculum, both to schoolteachers and the Department of Education. Employers from all industries and sectors spoke of the value they placed on creative skills and critical thinking in their workforces, and over the next decade, we will work to ensure that those skills are developed more effectively in young people' (Ibid p.19)

Discourse analysis of this section of the Let's Create strategy is extraordinary in the difference it displays to the rhetoric and educational policy delivery of successive governments over the last sixty years examined in Chapter Four of this research. The language is measured and less adversarial, there is no use of the hyperbole of 'revolution' or

[36] Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport

of 'apartheid',[37] but a simple statement that 'cultural opportunity outside of the home' is significantly impacted by location and social class. The words 'outside of the home' are clearly intended to apply to the experiences that young people have at school as the next sentence directly addresses the state-educational creative offer with an intention to lobby for 'strong focus for teaching for creativity and critical thinking'. Nevertheless, it is not clear what those words mean, they are a broad phrase without a request for specific and measurable action and as such it is not clear how the Arts Council expect schools or the Department of Education to respond.

The above quote also uses the word 'skills' in a way which is markedly different to the usage in the Ruskin College speeches of James Callaghan and Tony Blair and Nick Gibb's Ebacc speeches in 2015. As set out in the preceding chapter, rhetoric concerning educational policy has for decades used the word 'skills' and coupled it with the words basic or useful. Let's Create, the Arts Council strategy, couples the word skills with the word 'creative' in a way which is directly contrary to the usage of the political rhetoric, and then goes further by connecting creative skills with employment. By underlining the value that employers 'from all sectors and industries' place on creative skills, the Arts Council underline the benefits of the arts and creativity on a young person's development and upon their employability.

Whilst the Arts Council is not a branch of government, it is classed as a non-departmental public body of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport (ACE:2021), the monies it distributes still emanate from the Treasury and Central Government. Let's Create is a policy document delivering a strategy which is funded by government with a core mission to develop creative skills for young people to support them with their future working life. At the same time educational policy is reducing opportunities to develop the same creative skills in schools. There is also a key acknowledgment of the disparity between the school that a young person attends, by reference to the postcode lottery of opportunity, and the holistic nature of their education. This supports the conclusion previously drawn that via its funding of arts and culture the government is simply funding programmes and projects which seek to redress the imbalance in cultural capital acquisition for state educated pupils

[37] Context of the Ruskin College speech analysed on page 45 of this research.

that has been created through its own education policies. This is a conclusion which will be developed further when considering recommendations for policy approaches which take a more holistic approach to the development of pervasive skills in young people.

Another indication of the commitment of the Arts Council to develop strategies for children and young people is the development of LCEPS – Local Cultural Education Partnerships. LCEPS were introduced in partnership with the Department for Education (DfE) in 2015, 'with the aim of improving the alignment of cultural education of young people' (ACE: 2015). An LCEP is a place based group of stakeholders from local organisations e.g., Salford LCEP or Lancashire LCEP. This group meets to develop strategy, run events, and plan projects which advance partnerships between them to improve the cultural offer for children and young people in their area.

LCEPs are locally specific and can take many different forms dependent on place based need. Their collaborative working framework can be made up of a wide range of stakeholder partners, from a variety of sectors: cultural, education, higher education, youth, health, criminal justice, voluntary, and local business as well as local authorities. LCEPs were also the basis for the Youth Performance Partnership project, a pilot scheme funded by the Arts Council to take the LCEP model from place based support to practical projects to give children and young people 'from areas of low cultural engagement and high levels of deprivation the opportunity to take part in high-quality performance-making'(ACE:2023).

In 2019 ACE commissioned a consultancy report which showed that at that time there were ninety-seven active LCEPS (ACE:2019). To put that number in context there are 333 Local Authority Areas in England (GOV:2023). The report gained data from seventy percent of LCEPS although of this number only thirty-five percent had reported that they were 'active and delivering' (ACE: 2019 p3). The results from the report are difficult reading as the aim of the 'Cultural Education Challenge' which the LCEPS were designed to support namely to 'bring about a more coherent and visible delivery of cultural education' (Curious Minds: 2023) was being significantly impacted by infrastructure difficulties due to cuts in both cultural and educational spending. The Arts Council state that –

> We are committed to continuing our work with LCEPs as part of our 2021-2024 Delivery Plan. LCEPs will play an important role in our delivery plan theme of strengthening our place-based approach and supporting the levelling up of communities most in need. (ACE: 2023).

It is not clear what form the commitment to LCEPS will take moving forward, yet it could be argued that the use of the combined local intelligence and structure of LCEPS is a key tool in first engagement strategies for children and young people and, most particularly, priority participants. However, as will be examined further in later chapters, LCEP's need structured funding to be effective. If the valuable work that the LCEP undertakes is dependent on the voluntary labour of its members, then the work can only extend if the goodwill of those members lasts to produce it. The lack of formalisation within the structure can also lead to some members undertaking more work than others and becoming disenchanted (ACE: 2023). It is recommended that Local Authorities should be required to form and support an LCEP with key organisational partners and that a paid LCEP co-ordinator should be appointed to undertake the administration. I will develop this recommendation further in later Chapters.

It should be made clear that regardless of the Arts Council's strategy for children and young people they do not create work, or act as brokers to organisations, and they can only encourage work to be developed by acting in their role as custodians and funders of cultural activity. Accordingly, to deliver their strategy for children and young people, the Arts Council must support and fund organisations to meet the objectives of increased opportunity and creative skills development. To receive funding each organisation must make an application either for longer term NPO funding or National Lottery Project Grant Funding (NLPG)[38]. To be awarded funding for work with children and young people an organisation must demonstrate within their application that they are meeting specific outcomes and

[38] NPO awards are usually paid over a period of five years[38]. The minimum award being £50,000 per year and the highest value awards being several million per year. NLPG funding is awarded in two brackets: under £30,000 and under £100,000. These awards are for discrete projects which produce either a single piece of work or season of work linked by a theme or event (ACE:2023).

investment principles. Applicants must show that they are 'widening and improving opportunities for children and young people to take part in creative activities' either in school or outside of school or, more broadly that they are 'supporting children and young people to develop their creative skills and potential' (ACE:2022)[39]. There is therefore a principle focus on ensuring that the funded activity widens access and opportunity for participation within the organisations immediate and wider community.

These funding requirements also provide catalysts for organisations to develop methods of engagement which widen their participatory base year on year. This is clearly a difficult task and organisations are required to achieve these goals whilst also meeting their quality, managerial, and business commitments.

Where a funded organisation seeks to engage new participants they have a range of options, one of which is to simply advertise, through mailing lists and social media that the youth participatory programme is recruiting. This method has a limited cost and, particularly where the funded organisation has a high status reputation e.g., Contact Young Company; Royal Exchange Young Company; is likely to attract Group One and Two children and young people whose parents are cultural consumers and who are likely to be attracted by the connection between high-reputational organisations and their children. As previously stated in this chapter, when someone is a priority participant they have no associative relationship with cultural providers, and therefore using recruitment methodologies which rely on an associative relationship cannot by definition produce first engagements.

A different recruitment strategy method would be to undertake outreach workshops at schools; youth centres and community hubs, providing taster sessions and workshops designed to connect with a range of young people including priority participants and first engagers. This method focuses on widening access and making first engagements.

[39] Appendix Two of this research fully details the three Outcomes and eighteen elements applicants can apply for funding against.

A third option would be an amalgam of the two strategies with clear targets set by demographics local to the organisation for the range of young people to be engaged e.g., a locally identified framework could be at least forty percent free school meal recipients and twenty percent global majority participants; and with a minimum of fifty percent of the total participants to be first engagements. This approach requires detailed planning and research to set-up and a focused approach in any accompanying outreach programme to ensure that sessions are likely to connect with the targeted demographics. This does not mean that the only measure that matters is first engagement, it is of course important to ensure that once a young person has participated in youth theatre that there are pathways for them to continue to develop their skills. These two requirements, firstly to initially engage with young people and secondly to support them in further skills development need to be considered holistically.

There is also the further consideration of the cost of an outreach recruitment method as opposed to relying simply on organisational reputation or venue performance opportunities to attract already engaged young people to a youth theatre. Formulating strategy and targets takes time and expertise, as does the delivery of that strategy in whatever form it may take e.g., outreach in schools and communities; peer to peer recruitment; cultural events and free ticket offers etc. The cost of that recruitment is then an additional line on the budget for the funded work and reduces the amount that can be spent on delivery. Accordingly, to develop an effective strategy which delivers first engagements the organisation must have a clear commitment to widening participation which they are not only prepared to fund but that they are able to fund.

Currently, the reporting requirements attached to Arts Council funding are problematic and can be satisfied without an organisation specifically identifying the number of first engagements they make. Each organisation must submit audience data each year which collates the demographics with which they are connecting. However, the interpretation of the word audience is left to the organisation who could include participants as ‘audiences’ but are not required to. A Youth Theatre organisation could choose not to report on the

demographics of their participants and simply focus on audiences attending showings and productions:

> We encourage NPOs to evaluate a range of their work (e.g., theatre productions in a main house and studio). NPOs can use the Impact & Insight Toolkit to evaluate any public facing work, including participatory work and work that is delivered online or outdoors (ACE: 2022)

The explanation above which is part of the guidance given to NPOs clearly states that organisations can choose themselves which public facing work they evaluate and although they can choose participatory work they do not have to.

The guidance goes on to say that:

> NPOs will find the Toolkit most valuable if they use it to evaluate work where they can learn something interesting about the experiences of their audiences, or where they have a particular hypothesis about programming or marketing that they wish to test (Ibid)

Organisations could therefore choose to use the toolkit to learn about the effectiveness of their recruitment strategies for first engagements although no youth theatre offer funded under the NPO model is required to do so.

A significant flaw in the current strategy is that whilst there is a core aim to increase opportunities for young people, the Arts Council does not monitor whether NPO organisations are ensuring that their youth theatre offers are reaching the young people most in need of pervasive skill development. Whilst it would of course be impossible to ensure that NPO's have a specific success rate in first engagement and priority participation, it would be an incentive in structuring their recruitment process to require them, when working with young people, to at least report some detail regarding the participants. This

would provide data on how effective NPOs are at widening access to their provision which is key outcome goal for the Arts Council.

A recommendation of this research is a funders requirement to monitor increased engagement in a more specific way. Data could be required on first engagements and retention within programmes both as an incentive for organisations to carefully consider place based recruitment methods and to accurately monitor participatory trends and best practice.

Within this chapter the following conclusions have been reached, firstly, the recommendation to change the discourse of engagement practice by substituting the phrase 'hard to reach' with the phrases 'priority groups' and 'priority participants'. Secondly, funded youth theatre is the part of the sector which is the most likely to serve the needs of priority participants given the link with funders delivery frameworks which seek to widen engagement. Thirdly, that centrally funded organisations like the Arts Council are distributing funds to redress the deficiencies of wider government policy, in this case the reduction of arts education in schools. Finally, the range of priority participants will be different in each place and so any organisational recruitment strategy must have a clear and developed knowledge of their community, combined with the understanding that they cannot rely on associative methods to make first engagements.

Chapter Four of this thesis answered the question 'why should funded youth theatres make their recruitment practice a priority?' by highlighting reduced opportunities to acquire pervasive skills at school and underlining the importance of acquiring those skills to improve children and young people's prospects. This Chapter has provided a critical overview of the landscape in which funded organisations operate to ensure that the analysis of current youth theatre recruitment practice is grounded in an understanding of operational practicalities. This critical overview is also necessary to ensure that the best practice recommendations of this research are feasible and realistic.

The following chapter will examine three funded youth theatre organisations which have been identified as modelling best practice in recruitment. Each organisation has a different methodology and practice framework but delivers youth theatre in a similar place setting and within a similar funding structure. This practice review and analysis provides insight into the ways in which priority participant recruitment can be undertaken effectively and will act as a benchmark for a wider sector analysis.

Chapter Six: Analysis of Three Youth Theatre Models with Similar Place Settings

In Chapters Four and Five I have established that funded youth theatres should make their recruitment practice a priority, to ensure that disadvantaged children and young people can acquire pervasive skills. Those chapters have highlighted the reduction in creative teaching in schools which has particularly impacted children and young people from priority groups and the benefit of acquiring pervasive skills on future mobility prospects. Recommendations have also been made to alter the discourse used in engagement to create a more positive focus on the work necessary to ensure equity of access. Firstly, by classifying communities currently not engaging with arts and culture not as 'hard to reach' but as 'priority communities' and 'priority participants' i.e., those participants which the organisation wishes to prioritise engaging with. Secondly, by highlighting the importance of the skills acquired by drama provision and classifying them as 'pervasive skills' rather than the more widely used term 'soft skills'.

Having considered the practicalities of the funding of youth theatre in Chapter Five it has been established that funded organisations, i.e., those who receive core funding from strategic or charitable funders, are those most likely to have impact in reducing barriers to access for priority participants. As the contribution of this research is a set of best practice guidelines for participant recruitment it is necessary to evaluate and analyse current recruitment practice to isolate trends and where barriers to access are encountered. This is undertaken in two stages in this chapter and Chapter Seven.

This chapter provides a close analysis of three youth theatre offers, all identified as having a strong approach to recruitment practice who operate in similar place based settings and who are all funded by Arts Council England. As detailed in Chapter Three, these organisations have different delivery models and have been identified by a 'Purposeful Sampling' approach, which takes the researcher's prior knowledge of good examples of practice, to create a sample for case study (Patton: 2002).

Points of good practice identified from the close analysis, together with areas of potential improvement and practical delivery implications, will be used as a benchmark for the wider analysis of youth theatre practice undertaken in Chapter Seven.

The three organisations chosen for close analysis are Stage Directions in Salford, Contact Theatre in Manchester, and Burnley Youth Theatre. For each organisation I will provide an evaluation of their background, a critical overview of their delivery model and a critical analysis of their recruitment practice. As these organisations operate and recruit in different ways but within similar place settings, they provide a range of practice methodologies to create the benchmark for the wider analysis.

6.1 Stage Directions

Background

Stage Directions is one of five participatory schemes which form part of an Arts Council fund initiative- the Youth Performance Partnership Pilot Project. The pilot commenced in 2019 with a project in each of the five Arts Council England areas which aimed

> 'To support new opportunities for children and young people from areas of low cultural engagement and high levels of deprivation to design their own programme of workshops, events and productions as well as developing backstage and technical skills' (ACE: 2019)

Stage Directions was the largest of the pilot projects running initially from 2019 to 2022 and was produced by lead partner The Lowry in Salford together with partner organisations the BBC, Walk the Plank, the University of Salford, Salford City Council and Curious Minds who were the Arts Council bridge[40] organisation covering the northwest.

[40] Within the delivery strategy for Great Art and Culture for Everyone, ten 'Bridge' organisations were appointed to facilitate delivery of Artsmark and Arts Award and to provide a bridge between arts organisations and schools. These organisations were reclassified for the 2023 NPO funding process as IPSO – Investment Principal Support Organisations

Stage Directions works as an extracurricular activity in mainstream schools both within a Key Stage Two[41] (KS2) setting at primary schools and a Key Stage Three[42] (KS3) setting at high schools. The aim is to provide extracurricular creative opportunities with industry specialists and freelance artists for young people who have had few cultural opportunities and limited creative provision within their school settings. The creative opportunities are all Theatre focused, ranging from performance workshops in differing styles for both the KS2 and KS3 cohorts and includes technical and craft opportunities for the KS3 cohorts only.

Delivery Model

The delivery model is one of co-creation. Participants initially undertake workshops with various artists and industry specialists and then choose to develop a piece for sharing or performance in a particular creative style. This could be physical theatre, puppetry, utilising music, or other performance techniques within a devised and original piece of theatre. Young people take part in the project for an academic year and can attend within the school holidays to extend their skills and develop their performances.

The participants, many of them trying theatre skills for the first time, are encouraged to develop pervasive skills, and this model of co-creation is more about a broader creative stimulus than a specific training in drama or theatre. In that regard this model shows most clearly the impact of skill acquisition on basic skills taught in a school setting and is therefore the model most closely aligned with proposals made by DICE (DICE: 2016) as set out in Chapter Four.

The unique aspect of Stage Directions is the Co-creation model which allows young people to work with creative industry professionals in a school setting. There is a wide range of research on the theory of collaborative working and co-creation within theatre e.g., Greig: (2008); Nicholson (2004); Thompson (2015); Conquergood, D. (2002), and the purpose of this research is not to interrogate co-creation as a pedagogical approach which as Nicholson asserts remains, 'a major preoccupation in the range of practices that constitute applied

[41] Schools Years Three – Six which teach ages seven to eleven
[42] School Years Seven – Nine which teach ages twelve to fourteen

theatre', (2004: p.43). The analysis of this delivery model is concerned with the impact of co-creation in schools on young people through pervasive skills acquisition and development.

In his analysis of the "aesthetics of care," Thompson (2015) suggests that we find ourselves returning to collaborative theatre-making not for its effects or its endings, but for the 'promises of its pedagogies, processes, and affective qualities' (Ibid p.37). He argues that "the show is not always the thing" and that "aesthetic value is located in between people in moments of collaborative creation, conjoined effort, and intimate exchange" (Ibid p.38). This reinforces the assertion, that the acquisition of cultural and social capital through drama advances social competencies and learning behaviours resulting in improved outcomes. This further illustrates how funded youth theatre can help bridge the gap of pervasive skill acquisition for Group Four children and young people as defined in Chapters One and Five.

In his book 'Young People – New Theatre' Noel Grieg explores and explains the process of creatively collaborating with young people on the project 'Connecting the World' (Greig:2008). Greig sets out the principles identified through the experience of co-creation, describing how "creative collaboration" provides a creative space for the "habit of democracy" to develop (p.91). Although these principles are rooted in the specific parameters of the Connecting the World project which had the additional challenges of language barriers and cultural disparity, they can be applied to all co-created and collaborative work:

- listening to, and learning from, 'the other' - as in different views and experiences of the world, possibly radically different from your own
- accepting the 'challenge of the new' without retreating into the safety of 'the known'
- learning to articulate and creatively represent one's own experiences to others, with truth and bravery, but without attempting to 'control' those who are receiving them (Ibid p.92)

Greig also outlines a series of social intelligences required when collaborating creatively, 'These include listening, absorbing other perspectives, and being open and curious about "the different" – (Ibid p.94)

If these principles and social intelligences are examined in consideration of both the Lisbon Key Competencies and the Planned Happenstance Career traits as set out in Chapter Four, then the conclusion can be drawn that the principles of co-creation support the acquisition of competencies, traits, and pervasive skills. The development of curiosity is detailed as are the listening and language skills which promote the competencies of literacy; interpersonal skills; the ability to adopt new competences and cultural awareness and expression.

These separate branches of study have been considered i.e., the competences necessary for effective educational attainment (Erikkson et al: 2014), the studies undertaken to analyse the link between these competencies and drama (DICE:2010), and careers theory, (Krumboltz: 2004), and the conclusion drawn is that the co-creation model, if effectively delivered, can provide measurable benefits to young people's employability. The method by which it does so, through pervasive skill acquisition and application is not factored into the current knowledge based mainstream curriculum and so specifically benefits young people who do not acquire these skills at home i.e., Group Four children and young people.

When considering Stage Directions model of co-creation, it is also important to consider the difference between the collaboration of young people with their peers and of the collaboration of young people with adults from professional creative settings. A key element of the Stage Directions pedagogy is the impact upon young people of working with and learning from professional artists and technicians. This raises the issue of the power balance within these collaborative relationships and how effectively the young person can develop their own creative journey.

Stage Directions defines their process as:

> A process where everyone is collaboratively working together equally; sharing ideas, thoughts, experience, approaches; it can involve making decisions that enable people and communities to be actively involved in shaping the things which impact their lives. It shifts the power, resource, and ownership towards the people the work is intended to benefit, as opposed to a top down approach. (Stage Directions:2019)

Discourse analysis of this definition shows Stage Directions ambition for the impact of their process. The definition describes a scenario where 'everyone is collaboratively working together equally', although the phraseology is somewhat laboured the use of the words: collaboratively, together, and equally within the opening clause suggests the desire to empower the participants. This intention to centralise the creative pathway of the participants is clear, but this depends upon the project's facilitators, designated by the project as 'Artistic Leads' (Ibid. p.4), developing and maintaining a creative space which both enables this and still drives the project forward.

Evaluation of the project was designed by The Audience Agency and the project Leadership Team. The key measures used for the evaluation were the 'five creative habits of mind' which is a measure defined by a research team led by Guy Claxton from the University of Bristol (Claxton et al: 2006). Claxton's research study posed the question 'Is it possible to organise life in schools and classrooms in such a way that young people not only have the opportunity to express their creativity, but systematically become more creative?' (Ibid. p.57).

That study therefore focused on teachers' pedagogical approaches within the classroom rather than on the content taught, but the question aligns with the focus of Stage Directions. The five habits of mind identified: Collaboration; Curiosity; Persistence; Discipline and Imagination have then been expanded upon by the Stage Directions and Audience Agency Teams to manage the evaluation of the delivery at each school. Evaluation reports were produced for each of the three delivery years. These have been assessed and analysed to examine the impact of the programme, its key strengths and any elements that

can be isolated from the delivery of Stage Directions which can be used as part of best practice guidelines to engage Group Four children and young people[43].

To ensure the comparison between the organisations in this chapter is robust, consideration is given to the contrast between this practice model which is new and has been developed within the current landscape, and the other best practice models which have been running and refining their models respectively over a fifty year period. Stage Directions has the benefit of creating a model unencumbered by organisational expectation whilst also being able to reflect and model best practice elements from other youth theatre programmes. The refinement of the model over the three year delivery period has shown flexibility to meet the challenges of remote delivery during Covid although that refinement is a simpler process within a project based delivery format.

In the first year of the project a series of taster sessions with a range of artists were held in person over several weeks introducing the participants to different theatre practice types. The pupils then chose the practice they preferred, and Stage Directions commissioned an artist experienced in that practice to collaborate with them to create a show. An Ensemble Leader[44] functioned as an advocate for the young people and the aims of Stage Directions as well as supporting the teachers. The Audience Agency provided observational evaluation across delivery settings.

In the second year this delivery model was not possible due to Covid, and the Project Leader had also decided that the taster session programme was overly complex administratively as there were complications if several schools wanted the same delivery type. The second year model had one Lead Artist and one Trainee Facilitator working with the participants on a range of theatre practice styles and the participants used these early sessions to inform the

[43] Whilst Stage Directions is principally a first engagement delivery offer there are additional elements of the programme of work which are focused on creative career pathways. This research will not examine these areas e.g., work with performing arts students at a Sixth Form college and work developing trainee facilitators, as they are focused on young people who are already culturally engaged and have already benefited from drama provision.

[44] The Ensemble Leaders contracted were all experienced practitioners in youth theatre and participation

creation of their final piece. This delivery model was followed in Year Three, which also benefitted from less disruption due to Covid.

Recruitment Model

Stage Directions has been designed to be an easy access programme for participants. There is no cost to any of the workshops, including the summer holiday intensives, and the activities take place in a familiar setting, their school. There are however differences between the age group models of the programme between the primary KS2 offer and the KS3 secondary offer, which perhaps highlight a specific problem within creative provision for young people, that of timetabling around the varying needs of the primary and secondary curriculum.

The primary school delivery works with full classes as a timetabled activity within the school day, ensuring that participation is universal and young people can see a project through from start to finish during mandated school hours. Stage Directions within the high school settings operates as an extracurricular activity and therefore requires participants to make a commitment to attend and to have made a choice to try the activity in the first place.

Whilst there has been good take up of the sessions in secondary school settings, despite the interruptions and complications of COVID-19 in the first and second years of delivery, a young person may face barriers in making that initial choice to attend, particularly given the demographics of the schools in which the project operates. Stage Directions is being run within schools in the Salford local education authority area. Salford rank highly in the national deprivation index being the 18th most deprived local authority in the entire country (IMD:2021). The position of these schools in an area of high social deprivation places students in a demographic area most in need of a programme like Stage Directions. Studies show that students in such areas may also have additional responsibilities or complex family circumstances which mean they are not always able to access after school provision on a regular basis without additional support (Halpern: 2003)

Data produced at the end of each year and cumulatively at the end of the final year has shown impressive results in improved outcomes for children and young people (Stage Directions: 2023). The data was collected by the artists, facilitators, teachers, Project Manager and by The Audience Agency, who provided the framework for the data collection and completed an overall evaluation.

Within the evaluation data (Stage Directions: 2023), there are comments made which highlight individual impacts, a sample of which are detailed below.

- ‘You get to show who you are and what you can do. At first I was shy but now I'm building confidence that it doesn’t matter what you do'
- It is the best thing that Harvey has written independently all year - he has opted out up until now, this is the first thing that he has been engaged with in a long time. (Teacher referring to KS2 pupil)
- Ibrahim is using advanced language - not usual…Definitely not a reader so [the Teacher] has no idea where this has come from….in Y1 he didn’t speak English. (Ensemble Leader referring to KS2 pupil)
- Don't be shy because you know you've got it...At first I was shy to talk around other people but now I'm confident. (KS3 Pupil)
- It was good to come out of your comfort zone. Performing in front of people was a really big thing for me...I used to be really nervous in front of people but now I can act and be who I am on stage and people don't judge. (KS3 Pupil)

The quotes detailed above are all from participants, either students or teachers to avoid the potential bias which may be unconscious within project organisers. Discourse analysis demonstrates an improvement from the participants with confidence, resilience, and persistence, with repeated uses of the word confident or descriptions of overcoming nervousness. They describe young people connecting more effectively with their peers, pushing themselves past embarrassment and engaging more effectively with literacy skills with the use of more advanced language and effective writing. A particularly telling

comment was made by a teacher in one of the schools whose class were taking part, 'They have got a great imagination, but we don't give them opportunity to use it' (Ibid p.51).

Survey results of participants and their parents also had impressive results:
Of the responses given by parents

- 100% agreed that their children had grown in confidence by taking part in Stage Directions.
- 93% agreed their children gained or developed skills they can use elsewhere.

Of the responses given by participants

- 86% confirmed they were better at talking to other people after taking part.
- 86% said that they understand other people better after taking part.
- 93% said that Stage Directions had improved their teamworking skills.
- 93% said they were now confident at trying things they had never done before.
- 86% said they were good at using their creativity to explore and ask questions.
- 93% agreed they were good at practising in order to improve.

The above responses confirm the previous studies[45] detailed in Chapter Two and Chapter Four of this research which show that participation in drama can have a significant impact on the development of pervasive skills. Whilst this is not new knowledge to any drama teacher, youth theatre director or facilitator this connection to attainment and improvement is not one which is widely recognised outside of the sector (Gainer: 1997). The rhetoric and pathway of education policy examined in Chapter Four also highlighted this lack of connection between the professed strategy to 'help young people develop the skills they need to do the high-paid, high-skilled jobs of the future' (GOV.UK: 2021) and successive education policies which have reduced art subjects to the periphery of the curriculum regardless of their evidenced benefits.

[45] Parimoo:2017; Papavassiliou-Alexiou., & Zourna 2016, Erikkson et al: 2014 etc.

Parental attitudes are also a factor and demonstrate a similar lack of connection between participating in drama or other arts subjects and their impact on improved attainment and skill acquisition. A 1997 study by Brenda Gainer found that 'parents saw arts education (or any other enhancement to a "basic" curriculum) as a luxury that should not be provided through public funds but by affluent parents on an individual basis.' (p.264).
Whilst the value of arts teaching and drama is naturally understood by facilitators, it must be recognised that that understanding is not uniformly held and consequently the value of drama as a subject which confers pervasive skills which improve both attainment and employability must be effectively advocated.

A further factor which must be recognised is that not all children and young people will want to try drama and this issue of initial connection needs to be addressed and carefully considered when planning engagement and recruitment activities. Where pupils' attendance is within a timetabled class, this can be a factor in how well the programme runs particularly the management of early sessions to develop engagement and maximise the benefit to participants during the period that they do take part. Stage Directions experienced this issue with two schools where pupils were required to attend rather than choosing to attend which resulted at times in disruptive behaviour and lack of engagement.

Ensemble Leaders and teachers developed strategies based on identifying what changes to delivery approaches positively impacted the initial sessions and replicated them at the outset of the following sessions. For example, in Year Two when working with Albion Academy, a secondary school KS3 group, the following was identified as the key to ensuring 'positive and productive collaboration' (Audience Agency: 2021)

> Placing young people outside of their friendship groups was something that was embraced by the young people and established a more cohesive social dynamic and better teamwork overall. Beyond the comfort zone of their usual groups young people discovered and/or developed their communication abilities while extending the types of ideas they worked with, enriching their world view with new perspectives, and growing together (Ibid: p.40)

This evaluation was confirmed by the participants from Albion Academy:

> It feels really good because we're taking everyone's ideas and then, it's not just me or someone else who created it, we've all created it together with different ideas, so it's maybe not how we'd planned it but better than we thought. (Ibid: p41)

These methodologies applied to improve outcomes and engagement within the sessions, could also be applied from the outset of a recruitment strategy designed to connect with priority participants and will be considered in the recommendations in Chapter Eight.

A further factor to take into consideration is that Stage Directions recruitment model is based on funded artists delivering co-creation workshops within state school settings. As such, the actual recruitment of young people is contingent on the relationship with the schools and in the case of the current delivery programme, the Salford LCEP[46]. The structure of an LCEP where cultural organisations can develop local policy with a range of stakeholders and partners, can be an effective means of sharing place based knowledge and resources as highlighted in the Chapter Five. Salford LCEP has been a key element in the effectiveness of the planning and production of Stage Directions.

The work of the LCEP has given the partners a better sense of how they can work well together and learn from one another, highlighted by the Stage Directions working partnerships and confirmed by these evaluation comments[47]:

> It's probably deepened and improved some of those relationships...it has enabled a deeper working relationship because rather than crossing over with certain things, it's a shared objective. (Jennifer Riding – The Lowry)

[46] Local Cultural Education Partnership
[47] Quotes taken from the Audience Agency 2022 final evaluation report

> The LCEP has been key in providing access to Salford City Council departments for the Stage Directions programme, most notably council education leadership teams such as the Schools Improvement Team (Audience Agency Evaluator)

This data shows the importance of place based knowledge and interconnected working when developing projects which have a range of local stakeholders. The evaluation of the Stage Directions project describes the day to day facilitation of the partnerships through 'regular communication between the salaried staff on the Stage Directions core team and education professionals working within the schools' (Audience Agency:2021). This day to day management of the project was further facilitated by the Salford City Council Schools Improvement Team who 'worked to the path to productive comms and positive decision making in the interest of both the Stage Directions programme and the individual schools' (Ibid: p.39).

There is of course a cost in time and resources within multiple organisations which must be invested to make the project work as set out in the evaluation:

> Money affects it. So, if the money wasn't there, would we be partners? Would we both be coming together to do something in summer for young people in Salford because it's needed? Probably not. We'd all just be doing a bit of our own thing. So, the fact that it's a shared input means everybody does come together. Without that, it wouldn't happen. And I think that's where it gets a little bit political." (Jennifer Riding – The Lowry[48]).

Discourse analysis of this quote sets out a key consideration for the replication of a project like Stage Directions. Whilst the evaluation has shown that the project has delivered on its objectives, for a project to work across a range of stakeholders the administrative practicalities of that delivery must be funded just as much as the project delivery itself. That funding is itself a motivator, as the 'input means everybody does come together' (Stage

[48] Quote taken from Audience Agency Stage Directions Evaluation Report 2021

Directions: 2023). This puts the cost of funding a project like Stage Directions, which is designed to ensure priority participants have an opportunity to experience drama, significantly higher than the cost of a standard youth theatre offer which does not need to fund additional stakeholders. As the above quote indicates: 'that's where it gets a little bit political' (Ibid), as this work is not commercial, it is free at the point of access to schools and participants, the cost of the delivery must therefore be met by either public funds, or from charitable or philanthropic donations. This underlines the issues discussed in Chapter Five, the precarious position that all funded work is in, its dependence on others for its existence regardless of its intrinsic value or quality.

The success of the stakeholder relationships is also an endorsement of the LCEP structure by virtue of which the networked relationships were formed. If as the Arts Council have stated, they believe

> 'LCEPs will play an important role in our delivery plan theme of strengthening our place-based approach and supporting the levelling up of communities most in need' (ACE:2023)

then the funded development of successful projects like Stage Directions would seem to be a logical next step.

A final consideration when evaluating Stage Directions is that of legacy. If the programme operates in a school for a year and then moves on to other schools, are there any measures to ensure that the benefits of the programme continue to be developed after the delivery has stopped? This has been considered by Stage Directions, who are providing schools who have completed direct delivery funding to invest in the commissioning of independent creative and cultural activities for pupils. This also involves handing over the relationships with creative practitioners and artists who worked with the school during direct delivery. There are of course problematic issues with this approach, as it both relies on the school remaining invested with the delivery and facilitating the administration of it, as well as committing time, either within their timetable or extra-curricular hours, to maintaining the

programme. Whilst the teachers who worked with Stage Directions may be invested in continuing delivery, should they move schools that knowledge and commitment is lost in a way which is not apparent in other youth theatre delivery models.

The issue of ongoing legacy is problematic with this model unless there are further mechanisms put in place to address it. For instance: ongoing CPD for teachers; continued sharing of best practice across legacy schools and continued participant incentives such as the annual showcases which give the participants something to work towards.

There are several conclusions which can be drawn from the analysis of the Stage Directions project. Firstly, that the project has consistently evidenced the impact of drama and their co-creation delivery model on the development of pervasive skills. Secondly, the recruitment model of mandated attendance requires an approach focused on building a connection to the delivery sessions which facilitates participant retention. Finally, structuring a place based approach with multiple stakeholders through the LCEP requires strong relationship building, partnership development and additional funding to facilitate. However, the success of the programme in reaching participants, a significant number of whom are Group Four children and young people[49], and clear results in pervasive and core skills development shows that this is a strong approach.

6.2 Contact Theatre

Background

The Contact Theatre was founded as Manchester Young People's theatre by Barry Sheppard and Hugh Hunt in 1972[50]. Initially, the theatre employed a company and produced work for young people as well as operating a youth theatre section in much the same way as other small producing houses. In 1999 the theatre was rebranded following a five million pounds Arts Council funded refurbishment and became an arts venue where young people could experience a broad range of theatre arts together with music, visual art, spoken word, and dance (Coyle: 2014).

[49] Demographic data from Audience Agency reports in 2020; 2021 and 2022

[50] Sheppard was at the time the general manager of Manchester University Theatre and Hunt the Senior Professor of Drama.

The theatre has a reputation as one that makes work 'by young people for young people' (Contact: 2022). Contact prides itself not only on its progressive programming and delivery model, but also on its active engagement of young people in administration, production, management, and board positions. In 2021, Junior Akinola a former Contact alumnus, was appointed as Chairman of the Board. At twenty eight it is unusual for someone as young as Akinola to preside over the board of a nationally recognised portfolio organisation, yet Contact Theatre has a professed commitment to youth voice and is consistent in its approach to youth led policies. This has been further manifested in the appointment of the Artistic Director/Chief Executive of Contact – Keisha Thompson, who is not only the youngest person to hold the post at thirty two, but also the first black person, the first female and the first Mancunian to be appointed (Darcy:2022).

As a former Contact Young Company member and an artist developed through Contact's talent development pathways, Thompson was interviewed by Young Trustees and had to connect with them as a credible leader in that process. Every applicant interviewed for a post at Contact is seen not only by senior management and department heads, but by a young person who can ask questions which matter to them about the role and potential postholder (Contact: 2023). This attitude to youth voice perhaps makes Contact unique within the organisations to be considered, in this organisation young people make decisions at every stage of the production and management process.

Delivery Model

When analysing the work of Contact it is necessary to look at wider organisational structures and in particular the focus on youth voice and young trustees which is a core element of their organisational mission and strategy:

> We are the leading national theatre and arts venue to place young people at the decision-making heart of everything. At Contact, young people aged 13-30 genuinely lead, working alongside staff in deciding the artistic programme, making staff appointments and act as full Board members. (Contact:2023)

Discourse analysis of this quote must be viewed through the lens of its placement on the 'About Us' section of Contact's website. There is no history of the organisation, no details of the strands of delivery programmes, there is simply a message of youth led work changing lives as the core tenet of Contact's work in their 'shop window'. This positions Contact's mission not as one simply focused on the production of art and drama but utilising the process of that production as tool through which transformative change occurs in its participants.

Shannon Jackson is a key analyst within participatory arts and has explored the interconnectivity of socially engaged performance practice. In Jackson's 2011 work 'Social works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics' she explores the links between socially engaged participatory art and its key differences to a perception of art as a disruptive and revolutionary practice (Jackson: 2011). Art and artists are not viewed, she argues, as part of usual social systems, as part of societal infrastructure, and yet participatory artforms can fill the gaps left by dysfunctional social institutions and they can 'contribute to inter-dependent social imagining' (Ibid, p14). This underlines the conclusion drawn in Chapter Four, that if Group Four children and young people are engaged with participatory drama programmes, their outcomes will improve. Thus, mitigating the deficiencies of the national curriculum which has failed to facilitate their accrual of cultural capital and pervasive skills.

Discourse analysis highlights another key phrase within Contact's 'About Us' description: 'At Contact young people aged 13-30 genuinely lead'. The word which stands out is 'genuinely', with the tacit suggestion being made that there are circumstances where a commitment to youth leadership and youth voice may not be genuine. This could of course occur where an organisation may profess to utilise youth voice, possibly to impress a funder, and yet fail to do this effectively either through design or a failure to understand how to support young people within their organisation. Consequently, the process of embedding youth voice runs the risk of becoming perfunctory.

There is a significant amount of sociological research assessing the growth of youth voice and representation within organisations, much of this research relates to the involvement of young people within local government and community organisation but it can certainly be extrapolated and applied to youth theatre. Three principal theories have been advanced (Zeldin, Camino et al: 2003), ensuring social justice and youth representation; building civil society and promoting youth development.

Zeldin and Camino also hypothesise that the use of innovative models of youth delivery, which they analysed in the United States, demonstrates that these theoretical rationales can be effectively translated into policies with measurable outcomes. When young people are engaged in meaningful decision-making regardless of whether that occurs within families, schools, or organisations, they found clear and consistent developmental benefits for the young people involved (Ibid, p3). Research also shows that organisations and the communities which they serve derive benefits when young people are engaged in governance (Kirshner: 2003). These benefits derive from the differing views and perspectives gained by intergenerational working e.g., a young trustee may have better insights into effective marketing to a younger audience and may also provide a fresh perspective on programme delivery and recruitment (CAF:2015). The logical example would simply be that a young person is better placed to answer the question 'what would attract a young person to our production/event/workshop?', than a person who is sixty which is the current average age of a charity trustee (Young Trustees: 2023).

When we consider the 'genuine' nature of involvement of young people as decision makers within organisations, we must also consider how the relationship between the young people and adults, often in trustee roles or paid management positions, is structured. The power balance of this relationship is particularly significant when considering the weight given to the input of the young people by the adults within the organisation.

As Kirshner notes, the determination of the value and weight placed upon youth voice, by the adult voices in an organisation, may be minimised to a point where young people's ideas are heard but not acted upon (2003, pg. 11). The possibility of youth voice being tokenised

in this manner perhaps forms the basis for Contacts perceived need to spell out both their 'genuine' intent and their performative action.

The period in which young people are involved in the decision making process is also relevant. Are young people simply part of the initial sounding board of a project, or given a brief to examine within peer to peer meetings or discussions, only to be then excluded from the decision-making process or are those young people properly imbedded within the organisation? The most effective Youth Adult Partnership (YAP) power structures, are set out by Kirshner when considering the initial research of Zeldin and Camino,

> Rather than offering limited, circumscribed opportunities for youth input, in which youth serve as "youth representatives" on a decision-making board or learn leadership skills through planning school proms, these groups position young people as capable democratic actors, who have legitimate opinions about social policies and deserve to have these opinions heard in the public square (Ibid p2).

The terminology employed by Kirshner is noteworthy in its comparison of young people who simply act as 'representatives' of the views of their cohort and of young people who are 'capable democratic actors' within organisations with validated opinions which are considered when decision making. It is of course difficult to determine the extent to which to the ideas of young people are given weight within any organisation, particularly one where there are a significant number of employed adults. Contact often use the word partnership when describing their governance, management, and programming approach. Returning to discourse analysis of their 'About Us' information, Contact specify and frame the power balance between young people and adults in a collegiate way, with young people 'working alongside staff in deciding the artistic programme, making staff appointments and act as full Board members' (Contact: 2021). This creates an even field where each actor within the power relationship has an awareness of their respective roles and is a way of viewing Foucault's theory that power 'exists only as exercised on others' in a beneficial way (Foucault: 1994 p540). Contact holds the power of management of the organisation but then release some of this to not only benefit those to whom they release it, but to benefit

themselves through reputational improvement, a perception of integrity and the regeneration of ideas.

In a 2017 paper for Culture Hive, a forum run by the Arts Marketing Association as a resource of best practice, Matt Fenton, the former Artistic Director of Contact Theatre and Reese Williams a young board member set out the organisations attitude to board diversity and the position of young people in the decision-making process:

> Every major decision at Contact is made jointly by staff and young people. When we are recruiting for staff or board members, all candidates are interviewed by a staff panel and a youth panel. Both panels have equal weight and if they don't agree we do a second round of interviews or readvertise. The staff and youth panels usually agree. When they don't it tends to be because a candidate has under-estimated the youth panels influence. If they don't take the young people seriously, they don't have a place at Contact. (Fenton, Williams: 2017)

This governance structure has clearly been successful for Contact as this model has run for over twenty years with many success stories emanating from the organisation, including the appointment of their Chair of Trustees and current Artistic Director. There are numerous positive critical assessments of the programme delivery, (Gardner:2022), and a succession of young people who have found careers within the creative industries, many working for periods in paid roles at Contact. (Contact: 2023).

The discourse surrounding “youth-led” initiatives often highlights the parts played by young people while omitting much of the behind-the-scenes work done by adults. This may happen for strategic reasons— as YAP initiatives gain their credibility by representing authentic youth perspectives and alternately lose their credibility if they are seen to merely treat youth voice in a tokenistic manner.

Also, adult allies of youth leaders are often wary of talking about adult roles lest the implicit message appear (perhaps mistakenly) that such projects are there by the grace of adults and

not because of youth initiative. Except in the rare case of non-adult sanctioned youth programs, adults play multiple roles at every level of organisations (McLaughlin et al: 1994). In other words, adults do occupy a place in youth-led organisations. As Kirshner notes,

> Youth and adults engage in interaction routines that often depart from normative ones found in schools, families or workplaces as youth and adults together work out more equitable distributions of power and authority in their efforts to make an impact on some sort of problem of public significance (2003 p.3)

Contact Theatre achieves a high standard artistically and the collaborative creation process combined with a youth focused governance structure is yielding excellent results (Stage: 2018). Whilst that is the case, the impact of drama on young people external to this sphere of experience i.e., young people who have not previously engaged with drama is being considered, therefore, an analysis of whether the youth led delivery model positively impacts recruitment is necessary.

Recruitment

Contact undertakes recruitment through a variety of means, both through associative marketing via arts Twitter and Instagram and significant peer to peer outreach engagement. Contact's young producers go out into their local communities and simply talk to young people at bus stops, barber shops, and playgrounds. These conversations are focused not only on Contact's work as a theatre company but their interest in hearing the stories of their local community. (Contact: 2022)

Contact has a national reputation and doubtless being a member of the Young Company would be attractive to any young person interested in their delivery models and already engaged in arts and culture. This reflects the conclusions drawn earlier that Group One and Group Two participants who are culturally experienced may apply to Contact through the more traditional route of seeing the call out for Young Company auditions through social media. In this way the programme may be populated with young participants who would not benefit as much from the process as Group Four children and young people.

A further factor in the recruitment process at Contact is the word – 'audition'. Contact Young Company has an annual auditioning process when participants must complete a written application form and attend an in-person audition (Contact:2022). This process is likely to be significantly off-putting to a young person who is trying drama for the first time. There are drama sessions which are open to all without experience, the 'drama drop' sessions which are skills focused although participants are again required to complete an application form online and one of the questions on the form is: "Please describe your previous drama skills, knowledge and experience" (Ibid, np). If a young person must complete this form and state that they have no skills or experience this could, by the very fact of having to give a negative response, be discouraging. Discourse analysis of the question shows an expectation that the young person has experience: 'Please describe' rather than a possible alternative 'Have you attended a drama skills session before?' which allows for a negative response. As these are the drama sessions which are open to all without audition or experience it is an odd question to ask and could deter applicants to the session. This also gives Contact's outreach work in the community an increased importance as participants must already be engaged and motivated by when they complete an application form or consider an audition.

Contact do however have a commitment to place centred outreach. The theatre is situated on the edge of Manchester City centre next to the University Drama Department and close to urban social housing and the districts of Moss Side, Ardwick, and Hulme, which are areas of significant socio economic deprivation.

The 2019 Social Deprivation Indices ranks areas in Hulme, Ardwick, and Moss Side as within the top 10% of socially deprived areas in the country and within a three mile radius of the theatre every area is ranked within the 30% most deprived areas (MCC:2023). This index uses a variety of measures to classify areas such as crime, housing, education, employment, and health statistics and is produced by central government every five years. Despite being consistently surrounded by areas of deprivation Contact have established a reputation for excellence with their NPO application being rated as outstanding in the quality of their work in 2018 (ACE: 2020).

As cultural policy shifts evermore towards place based working[51] this recruitment strategy sits within the Arts Council outcome aim of cultural communities and yet also proves successful in one key element of recruitment, the ability to show a participant that a theatre has something to offer them and is a space in which they can see themselves reflected. There are numerous members of Contact staff who have developed creative careers as producers, administrators or directors having been members of the young company as the company is also focused on retention and development (Ibid, np). When dealing with communities that have complex issues a range of additional factors arise resulting in a need for clear safeguarding and participant welfare. By providing a space which allows creative expression to thrive this can create a supportive community around the young people who participate.

Contact Theatre operate strong place based outreach strategies which are undertaken through schools' partnerships and with the local LCEP. These are focused on a socio-demographic range of participants who would be unlikely to be able to pay for extra-curricular provision. All Contact's engagement programmes are delivered free of charge to participants (Ibid, np). This means that Contact must fund the work either through grants, donations, memberships, or ticket sales. Contacts commercial output either as a venue for hire or as a production house produces a small percentage of its annual income stream (Charity Commission 2021,) with the balance provided by external and charitable funders. Essentially, Contact must operate in a way which fits external funding frameworks to continue to operate and should those funding frameworks change or diverge from Contact's ethos then their board would have to decide whether to alter their mission to match that of the funders or become commercially independent.

Certainly, for the period of the Let's Create strategy, Contacts' focus on place based working and youth voice shows their alignment to Arts Council outcomes. The issue for any organisation remaining at the forefront of what attracts young people, will be ensuring the artists and programme streams delivered maintain impact with their target groups. Contact

[51] ACE:2022; PPS:2022; IRISS: 2022; Gilmore et al: 2019

must ensure that quality remains high with their programming output, producing work which sustains and maintains their reputation.

The conclusions that can be drawn following an analysis of Contact's delivery and recruitment models are threefold, firstly that Contact operates a youth led recruitment model through a focus on peer to peer recruitment and opportunities for youth leadership. This model has been shown to produce high quality artistic results and a positive impact developmentally upon its youth participants. Secondly, the theatre sits within areas of moderate to high social deprivation and draws its participants from backgrounds of low cultural engagement. There are models of practice undertaken at Contact which could be used as elements of a best practice guide to embed youth voice to support participant recruitment, but there are also some areas of concern such as the application process which could deter Group Four children and young people if they have not made a strong connection through outreach. Finally, Contact, similarly to Stage Directions, is not sustainable without significant investment from funders. Consequently, they are subject to operating within funding frameworks and ensuring that their delivery model and governance model meet funders criteria. This fact means that Contact is not the master of its own destiny and instead of being free to develop in its own direction must ensure that that direction is in line with that of governmentally funded organisations and charity funders which are subject to competitive bidding processes.

6.3 Burnley Youth Theatre

Background

Burnley is an authority in east Lancashire, covering fifteen wards with twice the national average of people per square kilometre. Burnley is ranked the eleventh most deprived area out of 317 districts and authorities in England. Burnley has a low rate of social housing with many residents residing in private rented or owned properties with a disproportionately high level of housing stock being in the lowest council tax band of A. This is an indicator of a low level of quality housing and net additional dwellings figures for Burnley have been negative for the last three reporting years. There is also a significantly high level of crime,

lower than average life expectancies and a high proportion of residents in receipt of benefits (Lancs.Gov: 2022).

Burnley Youth Theatre was founded in 1973 by volunteers. In 1978 the organisation moved to its current site at a former quarry within one of the quarry outbuildings. Bellevue theatre became a charity in 1996 and recruited their first paid artistic director in 1997. In 2005, the current Youth Theatre building was opened following extensive fundraising and was the first purpose built Youth Theatre in the UK. The theatre was designed and developed in collaboration with young people. In 2013, the original 1970s building which remained on site was demolished and a revised new studio building was open.
Since its inception the theatre has been run commercially through class fees and ticket sales, local fundraising, and donations. In the 2018 – 2023 national portfolio application round Burnley Youth Theatre (BYT) were placed in the lowest band of funding, receiving only a small percentage of their overall funding from the Arts Council. They applied for a significant uplift to their funding in the 2023 – 2026 and were successful in an extremely competitive funding round, (ACE: 2022) which highlights the strengths of their model against the Let's Create delivery plan.

BYT deliver a programme of youth theatre which caters for specialist age groups including early years and youth theatre groups covering ages from seven to eighteen (twenty five for young people with learning disabilities). BYT also operate their own theatre company Byteback Theatre. As a small organisation with a limited number of paid staff BYT operates on a paid workshop model for youth theatre whilst also performing charitably funded outreach work and bursaries.

<u>Delivery Model</u>

BYT operate what could be described as a traditional youth theatre model with fixed fees for participatory workshops which are scheduled around school terms. The groups of participants are divided in age categories starting at age three for independent classes, with ages birth to three having creative family sessions where they attend with a parent/carer. The groups are then split between educational key stages with an early years class,

following by a class for each of the subsequent key stages one to four between the ages of seven and eighteen.

There is a fee for all classes (£37.50 for a term of 10 workshops, or £3.75 per session). This makes the BYT model significantly cheaper than the commercial national franchise models examined such as Stagecoach or PQA. BYT also offer a range of other theatre activities including Artsmark, Arts Award and after school clubs and two alternative Youth Theatre groups which cover specific and specialised activity. The After the Rain group is a group for young people aged between 11 and 18 which explores LGBTQ+ culture through theatre arts, developing projects that celebrate and increase the visibility of their community. A second specialist workshop, Theatre for Change, is a group where young people can develop work relating to social issues and encourages them to use the arts to promote social change within their local community and beyond. BYT's offer is therefore wide ranging and diverse, despite operating within a traditional youth theatre framework, and produces termly performances around their paid model.

BYT describe their mission as to 'creatively inspire young people to take their next steps'. This is a delivery model which is focused on whole community engagement which they describe as being passionate about 'developing children, young people and families to ensure they are confident, healthy, resilient and ready for the future' (BYT:2022). Discourse analysis of that statement draws several significant comparisons with the other delivery models already analysed. Firstly, the words: confident and resilient are two of the evaluation measures by which Stage Directions demonstrate pervasive skills acquisition and are also two of the creative habits of mind which link to employability factors in Happenstance Careers theory as previously highlighted. Confidence is a pervasive skill which has been highlighted in every delivery model as a key benefit to drama provision.

Secondly, the word 'healthy' is a noteworthy choice in a mission statement as it could mean a variety of things, physical health, mental health, fostering healthy interactions, general positivity etc. This is a clear expression of the benefits of drama on all these forms of 'health'. Drama requires participants to be physically active and therefore improves physical

health; drama also promotes self-reflection and kindness to self through improved confidence and environments where mistakes are celebrated; and drama requires teamwork with respect for others which supports healthy relationship building. This could also reflect the place-setting of BYT, and the work undertaken with families to improve health outcomes in the community.

Thirdly, they are the only organisation considered in this Chapter which focus on 'families' and the importance of engaging with the wider community. This community engagement is of significance to BYT, within their Board of Trustees they have parents of current and past participants (BYT:2022) and their website contains a separate page setting out their rationale for family engagement:

> Burnley Youth Theatre aims to work in outreach and community settings throughout East Lancashire in order to reach families who wouldn't usually access theatre and the arts. Working in neighbourhood centres, libraries, schools, community centres, homeless shelters, and hospices we aim to expand our reach and make our creative offer accessible to all (ibid)

Discourse analysis of this statement highlights two clauses which are of particular importance, 'in order to reach families who wouldn't usually access theatre and the arts' and 'we aim to expand our reach'. The first clause states the intention to reach 'families' rather than 'children and young people', this could simply mean that their offer, including as it does early years provision, and professional productions is designed to appeal to the family market. There could, however, be a more strategic meaning i.e., that BYT understand that to reach children and young people who are culturally unengaged, an organisation must also engage with their parents. The second clause, 'expand our reach' is an explicit statement of intent to widen engagement which suggests that the preceding clause does describe an engagement strategy rather than a simple family programming offer.

As defined in Chapter Five, Group Four children and young people are those whose parents are not culturally engaged and/or unsupportive and who may not fall within targeted

classifications. This builds on Ball et al's original 'disconnected choosers' definition[52], extending it from parental choice of their child's school to parental choice related to the overall improvement of educational performance through extra-curricular activity.

Ball and Vincent's[53] examination of the 'grapevine', the way in which the medium of social comparison—with others 'like us' and 'others' not 'like us' impacts choice within social groupings. The grapevine theory builds on this work and the work of Taylor on the landscape of social practices 'local structures of feeling', produced by class, culture, and routine social practices'[54]. To put this in simple terms, the 'grapevine' can be both a positive and a negative reinforcing of what different social groups believe to be activity which is suitable for them and activity which is not suitable for them.

This idea can be extended to place based recruitment strategies for youth theatre. Where a socially conscious organisation seeks to provide young people with the greatest benefit from drama provision, they must seek to engage Group Four children and young people. By definition, Group Four have parents who are not culturally engaged and who may feel that arts and drama are 'not for them' or their children. This becomes a barrier to engagement as young people are not introduced to cultural activity by their parents. BYT's intent, with the utilisation of a wider family approach to engagement, could be an attempt to utilise the social grapevine within groups to alter perceptions through improved outcomes for young people.

Within project evaluation and end of year reports there are numerous testimonials from parents[55] which reference the holistic approach at BYT to young people's development:

- Just wanted to say what a great place this is for young people. It offers an inclusive environment where students can grow in confidence and ability (BYT: 2023)

[52] BALL, S.J., BOWE, R. & GEWIRTZ, S. (1995) p78
[53] Ball; S.J & Vincent C (1998) 'I Heard It on the Grapevine': 'hot' knowledge and school choice, British Journal of Sociology of Education, 19:3, 377-400
[54] Taylor et al (1996)
[55] Available under Freedom of Act 2000 upon a written FOI request to ACE

- My child wouldn't be the person they are today without your support and understanding. (Ibid: web)

Analysis of the above quotes shows some similarities in the language used to describe BYT's offer inclusive; support; understanding, encouragement and guidance; all these words suggest an environment which is focused on a holistic improvement in young people's outcomes.

BYTs delivery model is remarkably self-sustaining with earned income being greater than funded income despite the range of bursary places offered and with a programme which covers a wider range of activity than the other organisations examined. There are also elements of their work which bears similarity to the offer at Contact. They have a youth board who meet weekly with the Engagement Manager and, whilst the imbedding of youth voice is not as prominent as at Contact (BYT could not be said to run as a Youth Adult Partnership), there is a strong focus on working with young people to develop offers which engage them and this feeds into their recruitment model. The youth board only meet with the adult board once per year which could indicate the minimisation of their role as described by Kirshner (2003, pg. 11). However, the fact that youth representatives also meet weekly with a member of the Senior Management Team suggests that this is not the case, and that the involvement of the young leadership team is meaningful.

BYT's artistic output again differs from that of Contact Theatre. There are six youth theatre productions per year which utilise the Young Actors group (ages 14 -18), the Young Creatives Group (ages 11-13) and the Theatre Explorers Group (ages 8-11). Productions are split between age groups with older groups encouraged to work backstage on all aspects of the production for the younger groups. There is a collegiate and structured approach which provides a significant range of practical production and performance opportunities. This model differs from Stage Directions which is entry level skill acquisition creating devised work and Contact who only have performance opportunities within their auditioned Contact Young Company.

Recruitment Model

BYT recruit via a reputational model within the community and with peer to peer recruitment via outreach and early years engagement. As highlighted through their delivery model the theatre is very much a community organisation with strong links through its family engagement programme and a clarity of provision which engages young people at an early age and seeks to develop them until the age of eighteen. The pricing model used by BYT is also a recruitment incentive and it is interesting to note that there are no Stagecoach or PQA provisions within a ten mile radius of Burnley despite provision in every other major Northwest town (Stagecoach:2021; PQA:2021).

The demographic make-up of the Youth Theatre membership is reported in a quarterly diversity report and annexed as part of both Arts Council reporting requirements[56] and Charity Commission annual reporting. During 2021 BYT had 171 Youth Theatre participants across their eight core programmes with four of the programmes full to capacity.

The demographic spectrum of the participants is:
Youth Theatre: 15% Disability, 10% BAMER and 50% from lowest 20 percentile of socio economic deprivation.
Outreach: Participants - 10% Disability, 40% BAMER and 75% lowest 20 percentile of socio economic deprivation
Audiences: Audiences - 5% Disability, 20% BAMER and 50% from lowest 20 percentile of socio economic deprivation.
Board - 15% Disability, 20% BAMER, 10% LGBTQ+ and 50% lowest 20 percentile of socio economic deprivation
Workforce - 15% Disability, 20% BAMER, 10% LGBTQ+ and 50% lowest 20 percentile of socio economic deprivation

The above statistics show how well BYT understand and engage with their local community and that their model succeeds in breaking the cycle of cultural engagement by focusing on a holistic family unit recruitment strategy. This strategy builds via the 'grapevine' model of

[56] Available under Freedom of Act 2000 upon a written FOI request to ACE

social perception as set out earlier in this chapter. This is shown in the breakdown of their participants and audiences particularly regarding the level of cultural engagements they achieve within the lowest percentiles of socio economic deprivation. A range of research shows that education level, gender, and income are considered the main socio-demographic factors that interact with demand for theatre. In analysing attendance rates, more education generates more attendance (McCarthy and Jinnett 2001), a fact also confirmed by Grisoli et al. (2010) using census information of theatregoers.

BYT have therefore achieved the statistically unlikely by attracting fifty percent of their audiences and fifty percent of their participants from the lowest socio economic percentile. BYT have a strong and focused outreach programme and as can be seen by the data provided, they target seventy five percent of their outreach efforts to the lowest socio economic percentile. It is clear from the participation and audience data that this is proving successful and, as set out in Chapter Four, the young people most likely to be at risk of reduced cultural experience are those without cultural gatekeepers at home and this aligns to lower socio economic groups (Savage et al: 2015).

The conclusions that can be drawn following an analysis of BYT's delivery and recruitment model are firstly, that BYT offers a well-structured and socially conscious delivery model which provides provision from birth to eighteen with modest class fees and regular opportunities for performance. This is a model which is more 'traditional' than others with a range of weekly workshops leading to mostly scripted performances. Whilst their business model is still dependent on funding, their ratio of funding to earned income is significantly lower than other organisations offering the same scale of work. BYT's understanding of place based working and their immediate community delivers recruitment and participant demographics which are aligned very closely with local demographics, and anomalous with cultural engagement statistics in Burnley. The place based methodology has developed over a fifty year period and is not easily replicated in the short term. Yet, significant lessons can be taken from this approach when formulating best practice recommendations, particularly when considering the impact of a holistic approach to family orientated recruitment to overturn social perceptions of arts participation.

6.4 Summary

As concluded in Chapter Four, participation in drama is of significant benefit to Group Four children and young people through the acquisition of pervasive skills. The conclusion has also been drawn that for these young people to benefit from participation, not only must they make the initial connection with drama but that must engage them to move past the initial barriers of embarrassment and shyness to begin the process of skills acquisition. This makes the delivery method as well as the recruitment method of significance.

An analysis of three differing models of youth theatre delivery: Stage Directions; Contact Theatre and Burnley Youth Theatre has identified some elements of best practice together with problem areas which impact both delivery and recruitment. All three models consistently evidenced the impact of drama has on the development of pervasive skills with measured improvements in young people's confidence, persistence, resilience, and teamwork.

Stage Directions structures a place based approach in schools with multiple stakeholders through the Local Cultural Education Partnership. This requires strong relationship building, partnership development and additional funding to facilitate. However, the success of this approach in reaching Group Four children and young people and achieving positive outcomes shows that this is a strong approach to recruitment as the participant initially engages through required activity.

Embedding youth voice within an organisation also has demonstrable impact on participant retention and on young people's outcomes as evidenced by both Contact Theatre and Burnley Youth Theatre. Youth voice also positively impacts recruitment through peer to peer modelling and programming.

Place focused delivery methods, particularly in conjunction with local LCEPs can be highly effective in reaching priority participants, as demonstrated by all three organisations, enabling them to accurately reflect the demographics of their communities. Although, without the mandated in school delivery of Stage Directions, these approaches can take a

long time to develop and require significant time and expertise to build. Burnley Youth Theatre's 'whole family' recruitment model is highly effective in connecting with under-engaged parents, shifting their perception of the arts as 'not for them' to an understanding of the benefits for their children. This transformation from 'disconnected choosers' to 'connected choosers'[57] works to change parental barriers to engagement.

Despite the organisations analysed showing a commitment to first engagements with young people and success within their own models there are also problematic areas. Contact Theatre undertake an annual audition process which will by its nature exclude priority participants who are unlikely to place themselves in a position to be judged on skills they have not yet acquired. This is somewhat mitigated by the range of drop-in sessions which can build skills and participant confidence. Contact's funding model is also highly dependent on the requirements of its core and charitable donors.

Stage Directions successfully connects with priority participants through mandated in class attendance and of the three programmes analysed, despite only being in operation for three years, has connected with thousands of Group Four children and young people. The cost of this programme is significant requiring not only requiring substantial funding but a high-level of stakeholder buy in and commitment through the LCEP.

Burnley Youth Theatre is highly successful in reaching priority participants and has a strong hybrid commercial/charitable funding model however, their workshops are not free at the point of access and whilst the fees are significantly lower than major commercial offers, they are unable to offer universal free at the point of access delivery.

Unsurprisingly, the central problematic theme which has emerged is funding, with both Stage Directions and Contact Theatre both dependent on public and/or charitable subsidy. As set out in Chapter Five, where an organisation seeks to connect with priority participants in lower socio-economic social bands the cost of that connection and of the consequent improved outcomes for young people must be met somewhere. Burnley Youth Theatre have

[57] Referencing Ball:2015 and expanding the terminology

a lower subsidy level but charge fees, albeit modest ones, for attendance which is a barrier to access.

Despite the issues isolated above, the organisations analysed have all modelled best practice elements leading to the successful recruitment of Group Four children and young people through a range of recruitment methods, from in-school provision to youth led programming and recruitment, and a whole family reputational approach. All three organisations are successful in recruiting young people who are first engagers and both Contact Theatre and Burnley Youth Theatre are Arts Council National Portfolio Organisations which endorses their high standard of delivery. These benchmarks of good practice can now be taken forward to the wider analysis of youth theatre offers which will use the following elements as comparators: cost of participation; place based outreach; embedded youth voice and recruitment methodology. The points of improvement and practical delivery implications identified, will be also used as a benchmark for the wider analysis undertaken in the following chapter.

This will place the conclusions drawn into a wider context to better refine and support recommendations for recruitment best practice. The aim of those recommendations is to provide practical steps to reduce barriers to access providing equity of opportunity for all children and young people.

Chapter 7: Identifying Wider Themes in Youth Theatre Recruitment Practice

Preceding chapters of this research have evidenced the importance of youth theatre organisations implementing thoughtful and effective recruitment practice which connects with disadvantaged and disengaged young people. The reduction of arts teaching hours in schools stems from a long history of educational policy development failing to connect the benefit of creative subjects, particularly drama, with the development of pervasive skills which boost employability and social mobility. Whilst some children and young people develop those skills through extra-curricular activity organised by parents/guardians, children and young people who do not have access to cultural and social capital development opportunities outside of school also have limited opportunities to learn them in school.

This analysis provided the rationale behind the core research question 'how can funded youth theatres ensure that they recruit the children and young people most in need of the pervasive skills taught through drama?'. I have also identified a gap in the wider perception of the value of drama, which, outside of the cultural sector is not recognised as teaching a pervasive skill set which can significantly improve children and young people's outcomes. This is an area which would benefit from further study, as the parental perception of drama as simply being actor training or 'a luxury that should not be provided through public funds' (Gainer: 2007 p.264) is one which minimises the wider role drama could have in improving educational standards and improving social mobility for Group Four children and young people.

The participant's journey through the recruitment process, examining the individual barriers faced by children and young people, including parental perceptions will be considered in Chapter Eight. This Chapter provides analysis from an organisational perspective, building on the examination of three youth theatre offers in the Chapter Six which provided a benchmark of good practice across different delivery models, and which isolated key problem areas, most particularly those caused by funding.

What the analysis in Chapter Six also clearly identified, is that effective recruitment of Group Four children and young people, those most in need of pervasive skills acquisition, is labour intensive and requires a commitment to specifically engage with young people who have either no experience or very limited experience of drama.

This chapter will firstly revisit the methodology for the sampling of the data used in the wider youth theatre analysis and then provide an overview of recruitment practice trends within different youth theatre settings. Having isolated any similarities in best practice and any recurrent barriers to access, consideration will be given to how these can be further distilled into recommendations for best practice at the practical delivery stage of a youth theatre offer.

This comparative analysis will look at recruitment methods and the structure of the youth theatre offer to ascertain how organisations approach recruiting children and young people and whether consideration is given to connecting with priority participants. As with the programmes already analysed the comparator organisations all sit within England so that they are within the area covered by the Arts Council although it is clearly beyond the scope of this research to complete an exhaustive analysis of every youth theatre offer within England. Analysing offers within different settings provides a breadth of analysis, accordingly, offers will be grouped in the following categories: Producing Theatres; Receiving Houses & Arts Centres; Specialist Youth Theatre; Community & Amateur Theatre.

When assessing which youth theatre programmes have successful recruitment strategies the word ‘successful’ should be defined. In Chapter Four, the problematic issue of the increased advantage gap was connected to the lack of pervasive skills taught in mainstream education and this highlighted the importance of skill acquisition through extra-curricular drama delivery. For Group Four children and young people to connect to an extra-curricular programme there are two basic requirements, awareness of the programme and barrier free access to it. How a participant may become aware of the offer and their pathway to attendance will be considered in Chapter Eight, whilst this chapter provides an overview of the wider youth theatre landscape.

It is acknowledged that Youth Theatre programmes may consider themselves successful simply by having a full programme with waiting lists or by having a strong artistic output which puts young people on a pathway to success. There is of course merit in any positive artistic interaction with children and young people which supports their skills acquisition and development. However, a distinction should be drawn with funded programmes who are able to offer provision at a significantly lower cost than commercial offers which are designed to make profit. If these offers have been funded as part of an Arts Council delivery plan, then they have committed to widen participation and specifically to:

- Widen and improve opportunities for children and young people to take part in creative activities outside schools.
- Support children and young people to develop their creative skills and potential.
- Work collaboratively through place based partnerships to support and involve communities in high quality culture [to] improve creative and cultural education for children and young people (ACE:2020)

If funded organisations are to meet their obligations under the Arts Council delivery plan, then they should be attempting to connect with children and young people who do not currently have access to creative activity. Accordingly, success in the context of this research is measured by the ease with which Group Four children and young people can connect with a funded offer and develop pervasive skills without encountering additional barriers.

Chapter Six provided a benchmark of best practice elements, and this chapter will use a wider data set of organisations to compare against those findings. It is necessary to consider what constitutes an effective comparator as the constitution of the wider data set will have significant bearing on the outcome of this research. Bartlett and Vavrus have set out a suggested framework for comparison in social policy research which proposes a heuristic utilising two different logics of comparison (2020). Utilising a comparative case study avoids over complication of the data by 'encouraging comparison of how similar policies and practises unfold across sites at roughly the same level or scale' (Ibid p1), and then considering changes over time to situate the process which is under consideration.

The timeline for the comparison of these organisations has already been set within Chapter Four which isolated the reductionist approach to the acquisition of essential pervasive skills at a macro level, both through implemented education policy and the rhetoric utilised to describe that policy. The comparison made between youth theatre providers therefore focuses on their current recruitment model within the policy and funding landscape already detailed in Chapter Five.

To be an effective comparator to the organisations already analysed there must therefore be similarities in the scale and type of wider organisation. The professional organisations analysed are all Arts Council funded with a range of funding levels similar to Burnley Youth Theatre at the lower end of the spectrum and to Contact Theatre at the top of the spectrum. Most of the organisations analysed are also within the Arts Council North region to provide effective place based comparisons with the principal organisations examined, those outside of the North Region have place demographics comparable to those of the North based organisations.

One hundred and fifty organisations were considered for analysis, of that total data set sixty-five were disregarded as they had no regular children or young people's offer. The remaining eighty-five organisations were then assessed for their barriers to priority participant access through the following data: application and/or audition process; fees charged; recruitment frequency; whether they operate a waiting list and whether they allow drop in participation. This data is set out in a table in Appendix Three. This group of eighty five organisations will be referred to as the wider data set. Similarities and trends were identified within the different groupings (e.g., producing theatres; community youth theatre etc); and compared with the data from the three youth theatre offers chosen as a benchmark. Thirty organisations were then chosen for a more detailed analysis of their delivery model and recruitment process.

Within this group of thirty youth theatre offers (a multiple of ten times the three principal organisations analysed) fifteen are producing theatres; four are arts centres which receive theatre or simply receiving theatres, seven are specialist youth theatre offers on a

professional scale and two are amateur run youth theatres. As set out above these organisations have been chosen as comparators because of their funding status and size with all professional organisations bar one, the Liverpool Empire[58], in receipt of either core funding as an NPO or project grant funding. Liverpool Empire was utilised as an example of an offer within the professional commercial sector. The amateur run youth theatres have been chosen as being comparable in numbers of participants and scale of offer to a range of the professional programmes.

7.1 The wider Youth Theatre landscape

As set out above, and within the benchmarking in Chapter Six, a successful offer would have the fewest barriers to engagement in place for a Group Four young person. For example: free at the point of access or subsidised places; outreach or engagement which enabled the participant to try the activity easily; peer to peer recruitment and a clear pathway for participants to develop their own voice.

Producing Theatres

A producing theatre can be defined as an organisation which programmes, rehearses, and creates their own work. Some of these organisations also receive work from other theatres, touring companies, or artists but a proportion of their productions are delivered in-house. These theatres usually have their own technical; design and wardrobe departments or hire these craft creatives for each production.

The youth theatre offers of eighteen producing theatres have been analysed, thirteen in the North of England, one in the Southwest and four in the Midlands. Six of these organisations are delivering work which meets the best practice criteria set out above. They show a clear commitment to widening access within the communities in which they are situated and to reducing barriers to that access for participants. Those theatres are:

- Stephen Joseph Theatre – Scarborough

[58] The Liverpool Empire is a commercial Theatre run as a receiving house for mid to large scale touring work by Ambassador Theatre Group.

- Bristol Old Vic
- Nottingham Playhouse
- Derby Theatre
- Leeds Playhouse
- Lawrence Batley Theatre - Huddersfield

The Youth Theatre programmes highlighted above within producing theatres have several things in common, strong outreach and delivery of sessions directly within the community; a range of skills based workshops and performance offers at low cost or with bursary places available. There are also clear efforts made by these theatres to connect with priority participants. For example, the Stephen Joseph Theatre runs a free to access outreach youth theatre, for ages eight to twelve years, in a community centre setting, Eastfield. The community centre is within the area classified as the most deprived within Scarborough[59]. These outreach sessions at Eastfield take place in the same venue as the local Citizens Advice Bureau and other community services including pre-school provision. These sessions provide an excellent access opportunity within the community where Group Four children and young people are most likely to live and makes drama provision visible. Once participants have accessed this offer, if they have enjoyed the sessions, then they will have the connection to the SJT which makes attending the core youth theatre offer based at the theatre more likely.

Given the complications of funding highlighted in the previous chapter, it must be noted that this outreach programme is commercially sponsored and therefore not funded through the SJT's core funds.

There is a similar example at Bristol Old Vic who have two principal outreach programmes, Young Company City which is a programme designed to build project work with schools and

[59] Index of Multiple Deprivation based on last full study in 2019. The Index of Multiple Deprivation considers a range of factors including income; health; education; crime and housing and compares these across all postcodes within a Local Authority. The postcode with the highest score on the index is ranked one within the Authority and the Authority is then given a rank so that it can be compared with other Local Authorities regionally and nationally.

organisations within Bristol and has a similar model to Stage Directions, and Young SixSix which offers pathways to theatre that young people may not have considered before and is accessed through application or referral. Similarly to the SJT, one of these projects, Young SixSix is sponsored by a charitable donation rather than core funding.

Nottingham Playhouse has a paid core youth theatre offer but also runs the Shine project which is a direct outreach programme in areas with multiple deprivation factors. This project provision offers pathways to Group Four children and young people particularly given that the stated mission of the project is to support -

> the creativity and cultural capital of a huge range of young people including those with disabilities, refugees and asylum seekers, young people in hospital and at risk and those living in challenging circumstances (Nottingham Playhouse: 2023)

This is the only reference presented by any organisation's youth theatre offer to the acquisition of cultural capital. It could be theorised that the stated understanding of the importance of developing cultural capital provides the motivation for their strong outreach offer. This is a mixed recruitment approach which works to balance the needs of all four Groups of young people through the variety of provision and the commitment to outreach.

Derby Theatre, Leeds Playhouse and Lawrence Batley Theatre all have strong schools outreach models, Derby's Reimagine project, similarly to Stage Directions; Shine at Nottingham Playhouse and Young Company City at Bristol Old Vic ensures that connection is made in school settings which reduce barriers for access and provides opportunities for Group Four children and young people to try drama.

None of the six producing theatres modelling equitable recruitment practice hold auditions which is key barrier identified at other theatres. For example, Leicester Curve, despite some community outreach, holds an intensive annual audition process for a paid youth theatre offer for children and young people "with a passion for the performing arts" (Leicester Curve: 2023). This is a high quality, over-subscribed programme but although it is an Arts

Council NPO organisation and should have some focus on widening engagement there are significant barriers to access for Group Four children and young people.

Whilst six producing theatres have been identified as modelling strong outreach practice there is a common issue which is problematic, the separation of free to access outreach programmes from the fee paying core youth theatre offer. When considering the effectiveness of recruitment practice, it must be considered how a priority participant might graduate from a free outreach offer to a core[60] youth theatre offer. Some of the programmes also have waiting lists for their core youth theatre and new participants can only take up a place once existing children and young people have left the programme. If a participant has attended an outreach offer and wishes to progress into the youth theatre, then having to go onto a waiting list could impact their momentum and be a disconnecting event in their development pathway.

A second barrier is the costs of the core Youth Theatre programmes which range from £110 per term to £35 per term. Whilst there are some bursaries it may not be possible to meet the number of requests from graduates of the outreach projects while the model is on a fee paying basis. This is where free delivery programmes such as Stage Directions and Contact Theatre model equity of access, as there are no fees and no requirement to apply for a bursary which means that all the participants enter the programme on an equal footing. However, if a Theatre is only able to offer outreach with additional sponsorship as in the case of the SJT in Scarborough and Bristol Old Vic, then consideration must be given to a model where those who are able to pay do so, and those costs are fixed at rate which enables a percentage of bursaries on a break even basis if alternative funding cannot be found. For Group Four children and young people to develop within youth theatre offers the pathway must be there to enable them to progress from outreach attendee to fully fledged youth theatre member in a way which considers how to effectively balance their needs with those of Group One and Two children and young people.

[60] For the purposes of this research a core youth theatre offer is the principal youth theatre offer delivered at the venue which progresses through age bands and is not a specific outreach project.

Receiving Houses & Arts Centres

A receiving house is defined as an organisation which programmes the work of theatre companies and producers independent of the venue. The work programmed is usually touring productions of plays and musicals together with entertainment, variety, and dance work. These organisations usually have their own technical departments to support the incoming productions, but they do not have their own artistic or creative departments.

Some receiving houses have strong creative engagement offers which provide youth, community, and outreach work. However, this research has confirmed that producing theatres are far more likely to have a creative engagement offer which extends to youth theatre. Of the seventy-two Receiving Houses considered in the initial wide scoping of this research[61], thirty-two had no youth theatre offer at all, eleven only ran a paid summer workshop for one or two weeks and four outsourced their children and young people's offer to external suppliers, in one case a PQA franchise school.

There were twenty-nine receiving houses which ran a youth theatre programme and the common thread with the models being delivered was their commercial focus, no external outreach, and the high cost of participation fees. Costs ranged from £435 a year at the Grand Theatre Leeds, £600 per year at the Theatre Royal Bath, and £885 per year at the Theatre Royal Wakefield. These offers, with few exceptions which will be discussed in more detail below, were firmly aimed at Group One and Group Two children and young people whose parents can afford the fees and who are likely, as theorised in Chapters Four and Five to already be culturally conversant.

The offers of three receiving houses, two in the North of England and one in the Midlands have been identified as modelling good practice. These organisations are delivering work which meets some or all of the benchmarking criteria with a commitment to widening access and reducing barriers to that access for participants. Those organisations are

- Royal & Derngate, Northampton
- Blackpool Grand

[61] See Appendix Three for full details and listing of all theatres considered during the scoping exercise.

- Theatre Porto – Ellesmere Port

The above organisations have strong place focused offers which either connect widely with local schools, in the case of Blackpool Grand and the Royal & Derngate or are embedded in the local community through the ease of access of their offer and their location, in the case of Theatre Porto. A further common feature of these anomalous receiving House/Arts centre models are the strong external partnerships they have built which support their participatory programmes to connect with priority participants and build first engagements.

The Royal & Derngate is a lead partner of their Local Cultural Education Partnership and has worked with them to produce an After School Theatre Hub and a Saturday Skills programme. Both these programmes are open access and demonstrate commitment to embedding youth voice with a Youth Panel and Youth Leadership programme. This is a very wide ranging offer which offers creative, technical and performance workshops without auditions. They also offer a facilitators training programme which can lead to paid work.

Blackpool Grand have developed a strong partnership with the RSC Schools programme and engage with more than six hundred local children per year with the free to access offer. This is an effective outreach programme with a high quality partner delivering a memorable experience over a period of months for the young participants. The skills learned within the programme are beneficial and the positive connection to the theatre could result in attendance at Youth Theatre Workshops. However, their core youth theatre offer is over-subscribed which underlines the repeated pattern observed of strong outreach offers which may attract Group Four children and young people who then have no funded pathway to continue to advance their skills if they have developed an interest in drama.

There is a different dynamic at Theatre Porto (formerly Action Transport Theatre), in Ellesmere Port. Although the town is in Cheshire West, a very affluent wider area, Ellesmere Port itself is within the top 10% of deprivation levels in the country across multiple indices (IMD:2019). Theatre Porto have built a strong set of hyper local partnerships with the Local Authority, neighbouring schools, and local artists. The theatre building is open to the public

throughout the day at the centre of a park and recruitment is through community outreach with an open door – 'come and drop in' approach which makes the most of the open setting of their building. Their ethos is, similarly to Contact, theatre 'by with and for young people' and their commitment to ease of access and a free offer creates a youth theatre model with few barriers and which young people can opt in and out of depending on their circumstances. Yet, whilst the youth theatre offer runs to from age seven to eighteen and is based on skills development there are limited wider performance opportunities for those participants who wish to develop further.

There is a wider thread emerging within this analysis of the need to connect outreach offers with the core youth theatre offer and/or to build pathways for Group Four children and young people to develop their skills. Whilst there are a few limited offers such as Contact and Theatre Porto which commit to free at the point of access delivery these are rare and can result in limited numbers. As highlighted in Chapter Six the commonality underlying a range of challenging elements is funding. Connecting with priority participants in lower socio-economic social bands is costly, and the price of the consequent improved outcomes for young people must be met somewhere. In most funded youth theatre offers that is through subsidised outreach programmes and fee paying core youth theatre offers with limited bursaries. This is problematic because it is more usually the participants towards whom that outreach should be targeted, Group Four children and young people, who may be unable to meet the costs of the fees either through financial circumstances or because they are unsupported at home. This means that these young people may get an opportunity to try an activity through outreach that they are then unable to pursue unless they are fortunate enough to obtain a bursary.

The bleak conclusion which could be drawn is that the majority of funded core youth theatre provision will be populated with children and young people who can afford the fees. Whilst there are more affordable options such as Burnley Youth Theatre at £3.75 a session there are high quality offers highlighted in this Chapter whose fees would be prohibitive for many e.g., £10 per session at both Leeds Playhouse and Bristol Old Vic.

Specialist Youth Theatre; Community & Amateur Theatre

The final category of youth theatre offers examined takes in two types of organisations, firstly, specialist youth theatre companies which are managed and facilitated by paid staff and may receive funding from the Arts Council or charitable trusts and foundations. Secondly, community or amateur companies who are run predominately by volunteers within community groups or settings. The factor which is common to both these groups is that their whole offer is focused solely on children and young people.

There were forty-three organisations in these categories which were considered in the initial scoping exercise, thirteen of these were specialist youth theatre companies and thirty were community/amateur companies. The specialist youth theatre companies had clear best practice elements with a focus on inclusion, diversity, and equality of access with a mission focused on increasing engagement. These organisations focused clearly on participant need and in the following Chapter consideration will be given to how a young person centred approach can inform a wider participatory offer. Strong practice was seen across all thirteen specialist companies analysed and examples of these organisations are:

- M6 Theatre in Rochdale
- 20 Stories High in Liverpool
- Lewisham Youth Theatre
- ChickenShed Theatre in London

All these offers have commonalities with the benchmarked best practice offers in Chapter Six. 20 Stories High has a very similar practice model to Contact Theatre with an emphasis on co-creation and youth voice and a highly diverse company which delivers work focused on issues relevant to young adults. Their mission is that ‘everybody’s got a story to tell and their own way of telling it’ (20storieshigh: 2023). Both 20 Stories High and M6 create professional productions which tour schools, community and youth settings as well as having a participatory youth theatre offer. The discourse they use to describe their offers is very participant focused, particularly 20 Stories High who utilise phrases such as ‘collaborate

with you' and 'you can join', speaking directly to the young person with a conversational, first person connection which differs from most of the offers analysed.

They are set in similar urban demographic areas and although they have slightly different focuses to their participant pathways, they both model strong partnership working which is a repeated characteristic of best practice organisations. Both organisations work closely with the Local Cultural Education Partnerships and a network of local schools to deliver work and 20 Stories High also work closely with theatre sector organisations, the Unity, and Liverpool Everyman to build talent development pathways.

ChickenShed and Lewisham Youth Theatre have models with elements similar to both Burnley Youth Theatre and Contact Theatre with an open access wide ranging offer with elements of youth voice. ChickenShed was set up as a single Youth Theatre in 1974, the year after Burnley Youth Theatre and has now progressed to a very wide ranging offer with a membership of 600 young people across age ranges, venues, and experience groups. ChickenShed has a fully inclusive model with able bodied children and young people working with disabled and SEND participants in integrated sessions. Their stated mission, 'to create and promote a wider and deeper understanding of inclusive theatre practise' (ChickenShed:2023) is demonstrated by their creation of ShedLink, which is a network of independent organisations which operate the ChickenShed inclusive creative method.

Lewisham Youth Theatre is similarly inclusive, albeit a smaller organisation where co-creation, and creativity are centred, utilising similar outreach models to both Contact and Burnley Youth Theatre. The demographics in Lewisham are very similar to those in Manchester, Salford, and Burnley. Lewisham also runs a peer mentoring scheme and creative hubs which deliver workshops on backstage skills and creative writing and specialist performance workshops.

Both these youth theatres are oversubscribed however, unlike most of the other organisations analysed they do not simply ask that prospective participants go onto a waiting list. ChickenShed operate a system of drop-in sessions for children and young people

who want to try the offer and may be waiting for a place which provides a pathway between outreach and the core offer. This drop in option provides a solution to linking outreach offers and oversubscribed core offers.

Lewisham have a published recruitment strategy which sets out their criteria for participation in their projects and how they allocate places when they are over-subscribed. This strategy is the only formal recruitment policy encountered across the 150 organisations considered. Within the policy[62] there is a clear commitment to Group Four children and young people, and they do not guarantee a place for returning participants, stating:

> We want to make sure that as many young people can benefit from our work as possible, and that returning as well as new members have a chance to interact with new people and make new friends. In order to provide the same opportunity for everyone, we ask that all register their interest for each project (LYT: 2023)

They state, (Ibid p2), that "our projects are often very oversubscribed with sometimes twice as many people registering interest as we have places available." By refreshing the whole cohort at the start of each project[63], Lewisham Youth Theatre can ensure that the places are allocated in a way which serves the project and ensures that waiting list times are not dependent upon participants leaving the group and freeing up spaces.

This analysis has identified the recurrent problem of blending free to access outreach offers with a principal youth theatre offer to provide pathways for Group Four children and young people. Lewisham are the only offer identified who formally commit to refreshing the entire cohort on a regular basis to ensure equity of access.

They also indicate that funders criteria are a factor with the full criteria for allocation being stated as follows:

[62] LYT's recruitment policy is published on their website, a link to which is included in the detailed breakdown of all the organisations considered within Appendix Three of this research.
[63] Information available suggests that there are usually two projects per year per age band (LYT: 2023)

We want each group to have a mix of:

- boys and girls
- Young people from across the borough
- Existing and new members
- Those experienced in drama as well as those who need extra support
- Those who will increase the diversity of Lewisham Youth Theatre

We also consider:

- The goals and targets of our funders
- The needs of partner organisations who refer young people
- If your child has taken part before, their attendance record and likelihood to be able to commit to the project
- The order in which interest in the project is registered

(Ibid p1)

These criteria provide a strong methodology for balancing the needs of participants, partner organisations and funders requirements. This is a refreshing and considered approach to recruitment which despite Lewisham Youth Theatre describing themselves as 'a small organisation with a limited amount of funding and capacity for running projects' (Ibid p2 para 6) is particularly evolved. Their method requires a careful consideration of multiple criteria before allocating a place to each participant and clearly factors in the needs of participants within that process.

The considered approach of both Lewisham Youth Theatre and ChickenShed to involve participants at every stage of their connection to the organisation highlights that there are ways in which recruitment and retention can be managed cohesively.

The community/amateur companies had the widest range in quality and size of offer which is perhaps unsurprising given that many are run by volunteers as a hobby or a means of

recruiting younger members for adult amateur groups[64]. The following organisations deliver youth theatre which is of a standard (based on outcomes, organisational depth, and commitment to participants) commensurate with those delivered in professional settings, with a strong understanding of their locality and the needs of their participants:

- CATS Youth Theatre
- Mossley AODS

Both these offers are not for profit and administratively staffed by volunteers with some paid freelance professional tutors. Both focus on basic skills and musical theatre production with mission statements not dissimilar to those of the commercial franchise offers. Both have proved highly effective through connection with their local communities in offering a full programme with minimal barriers to access resulting in a strong Group Four offer.

CATS is a volunteer run Amateur Youth Theatre in Bolton based in a disused church in an area of significant deprivation which the company have gradually renovated over a fifteen year period. There is a strong connection to place, and the demographics of the Group are reflective of the local area with a commitment to an open offer and recruitment through peer to peer connection. They encourage parents to become volunteers and their whole family approach is like that of Burnley Youth Theatre. This group has a remarkable level of success with past participants making viable industry careers following successful auditions for drama schools - this is not however the stated vision of the organisation which is to provide access and 'transferable skills' (CATS: 2023).

Mossley AODS offer is based within an amateur theatre society with their own venue and utilising a range of professional tutors paid within the structure of a not for profit setting. The organisation is again well embedded in the community, an interesting aspect of this offer, and the reason for their inclusion within this chapter is that they celebrate youth theatre alumni both in creative industries and those who have used pervasive skills to

[64] Based on mission statements and criteria for the Little Theatre Guild, Greater Manchester Drama Federation and The National Operatic and Dramatic Association.

succeed in other areas (MAODS: 2023). There is a clear understanding of the way in which they are supporting their participants to develop pervasive skills to achieve academically and within a range of careers unrelated to theatre. This connection to skills development and a strong place based ethos creates an offer with strong outcomes.

Having considered the full range of wider comparator organisations a fuller picture of the current youth theatre landscape has emerged. It should be reiterated that a successful youth theatre offer, in the context of this research, would have the fewest barriers in place for Group Four children and young people in terms of cost, awareness and access and would also facilitate a clear pathway for all participants, both first and secondary engagers, to develop their own voice.

The wider analysis has shown that producing theatres are much more likely than receiving houses and arts centres to have a youth theatre offer. This is a significant factor in the youth theatre landscape as there are far fewer producing houses than other theatre venues (ACE:2023) (Theatre's Trust: 2023). Although there is no definitive database of theatre provision in the UK, a piece of work which the Theatre's Trust is working towards, (Ibid: web np), an analysis undertaken for the Arts Council in 2016 highlighted the decline in the producing house model and that this subset was the smallest within approximately four hundred theatre buildings in England and Wales (ACE: 2016 p.4). These figures consider the professional landscape and do not take into account community spaces where there may also be youth provision. However, if the smallest subset of theatres is the one most likely to provide youth theatre provision, then logically the range and depth of provision is limited to those venues who are committed to providing it and exacerbates the problems of access to funded drama provision for those children and young people in need of it. The number of funded youth theatre offers available is unknown and would benefit from further research to better identify local and regional gaps in provision.

Producing Theatres common strengths are seen in outreach and community delivery together with skills based workshops and performance opportunity offers. Receiving

House/Arts Centres common strengths were their connections to place based working and an understanding of community need.

Both these comparator groups had similar barriers to access most particularly with the practical pathway for a Group Four participant to progress from a free outreach offer to a core youth theatre offer. This issue was exacerbated by core youth theatre offers being oversubscribed with waiting lists for places.

Another key factor common to these comparator groups is the limited numbers of bursary places on paid offers. This is a significant barrier for Group Four children and young people and as theorised in Chapter Five this means that the balance of places are more likely to be allocated to Group One and Group Two children and young people whose parents are more adept at meeting their children's needs but who are already culturally conversant.

The Specialist Youth Theatres and Community Organisations analysed had the fewest barriers in place showing a commonality with the youth voice and place centred approaches of Contact Theatre and Burnley Youth Theatre combined with free or low cost offers. These organisations also demonstrated a clearer understanding of the need to reduce barriers through thoughtful recruitment policies, open door approaches and an understanding of the impact of waiting lists.

In summary, elements common to successful offers are include a commitment to open access through place centred outreach, drop-in sessions and free or low cost delivery. A pattern has also emerged through this wider analysis of youth theatre provision that where good practice is identified and where there are negative or challenging areas of that practice these often relate to funding.

7.2 Financing first engagements within funded delivery plans

Funding youth theatre programmes will always be a significant factor within organisations as, unlike for example production costs, which a theatre would hope to recoup through ticket sales, the output of a youth theatre programme does not usually have a financial

component. The costs of the youth theatre programme e.g., rehearsal space, facilitators, materials, showing or production costs, must be funded either through participation fees, core funding from the theatre or an external source such as a sponsor or a trusts and foundations grant. This practical problem is shown across the published accounts of all the principal organisations[65] considered within this research.

Chapter Four set out the long running issue developing throughout modern educational policy, a focus on the measurable through a 'knowledge based curriculum' rather than the development of essential pervasive skills with no real consideration given to the end outcome for most students. The unpleasant reality faced by arts organisations funding any first engagement strategy will be that only a minority are able to be served by funded programmes due to the already significant strain upon diminished budgets and the significant cost of developing first engagement strategies. And yet, as set out earlier in this chapter funded organisations delivering youth theatre will not be meeting the Arts Council delivery plan if they do not widen access for children and young people within their offers.

If a Group Four participant wishes to attend Youth Theatre, then the barrier of cost could be an insurmountable one accordingly, the Youth Theatre offers which are free at the point of access are those which are the most likely to provide opportunities to those participants. Most of the Youth Theatre programmes analysed require payment by the participant with only eleven[66] free at the point of access offers. Whilst it is possible that a Group Four young person may be able to independently apply for a bursary or reduced place, they are less likely to have the pervasive skill set necessary to undertake this exercise in self-advocacy without access to the provision in the first place. Accordingly, where there is an egalitarian approach to funding these participants are far more likely to be successful at accessing the offer.

Clear instances have also been highlighted where youth theatre offers are opportunities to

[65] Those organisations detailed within Chapter Six and Seven of this research who deliver youth theatre programmes.
[66] See Appendix Three

increase profit for organisations charging Group One and Two parents up to £885[67] a year. There are also programmes which successfully utilise commercial sponsorship to fund outreach in an area with a significantly deprived demographic. The sponsorship relieves the pressure on internal funding and provides barrier free access for Group Four participants, creating a connection with the Youth Theatre programme in a place based setting. Once the young participant wishes to access the core youth theatre offer however, the issue of payment and bursary application arises once again, although, in these circumstances the participant can connect with facilitators in the placed based setting to obtain support. They will also have developed skills to support themselves within the sessions they have attended at the outreach offer.

There is an argument to be made that where an organisation is being funded by public funds through the Arts Council and their application for funding included a commitment to children and young people that their youth theatre offer should reduce barriers to access to a minimum. If they are working to widen access and improve creative opportunities for children and young people then, it could be argued, that they can only meet that target effectively by working with Group Three and Group Four children and young people. Group One and Group Two are already being supported to access culture and creative opportunity through supportive family networks and there is, as identified in Chapter Five a range of commercial drama provision which can meet their needs. Although there may be circumstances in which Group Two children and young people need the additional financial support of a bursary or assisted place, they will be supported in that application by their parents/guardians. To widen opportunity, organisations must be seeking to work with priority participants, as defined in Chapter Five, who have not previously connected with their offer.

Regardless of the argument made above, the simple fact remains that if a priority participant has access to a free place at youth theatre, the cost of that place must be met in some way. In economic terms, this is opportunity costs at work, (Stone: 2015), if the implicit costs in labour and the explicit costs in rehearsal room space, light, heat etc cost £X per

[67] Theatre Royal Wakefield, see Appendix Three

participant, then to fund a free place, the organisation cannot spend £X elsewhere in the budget. A concluding recommendation, expanded upon in Chapter Nine, is that funded youth theatre must have core funding from the Arts Council ringfenced to guarantee free at the point of access provision for children and young people. This would ensure that organisations who seek public funding for this work are required to broaden engagement to include children and young people who would otherwise be prohibited from attending because of cost. There is currently no requirement for organisations to specifically offer free places.

It is also argued that within that calculation of the cost per head of the offer must be the cost of the outreach necessary to reduce barriers for priority participants, as the work undertaken by benchmarked organisations who have connected with Local Cultural Education Partnerships, wider local networks and communities is one of the key success factors identified throughout this research.

7.3. Youth theatre recruitment strategies

Having considered three youth theatre programmes in close detail and then a wider range of youth theatre as comparators, themes have emerged with key similarities between 'successful offers'[68], being:

- A recruitment approach focused on building a connection to the organisation through place based knowledge, local networks, and community delivery.
- Delivery either in schools or at after school clubs with multiple stakeholders through the Local Cultural Education Partnership requires strong relationship building, partnership development and additional funding to facilitate.
- Embedding youth voice within an organisation has demonstrable impact on the retention and outcomes of young people. Youth voice also positively impacts recruitment through peer to peer modelling and programming.
- Place focused delivery methods can be highly effective in reaching Group Four children and young people and enabling organisations to better reflect the

[68] As defined above

demographics of their communities. However, these can take a long time to embed and require significant time, expertise, and funding to develop.

- Utilising a 'whole family' recruitment model is highly effective in connecting with under-engaged parents to shift their perception of the arts as 'not for them' to an understanding of the benefits for their children. The transformation from 'disconnected choosers' to 'connected choosers'[69] works to change parental barriers to engagement.

Chapter Nine uses these similarities to develop best practice guidelines for effective youth theatre recruitment. They not only build on the wider analysis of youth theatre undertaken in this chapter but on the detailed analysis in Chapter Six of Stage Directions, Contact Theatre and Burnley Youth Theatre. These elements take key strengths from those models, confirmed by the comparators in the wider analysis, which can be extrapolated and simplified into a framework to support best practice.

Consideration is also given to the common problems encountered within the analysis, specifically how to deal with over-subscribed groups and waiting lists; free places only being available on outreach not on core offers; and a lack of a clear pathway from outreach offers to core youth theatre. These common problems are specific to those organisations who are trying to connect with priority participants. The analysis undertaken has shown the prevalence of a similar model of practice across the wider analysis group which predominately serves Group One and Group Two children and young people. This observation provides a provocation to consider why the uniformity exists across so many of the youth theatre offers considered within the process of this research. This could simply be because the model works for the space. The venue offers youth theatre, hires a facilitator, produces a budget, costs the workshop sessions, advertises, and then charges fees to the participants who have applied to attend. This model was the most common one encountered at a wide range of venues from the Octagon in Bolton, the Theatre Royal Wakefield, Chichester Festival Theatre and more than seventy percent of all the youth theatre programmes considered. Some of these organisations had outreach programmes or

[69] Referencing Ball:2017 and expanding the terminology

more diverse groups in addition to the core youth theatre offer but the central offer was recruited for and delivered in an almost identical framework.

At the outset of this chapter, a key finding was highlighted, the gap in the wider perception of the value of drama, which, outside of the cultural sector and some academic studies[70] is not recognised as teaching a pervasive skill set which can significantly improve children and young people's outcomes. The uniformity of the recruitment practice within this wider analysis, has highlighted that an evidenced commitment to recruiting priority participants and providing equity of access is the exception and not the rule. This raises several possibilities, firstly, that there is standardised thinking in managing youth theatre offers which does not consider the importance of who is accessing the offer. Secondly, that organisations are aware that some groups of young people would benefit more than others from youth theatre, but they do not have the resources to connect that knowledge with access to their own youth theatre offer. Thirdly, that there is a disconnection between a clear understanding that drama can make a significant impact on children and young people's outcomes and a lack of understanding of the wider societal perception of the value of drama. These possibilities will be considered further in Chapter Eight when considering the case for change within the youth theatre sector, particularly when considering why an organisation with a fully booked youth theatre company which is financially viable would alter this approach to ensure equity of access for priority participants.

The recommendations made in Chapters Eight and Nine seek to be a provocation for organisations to treat engagement and recruitment as a vital tool, not only in improving outcomes for children and young people but in building resilience within the sector itself.

[70] DICE: 2010; Kalıpcı, M. (2016); Koyluoglu, N. (2010).

Chapter Eight – Participant Engagement – The Pathway to Youth Theatre Recruitment

Throughout this thesis, I have examined how youth theatres recruit participants and why it is important that those organisations consider not only how they recruit but who they recruit. I have done so to ask, 'how can funded youth theatres ensure that they recruit the children and young people most in need of the pervasive skills taught through drama?'.

By centring funded youth theatre as an access point for pervasive skills development, I have highlighted the need for priority participants to have access to those funded youth theatre offers. By providing a conceptual model of best practice I offer a novel approach to the issue of pervasive skill acquisition for priority participants, not only by revisions to the discourse in this area, but by providing a practical recruitment framework for organisations and funders.

This chapter will draw upon the analysis of youth theatre best practice summarised in Chapters Six and Seven, to formulate best practice recommendations for youth theatre recruitment. Firstly, I analyse the recruitment journey of a participant from first awareness of a youth theatre offer to completing an initial session. Within this analysis I will consider the impact of any barriers they may encounter on their engagement pathway. Secondly, I examine how wider considerations including policy and funding factors, standardised sector models and wider perceptions of drama provision might impact the process of barrier reduction. Finally, I define the key elements which would constitute a framework for recruitment best practice.

I have classified a demographic of young people as Group Four children and young people and, as previously defined, the characteristics of this demographic group are: - those children and young people who have had few cultural access opportunities; whose parents are not culturally engaged and/or unsupportive of their attendance at cultural activities and who may not fall within targeted classifications. Whilst there are other demographic groups which organisations may also class as priority participants, for example global majority communities; adult participants in areas of low cultural engagement or disabled participants, this research is solely concerned with children and young people and any

reference to priority participants within these best practice proposals refers to that demographic group.

Key factors that facilitate connection with priority participants are:

- The formulation of a clear and effective strategy for first engagement recruitment in addition to any general recruitment strategy. This ensures that priority participants are being reached and the organisation is not simply recruiting participants who are already culturally engaged.
- Setting recruitment targets for first engagement with reference to local demographics and in consultation with area experts e.g., the Local Cultural Education Partnership (LCEP).
- Creating a structured youth theatre offer which allows for skills acquisition from the point of access but also caters for young people who are entering as secondary engagers.

Consideration of the factors above might suggest a two tier approach to engagement such as the separate outreach and core youth theatre offer which has been encountered many times within this research. However, the problem of priority participants encountering barriers when progressing from an outreach offer to a more advanced youth theatre class has also been apparent. What has been made clear by the core organisational studies undertaken is that there are strategies which avoid these barriers for priority participants, and which also consider children and young people's differing needs and requirements. Accordingly, I propose a practical recruitment methodology which allows both priority participants and secondary engagers to access the youth theatre offer alongside one another.

The practical steps required to create an effective recruitment framework must be considered from the perspective of the participant as well as the organisation[71]. In

[71] For ease this research will refer to those theatres, arts centres, companies etc who produce youth theatre as 'organisations' or 'the organisation.'

participatory engagement, as with the production of a piece of theatre, the meaning of the activity offered is lost if no-one experiences it. In this way the participants, or audiences, may hold the balance of power as theorised by Foucault in his work on the two way nature of power structures (1982, p 542).

> 'What defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action that does not act directly and immediately on others instead, it acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on possible or actual future or present actions' (1982; p540).

In this way, all the 'actions' undertaken by the organisation to recruit participants to a youth theatre programme impact upon the likelihood of priority participants becoming aware of and responding to the offer. This can take the form either of multiple barriers to engagement or multiple incentives to attend or a mixture of both, all of which will impact the likelihood of the young person accessing and benefitting from the youth theatre offer.

As examined in Chapter Seven, organisations have adopted recruitment approaches which serve them, providing them with full youth theatre companies and waiting lists, why would they then alter this to a more complex approach or one which may not work as well for them? Change theory explains that the impetus for change should come from an acknowledged gap between the organisation's actions and their mission statement (Stamford PACS: 2020). Change can therefore only be driven by an organisation acknowledging a divergence between their current actions and their desired outcomes. If organisations do not acknowledge that there is a problem with their current recruitment methodology, i.e., a lack of focus on first engagements, then they are unlikely to alter their recruitment practice to mitigate this problem.

Where an organisation seeks to meet the outcomes of funders like the Arts Council and widen their engagement base then they must acknowledge a need to change their recruitment process to achieve that outcome if it is not currently met. However, as funders, including the Arts Council, do not require evidence of this to be reported in relation to participatory work, there is no check and balance which highlights whether an organisation

is successful in recruiting priority participants. Rune Todnem By's critical analysis of change management reviewed a range of studies which all found that organisational change 'tends to be reactive…and often triggered by a period of organisational crisis' (Todnem By: 2005 p370).

This supports the conclusion that an effective approach to priority participant recruitment is the exception rather than the rule across the cultural sector because there is no external agency seeking evidence of it, therefore the lack of an effective approach is not identified as a problem to be solved by a change of process.

Change theory dictates that once the gap between an organisations actions and mission is identified as a problem, this provides the impetus for a change in organisational systems (Leifer: 1989). Having identified the problem, the barriers faced by priority participants engaging with youth theatre, this research seeks to formulate best practice approaches to mitigate that problem and provide a provocation for organisational change within the funded youth theatre sector.

The analysis of youth theatre programmes within previous chapters has been undertaken from a macro organisational perspective using set criteria e.g., type of organisation; cost of attendance, outreach practice. I will now consider these themes but reverse the analysis and consider a young person's journey from becoming aware of a youth theatre offer to becoming a participant. This will complete the analysis of both sides of the power balance to provide the most robust recommendations for recruitment practice.

8.1 Removing Barriers for Priority Participants

To identify the barriers to access for a priority participant, their pathway to engagement must be analysed sequentially. Each stage of the engagement process can be broken down as follows:

- Awareness of the offer
- Enquiry and Application

- Requirements – once they have connected with the organisation and arranged to attend what are the requirements placed on them for example, cost of sessions, travel etc.
- First session retention

Awareness

The findings summarised in Chapter Six of this thesis showed that the most effective way for a priority participant to gain awareness of a youth theatre offer would be through the one place they are required to attend i.e., at school. This is the factor which makes the Stage Directions model so efficient and effective in connecting with priority participants. A young person can, through mandated delivery in timetabled lessons, experience drama delivery and be signposted on to external organisational provision at the end of the project. There are also other successful methods, modelled by Contact Theatre and Burnley Youth Theatre such as peer to peer recruitment and community based outreach although these methods do not reach the sheer numbers of participants that in school delivery can reach.

Creating awareness and initial connection with priority participants is complex and considered in detail later in this chapter when analysing the impact of place, local networks, and external stakeholders.

Enquiry and Application

When the priority participant is aware of the offer and wishes to attend a session, how do they undertake this? This research has found significant barriers for priority participants at this stage of the engagement process. Whilst some organisations have a simple model of open access groups where participants can just 'drop in', such as Theatre Porto in Ellesmere Port and Royal Exchange in Manchester, most require the completion of an online form[72], some require participants to audition, and some only accept applications annually or at specific times of the year.

[72] See Appendix Three for full breakdown of organisations assessed.

Of the 150 organisations examined, eight-five had a youth theatre offer[73] and eighty-two of those offers had a barrier at the initial enquiry stage:

- Sixty-four organisations (75%) required the completion of an online form
- Twenty Two organisations (26%) hold auditions (Ten once annually for limited places)
- Sixteen organisations (19%) only accept new members once a year.
- Sixteen organisations (19%) only accept new members once per school term.
- Sixty-seven organisations (78.5%) had multiple barriers at the enquiry stage.
- Two organisations had closed recruitment methods through referral only.

As highlighted in Chapter Seven the landscape of youth theatre recruitment largely follows a formula which has not changed or seen the need to change for a considerable time and this is evidenced by the number of organisations with multiple barriers for priority participants to navigate.

An example of an offer with multiple barriers is Liverpool Everyman & Playhouse. Their youth theatre – YEP (Young Everyman and Playhouse) has one drama opportunity open to young people aged fourteen and over. Given the multiple barriers within this one offer it is illustrative to consider how a priority participant would navigate those barriers and the impact that this may have upon the likelihood of them joining the youth theatre. YEP only recruit participants once annually and require the completion of an online form which asks the potential participant to explain why they wish to attend Youth Theatre (LMTT: 2022). This form also includes a question asking for the potential participant's written 'response to a piece of art they have seen' (Ibid, web np). If a priority participant wished to attend this offer it could be argued that the requirement to provide a written response to a question which is phrased esoterically, even if the intent is not such, could be extremely off-putting for them.

[73] An additional twenty-one organisations offered some form of children and young people's activity which was either limited to occasional workshops, was outsourced to an external provider, or otherwise fell short of being a youth theatre programme offering at least thirty weeks of activity per year. See Appendix Three for details.

Each applicant is then required to attend a competitive audition for the limited places available. The combination of the written task and audition where they will be judged against others, despite having no experience of youth theatre, is likely to be very daunting for a priority participant. At the point that the participant is offered a place at YEP, they then have no further barriers as all places are offered free at the point of access. It is not however an unremarkable conclusion to draw that the barriers already encountered would have reduced the number of priority participants able to take advantage of the free place.

The engagement methodology applied by Liverpool Everyman raises a question, one which it could be argued is pervasive to every engagement process and which should be asked at every stage when designing a recruitment model, specifically, what is this step in the process trying to achieve for the organisation? In this case, what does the participant's response to the written question tell the organisation about that young person, and why is it necessary to their application for a youth theatre place?

The conclusion could be drawn that the application enables the organisation to preselect participants who are already culturally conversant, have an interesting response to 'art they have seen' and can express themselves well on paper. Some of the skills employed, effective writing, an interesting choice of subject etc., may be useful in a devising or co-creation context but this would mean that the participant has already developed these skills and understands what is meant by a 'response to a piece of art.'

Discourse analysis highlights that the practice given agency is the assumption that a potential participant will understand what is required by the question, and what has been normalised is the pre-supposition that a potential participant will be able to articulate that understanding to a requisite standard which passes an undefined test. The way that language is used in this setting is a further example of the exclusionary nature of cultural reproduction theorised by Bourdieu (Bourdieu: 1977). Here, a culturally conversant applicant is likely to have experiences of 'art' to draw on and, may also be able to seek help

in completing the form from culturally conversant parents who can guide, support, and help shape their child's answer.

The requirement to attend an audition or a workshop for a participant who has not attended youth theatre before is also a significant barrier, even if that participant is confident enough to take the step to attend. The word 'audition' is defined 'as an interview for a role or job as a singer, actor, dancer, or musician, consisting of a practical demonstration of the candidate's suitability and skill' (OED:2023). How can a priority participant demonstrate skills they have not yet learned and distinguish themselves confidently with other auditionees who are likely to have previous experience not only of drama but of the process of auditioning.

The conclusion must therefore be drawn that a Youth Theatre which requires auditions is placing a significant barrier before priority participants and reproducing opportunities which are realistically only accessible by Group One and Two children and young people who are already in possession of pervasive skills. This is an example of the habitus theory of cultural replication (Bourdieu; Passeron, 1990), but in this case the organisations are reproducing youth theatre companies and seeking to preserve what they consider to be a specific level of skill set from the outset. If a priority participant must display a skill level in an audition to access the youth theatre at which they hope to learn those skills, then logic dictates that they would have had to have gained those skills elsewhere. That logical argument can be extended to the assertion that any youth theatre which requires participants to audition is not a first engagement offer and although YEP has been used as an example to highlight this type of barrier, analysis showed that twelve percent of all the youth theatres considered had a similar application and audition process.

Another barrier encountered at the enquiry stage may be the language which the organisation uses to describe their offer. Analysis undertaken of the language used by the wider dataset highlighted common phrases which were repeated by organisations when marketing their youth theatre programmes. Discourse analysis of these patterns shows how they might create barriers when a priority participant progresses from awareness of the

youth theatre offer to enquiry about attending a session. To highlight those barriers in context, a sample of three of those statements are detailed and analysed. Each of the statements analysed were taken from the primary youth theatre page of the organisational website, designed to give information to potential participants.

'The young company is our award-winning resident company for young people aged 14 to 21 '(Royal Exchange: 2023)

While the above sentence seems innocuous and a simple and positive statement of the offer, there are key elements which could be off-putting to a priority participant. Firstly, this sentence suggests that a certain standard is required by using the term, 'award-winning' and uses theatrical phraseology which is not likely to be understood by a priority participant with no youth theatre experience. Specifically, the phrase 'resident company' may cause confusion for a priority participant who has little or no experience of theatre. Both words have a range of meanings, and it is a possibility for example, that an enquiring participant could think that 'resident' means locality or even that the young people reside at the theatre. If a participant does not understand the context of an offer, it could be argued that they are far less likely to progress to the enquiry stage further for fear that that lack of understanding means that they will make a mistake. (Heath & Tversky: 1991)

'Our Curve Young Community Company (CYCC) is for young people aged 5 – 19 years with a passion for performing arts'. (Leicester Curve: 2023)

Analysis of this sentence is straightforward as the offer sets out immediately that this youth theatre is for young people who 'have a passion for performing arts.' A young person can only develop a passion with significant experience, a priority participant enquiring about youth theatre for the first time reading that statement is unlikely to believe that it applies to them. A first engagement offer might focus on wording which proposed, for example, 'trying something new' or 'meeting new friends.' This statement clearly sets out that this offer is for young people with an interest developed enough to become a 'passion' and is unequivocally not a first engagement opportunity.

‘Young Rep groups meet weekly at The Rep to create high quality performances working with professional theatre-makers.’ (Birmingham Rep: 2023)

Similarly, to the analysis of the Royal Exchange quote this statement suggests that a certain standard is required by using the words, ‘high quality,’ in this context it links those words with the weekly youth theatre sessions thereby stating that the work undertaken by participants on a weekly basis is already of a required skills level. This statement then further links that requisite skills standard with the word ‘professional’ which elevates the perception that a specific level of attainment is required to be part of the group.

The three examples detailed above provide a representative sample of the evidence gathered within the wider dataset of first enquiry points (detailed at Appendix Three). Analysis of these first enquiry points shows that there is a conflict when organisations are seeking to promote their youth theatre positively and how that presents to participants taking a first step to connect with the organisation. It would be unrealistic to expect organisations not to speak positively about their programmes with descriptors such as ‘high-quality,’ ‘professional’ and ‘award-winning,’ they are, after all, marketing their offers to every individual who might enquire about joining their youth theatre. If an organisation is not focused on first engagement, then there is also no reason to reconsider the language they employ on their enquiry pages.

However, where a youth theatre is funded in whole or in part by the Arts Council whose requirements are,

> Widening and improving opportunities for children and young people to take part in creative activities outside schools (ACE:2023)[74]

then there is some obligation for the organisation to make each stage of the engagement process as clear and simple as possible.

[74] For full list of Outcomes and Elements see Appendix Two

It could also be argued that not every child or young person enquiring about joining an organisation's youth theatre will be a priority participant. A secondary engager might connect more readily with terminology which indicates that they would be developing existing skills and it is of course important to ensure that offers are open to all children and young people.

I propose the simple recommendation of a single extra enquiry page for participants who are 'New to Theatre.' An enquiry page focused on first engagement pathways for priority participants and audiences which might include information on the times and locations of drop in groups; how to connect with someone who can help them and details of first engagement offers such as free ticket schemes, theatre tours and taster sessions. The language used on this page should be clear, free of hidden assumptions such as theatrical terminology, and provide a resource where priority participants can connect to information which is barrier free and encourages them to engage with the organisation.

Requirements

When a priority participant has connected with an organisation, there will be administrative requirements for them to fulfil which are necessary to the appropriate management of the offer. For example, an initial requirement may be the completion of a basic information form which is necessary to meet safeguarding requirements[75]. The seven safeguarding requirements set out in the Department for Education checklist for after school tuition include basic health and safety; fire safety; governance; regular DBS[76] checks for staff;

[75] Safeguarding is an area of law covered by a range of legislation including: The Children Act 1989 (as amended); The Children and Social Work Act 2017; Keeping Children Safe in Education; Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018; The Education Act 2002; The United Nations convention on the Rights of the Child 1992; The Equality Act 2010.; The Children and Families Act 2014; The Human Rights Act 1998 (GOV:2023). This research does not intend to provide a breakdown of the intersection of these acts and how they apply to the provision of youth theatre but, will instead, utilise the guidelines set out by the Department for Education in their 'Seven Steps towards running a safe club, activity or tuition class for children' (DofE: 2023) which has distilled the legislation down to a checklist.

[76] Disability and Barring Service Checks – these checks are undertaken initially by an organisation to ensure that a staff member is not barred from working with children, the staff member can then be added to an update service where the check is completed once annually (DBS: 2023)

safeguarding training; and the requirement for more than one emergency contact for each participant.

A form which would meet the basic requirements would include: the participant's name, date of birth and address; two emergency contact names and numbers and any allergy or medical information. A priority participant may need help completing this form and it is important that there is support in place to complete this with them either at the first session or, if the information is required in advance, during a drop-in or orientation tour.

Whilst administrative requirements are a barrier which it is reasonably easy to overcome with the addition of engagement support, the principal barrier at this stage of the process is cost, and what a participant might be asked to pay to attend. Of the 150 organisations assessed by this research only nine are free at the point of access across all programmes[77].

There are references to limited bursary places on many of the offers[78] and some also have discounts for siblings, but the use of the word 'limited' when referring to lower cost places means that organisations cannot offer places at the lower rate to all attendees and therefore some children and young people will be unable to access these. Cost will be a barrier to many participants who may engage with an organisation delivering youth theatre only to find that they are unable to attend because they simply do not have the money or support to do so. When then occurs, this is a manifestation of the disadvantage gap in action and highlights the need for a novel approach.

There are organisations who provide free at the point of access youth theatre, and this paper proposes that this should be the standard model of funded youth theatre delivery, if a core aim of that organisation is to ensure equity of delivery to all children and young people including priority participants.

[77] See Appendix Three for details
[78] See Appendix Three for details

An argument that could be made to counter the above is 'what about the children that can afford to pay?'. The fees provided by these participants could of course facilitate additional resources/places for the programme. There are, however, difficulties with an approach which is not the same for everyone. Principally, how does an organisation identify who can afford to pay? The only way to do this is to have an application process where participants evidence their inability to meet the cost as there is no other practical way to determine who can or cannot meet the fees. This places the onus on the priority participant to apply for a free place which is not only an additional administrative hurdle but one which may feel humiliating. The participant whose guardians[79] can pay does not have to make such an application and therefore experiences a much simpler registration process, albeit at a cost. Participants are therefore immediately separated by their status and consequently start the class at a social disadvantage over and above those disadvantages which they may already encounter within the process due to reduced cultural and social capital. This finding is supported by the work already referenced in this thesis by Stephen Ball, with his theory of disconnected choosers, (Ball: 2019) and of Lareau whose elementary school study highlighted the negative long term educational impact of sorting students into social class distinctions (Lareau: 1987 p.83).

An alternative is to suggest that guardians who can afford to pay, donate to the organisations children and young people fund on a voluntary basis and the monies are used for resources for the youth theatre, tickets to productions etc., although this may of course result in no donations to the programme. Where the organisation is being funded by the Arts Council and an indication is given that part of the funding applied for is to fund a youth theatre programme then why are the organisation requesting payment from participants, unless of course the organisation make it clear that the core funding is not enough to meet the costs of the programme. The Arts Council could choose to impose a payment condition which requires programmes to offer free at the point of access delivery where funding is

[79] This research recognises that many children live in circumstances where they do not reside with parents but with other guardians or responsible adults. Although this research has used parents within earlier chapters when considering children and young people's home circumstances, when proposing policy, the term guardian will be used as a non-exclusionary umbrella term.

being used for children and young people's activity, and this would ensure that there are no cost barriers for priority participants.

First session retention

It is widely acknowledged within youth theatre practice and delivery that there is always a difference between the number of participants who start a youth theatre programme and the number of participants who continue through the entire term/cycle. As with any other form of extra-curricular activity there may be a variety of reasons behind their discontinuance[80], one of which may be that the participant simply does not enjoy the activity and decides that it is not for them. There may however be additional barriers to priority participants which could result in a higher drop-out rate. Children and young people may drop out because it is too difficult to get to the venue without support, because their guardians are unsupportive and believe they are wasting time which should be spent on schoolwork or, because they do not feel that they are making progress or fitting in to the class.

There are processes which an organisation can employ to mitigate many of the potential reasons a priority participant may stop attending youth theatre. Travel subsidies can be put in place to assist participants who need to use public transport; guardians can be made aware at the point a participant first attends of the measurable benefits to academic performance of attending drama and these benefits can be added to the 'New to Theatre' information so that they are available at the point of first enquiry. Providing this information can contribute to changing perceptions of the value of attending youth theatre and build connection between not only the participant but their guardian.

However, no amount of practical assistance outside of the sessions will encourage a participant to continue with youth theatre if they do not feel comfortable and supported in the room during the content of an initial session. There is, of course, no prescribed format for a youth theatre class but experience gained across a range of settings and structures

[80] This research did not find any specific studies related to drama or youth theatre but there are several studies related to sport and to music which are included in the list of references, and which are distilled above. The observations within this chapter also relate to personal experience over a period of thirty years.

informs the following broad breakdown of a typical hour, or hour and a half, skills based workshop[81].

- Introductions – circle time
- Warm-up games
- Activities focused on specific skill acquisition.
- Short break
- Work on group project if working towards a production or showing.
- Reflection to close the session.

The above breakdown is not definitive it is simply used as an overview of the type of activity and structure which a participant may encounter when attending a youth theatre session to identify areas where barriers may occur.

Earlier in this chapter a potential barrier was identified when organisations demonstrated hidden assumptions about the understanding of specific theatre terminology. When developing a strong recruitment practice, the terminology and language used within the initial session is just as important to ensure that every participant understands instructions, can contribute to the discussion or activity and, most importantly, feels a part of the session rather than an observer of it. The facilitator of the session must be cognisant of this and use an approach that uses clear and simple instructions, avoids ambiguous terminology, and does not assume knowledge.

For example, if a warm-up game is played at the start of the session, a re-cap of the rules every time a game is used is beneficial, even where all the participants may have played it before. Recapping the rules acts as information to newcomers, a reminder to experienced participants and reinforces the aim of the warm-up. In this way everyone is treated equally, and everyone can participate fully which is particularly important at the start of the session

[81] For example, a similar structure is set out in the session notes from the Stage Directions facilitators detailed within Chapter Six.

to help settle nerves and break the ice between participants which is, as widely acknowledged, one of the aims of the warm-up stage (Poulter: 2018).

Stage Directions has the advantage that within their sessions all the participants were at the same experience level. Where recruitment works within the framework proposed within this thesis, there may be a range of experience levels at the initial session and the facilitator must ensure that, while the group dynamic establishes itself, the secondary engagers are kept engaged and supportive of the pace of their priority participant peers. This is an issue which needs careful consideration to ensure the success of the recruitment framework. As advanced earlier, change is made when a problem is highlighted and if groups are not working effectively because of an inability to manage differing experience levels then the format will fail.

One method of balancing differing experience levels and competencies within sessions is to mix participants for small group work. This proved effective in several of the Stage Directions settings:

> Beyond the comfort zone of their usual groups young people discovered and/or developed their communication abilities while extending the types of ideas they worked with, enriching their world view with new perspectives, and growing together (Audience Agency: 2021, p40)

As the above suggests a key factor in the success of a delivery session is the ability for participants from a variety of experiences and backgrounds to develop their abilities and skills whilst obtaining and learning from differing perspectives.

This small group work approach is like a peer to peer learning model, and it is well established from a variety of studies that peer to peer learning can have significant benefits for both the peer who is 'helped' and the peer who is the 'helper' (Chi et al: 1998). This

would translate in the context of a drama session, to a secondary engager supporting their more inexperienced peers within small group and one to one work

Topping and Ehly's synthesised model of peer assisted learning (2001), sets out these benefits not only for the 'helped' but the 'helper'. Topping subsequently built on this model with a review summarising the benefits to both peers of not only improved performance in the skill being learned but of improved listening, communication, and teamwork skills for both peers (2005 p.643). This supports the proposition that priority participants and secondary engagers within the same group can benefit equally by collaborating with each other and support each other's development if managed properly by facilitators.

The co-creation principles developed by the Stage Directions project are particularly helpful when facilitators are planning taster, outreach and initial core youth theatre sessions and considering the management of the varying experience levels of participants (Stage Directions: 2023). Whilst the co-creation principles are focused on programmes which devise work with young people, their elements can be extrapolated for use in any youth theatre setting or session, as the emphasis is upon the relationships within the session and how the work undertaken is communicated between the participants and the facilitator. This section has summarised the pathway which needs to be navigated by priority participants when accessing a youth theatre offer and, more specifically, the barriers which might be encountered from initial enquiry and application, enrolment requirements and finally, their first delivery session. What is apparent when these stages of the engagement process are considered is that many of the potential barriers centre around language and communication, particularly the use of sector terminology and the variety of hidden assumptions made by some organisations when making external communications.

A further barrier is the financial cost of attending the sessions and it should be remembered, as highlighted earlier in this research, that parents of Group One and Two young people unable to meet the costs of commercial provision may seek provision through funded organisations. This should be a consideration when planning recruitment strategies, as

Group One and Two parents, as skilled choosers, are more likely to seek out ways to support their child and 'In doing this they may limit the opportunities available to working class children.' (Nunn et al, 2007, p23). This can result in funded offers becoming oversubscribed with children and young people already in possession of pervasive skills, leading to the phenomenon described that a full waiting list is not always a measure of success unless the only success measure is a full youth theatre programme.

Where a programme is oversubscribed, this can be mitigated by the overspill of an additional drop in group and by considered recruitment on a project to project basis such as that employed very effectively by Lewisham Youth Theatre as highlighted in Chapter Seven.

8.2 The need for collaborative networks: LCEPS and Place Based Strategies

Within this chapter I have considered three of the four stages of the recruitment process: enquiry and application; enrolment requirements and first session retention as summarised above. The first stage of that four step process, the participant becoming 'aware' of the youth theatre offer, is interconnected with a range of factors external to the organisation. As such, 'awareness' must be considered separately when seeking to develop best practice guidance.

The question to be answered when considering awareness is ostensibly simple – how do organisations make an initial connection with priority participants? Earlier chapters of this research have identified organisations who are successfully connecting with priority participants and each of those successful strategies, whilst different in its specific practice, has been rooted in a clear understanding of the community which the organisation serves. Particularly strong examples are Burnley Youth Theatre; Theatre Porto; CATS Youth Theatre; the Stephen Joseph Theatre and Lewisham Youth Theatre.

All the above organisations connect with participants through detailed knowledge of the needs of their local communities and by collaborating with local volunteers and partners. They also employ a 'whole family approach' to recruitment which utilises the 'grapevine' theory (Ball & Vincent:1998) which, as summarised previously in this research, uses the

medium of social comparison to impact choice within social groupings. Organisations can use the 'grapevine' as a positive reinforcing of what different social groups believe to be an activity which is suitable for them. This is another means by which the perception of the value of drama in improved outcomes can be changed and enhanced.

Where an organisation seeks to engage priority participants, by this research's definition, a group with disengaged parents, that parental disengagement is itself a barrier. By using a whole family approach, the social grapevine within groups alters perceptions through improved outcomes for young people. Organisations can use this to their benefit by having 'taster days' or 'open days' where families who are already engaged can bring guests or by showcasing children and young people's work in community settings.

The 'whole family approach' is very successful in embedded place based offers as it has evidenced longevity[82]. However, the most effective way to reach large numbers of priority participants in a single project is with in school delivery. It could be argued that Stage Directions, has the most effective recruitment strategy of the hundred plus offers analysed in this research, as the priority participants are identified in groups through matching the programme to schools who are situated in areas of disadvantage through the Index of Multiple Deprivations (IMD) or are in areas of low cultural engagement.

Through partnership working with Salford Local Cultural Education Partnership (LCEP), Stage Directions has built a network of stakeholders across Salford who have succeeded in engaging with more than five thousand children and young people across the three years of the project, the vast majority of whom are priority participants (Stage Directions: 2023). As examined in Chapter five, LCEPs are a mechanism by which schools, cultural organisations and local authority stakeholders can work together to plan cohesive strategies to improve cultural opportunity for children and young people (ACE: 2019). In fact, they were specifically designed 'with the aim of improving the alignment of cultural education of young people' (ACE: 2023). This founding aim should therefore mean that LCEPS are at the

[82] BYT celebrate their 50th anniversary in 2023; ChickenShed have been operating for over 40 years as have Theatre Porto and CATS Youth Theatre is celebrating 25 years of operation in 2024

heart of any strategy focused on the recruitment of priority participants to a cultural offer which will improve their pervasive skill set and expand their cultural capital.

The 2019 analysis of LCEPS undertaken by the Arts Council identified that

> more could potentially be done to involve children and young people in the decisions being made about their local cultural offers and how they can be supported to progress (ACE/BOP: 2019 p.4)

The analysis of Contact Theatre's highly successful delivery model showed the significant benefits of Youth Adult Partnership (YAP) working and a range of research also shows that both organisations and the communities they serve derive benefits when young people are engaged in governance (Kirshner: 2003). This involvement of young people within governance highlights the way in which the promotion of self-determination can impact positive outcomes for young people (Hauseman: 2016).

Earlier in this research it was argued that any findings and recommendations should not treat priority participants as being without individual agency. Bourdieu also opined that the pedagogic process should be a collaborative one with pupils and teachers working together towards a participatory construction of learning (Bourdieu:1964a) and this could certainly be applied to learning at a more strategic level. It could be argued that were LCEPs to operate as a Youth Adult Partnership, the benefits to cultural strategy and the development of place centred recruitment approaches could only benefit, as has been seen in the organisational models at Contact Theatre and further evidenced at Burnley Youth Theatre and Lewisham Youth Theatre.

In summary, place based strategies are highly effective in delivering priority participant recruitment as they are focused on areas of need and by virtue of that focus develop a better understanding of the communities they serve. The place strategies which are particularly effective are the whole family approach using the social grapevine; and direct delivery in schools using LCEPs as a strategic planning mechanism. It should also be noted that there are some youth theatre offers which provide direct delivery in schools by

providing after school and holiday clubs which also provide a good entry point for first engagement[83].

8.3 Youth Theatre Recruitment – A Best Practice Framework

As I have highlighted throughout this thesis, there is an unacknowledged problem within the youth theatre sector, that priority participants are not being actively recruited to youth theatre programmes. As evidenced in multiple studies and highlighted within Chapter Four, drama has the potential to significantly enhance the cultural and social capital of priority participants. In a sector which is widely acknowledged as socially conscious (Nicholson: 2011 p101), there are excellent targeted programmes and specialist work undertaken in some organisations[84], but the wider analysis of youth theatre recruitment shows multiple barriers for priority participants and no impetus for change from funders.

The novel contribution of this research is the highlighting of this gap in practice together with a proposed framework for recruitment in youth theatre. This framework builds on the elements of best practice isolated within the analysis of current youth theatre programmes by considering them in a practical context which, although focused on the need to recruit priority participants, would also cater for children and young people who are more experienced.

This framework is set out in a guidance document at Appendix Four of this thesis in a format which is intended to be used practically by organisations either funded by the Arts Council or by other charitable grants and not for use in commercial offers of youth theatre where profitability is a factor. The framework is split into three sections: Discovery; Connection and Participation. The choice of these sections is not arbitrary, they are in distinct blocks of work which have been developed from the consideration of the pathway of a single priority participant to best serve their needs and improve engagement.

[83] See Appendix Three
[84] See Appendix One

The framework is underpinned by a central tenet that success in the context of this research is measured by the ease with which a priority participant can access a youth theatre offer and continue to develop pervasive skills, should they wish to do so, without encountering additional barriers. Those barriers have been encountered at each stage of the participant journey and the principles of best practice focus on the following elements:

- widening awareness of the offer
- building effective enquiry points online
- using simple messaging which avoids assumed knowledge and theatrical terminology
- simplifying the application process
- structuring first delivery sessions which include and support participation from all

The framework is very simple with basic statements of best practice in each section and the simplicity is deliberate as these are practical guidelines. Within the best practice document at Appendix Four there is a preface which details, in very short form, the rationale behind the framework, with a definition of priority participants, why it is important that organisations connect with them and the reasoning behind a practical guide to barrier reduction in recruitment.

The framework, which is set out in more detail in the following chapter, also proposes that a successful youth theatre offer is one which provides a space for participants from a variety of experiences and backgrounds to develop their abilities and skills whilst obtaining and learning from differing perspectives. Access to the offer should however prioritise participants who are most in need of pervasive skill development, and it should be ensured that young people encounter as few barriers as possible on their pathway to becoming a youth theatre participant.

The consideration of more than one hundred organisation's children and young people's provision has evidenced that there are very few offers without barriers for priority participants to overcome and this puts the onus onto the participant rather than the organisation. It has also been highlighted, through consideration of the theory of change,

that current recruitment methods throughout the sector are very similar and present multiple barriers because an external stimulus has not identified a problem with the status quo. Were funders to require organisations to give more detailed breakdowns of their participants or be more specific about the need for organisations to connect with priority participants, then this would provoke organisations to consider change and improve recruitment methods.

These guidelines are the most important recommendation of this research as they are the practical steps that an organisation can take to improve their engagement pathways and enrich their programmes. They not only provide these practical steps, but they may, in and of themselves, contribute to the wider understanding of the benefits of youth theatre for priority participants and for the need for funded organisations to reconsider their approach to youth theatre recruitment.

Chapter 9 How Effective Youth Theatre Recruitment Practice Can Minimise Engagement Barriers for Priority Participants

As I have discussed throughout this thesis, funded youth theatres must ensure they recruit those children and young people most in need of the pervasive skills taught through drama. I have also highlighted the impact of the reduction of arts teaching hours in schools and considered why the skills taught by creative subjects are undervalued. Subjects briefly touched on here but considered in more detail in numerous reports, studies, and commentaries[85]. What I have discovered particularly through the examination of the wider youth theatre landscape, is a failure to connect these issues with simple measures that organisations can take to improve their connection with priority participants.

I have utilised a combination of methods, from discourse analysis to 'policy sociology'[86], conducting text and source based analysis, and considering published statistics and other quantitative data. This range of methods together with the application of my own experience within the sector[87] enabled me to draw conclusions from three key areas of research, education policy development; drama and pervasive skill acquisition; and youth theatre practice. This contributed to an understanding of both the expanding disadvantage gap in schools and of the disadvantage gap within extra-curricular drama provision for children and young people. Each chapter has also contributed to an understanding of the necessity for change in the prevailing discourse on the acquisition of essential pervasive skills in school and of the value of drama in teaching those skills. The analysis of youth theatre models demonstrates that best practice in funded organisations can improve outcomes for children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, and that focus on the recruitment of priority participants within funded programmes is necessary to ensure the widest access for children and young people.

[85] Sutton Trust (2016) (2017); Warwick Commission (2015); Arts Emergency (2018)
[86] Policy sociology is defined by Ball as the utilisation of sociological concepts, ideas, and research as tools for making sense of policy. This may take the approach of a heuristic device as a method for considering how things may be. (Ball, 2017).
[87] As a drama and music tutor, a freelance facilitator, youth theatre director and arts manager as set out in Chapter One.

Awareness of the work of the more closely analysed organisations, Stage Directions, Contact Theatre and Burnley Youth Theatre led me to expect elements of best practice and I was unsurprised in that regard, whilst also learning how a range of different approaches can be equally effective and that an in-depth understanding of an organisations place setting is essential. I was however surprised to find a wider youth theatre landscape which, with some notable exceptions, presents significant barriers to children and young people who may be connecting with theatre for the first time. For an industry widely perceived to be at the forefront of presenting ideas of social justice (Nicholson: 2011 p.101), there appears to be a real disconnect with the ideal of accessible theatre which has a 'responsibility to take away barriers' (Choudhury: 2020 p.330), and the way in which youth theatre participants are engaged with and recruited.

In most funded youth theatre offers that is through subsidised outreach programmes and fee paying core youth theatre offers with limited bursaries. This is problematic because it is more often the children and young people towards whom that outreach should be targeted, Group Four children and young people, who may be unable to meet the costs of the fees either through financial circumstances or because they are unsupported at home. This means that these children and young people may get an opportunity to try an activity through outreach that they are then unable to pursue unless they obtain a bursary.

The conclusion which could be drawn is that the funded youth theatre provision will be primarily populated with children and young people who can afford the fees. Whilst there are some free to access offers, e.g., Theatre Porto and Contact Theatre there are a range of excellent offers assessed in this research whose fees would be prohibitive for many e.g., £10 per session at both Leeds Playhouse and Bristol Old Vic.

With this conclusion in mind, one must consider how funded organisations recruit and how that can be adapted to address such an imbalance. The data analysed also showed that many organisations recruited utilising a similar methodology which raised multiple barriers to priority participants. Change theory, as discussed in Chapter Eight, suggests that this is because these organisations had not identified that their youth recruitment practices were

problematic, and they therefore saw no need for change or alternatively, youth theatre was not an element of their work which was regularly reviewed. It also seemed evident that the organisations which were most focused on widening participation had the least number of recruitment barriers in place. This leaves priority participants at the mercy of their postcode and in circumstances where organisations are publicly funded, they have a responsibility to serve their locality and provide an accessible offer.

These findings contribute to the discourse of youth theatre provision by recommending not only change in the way organisations approach recruitment but also change in the way in that engagement and recruitment is discussed and categorised. These recommendations highlight the need for effective youth theatre recruitment and propose ways in which organisations can simplify and improve their youth engagement process, often through simple measures which have no significant financial impact. These are the measures which are included within the best practice recommendations which can be shared with funded organisations. These recommendations serve three purposes, firstly, to highlight the necessity to consider the requirements of priority participants within non-targeted recruitment strategies. Secondly, to reframe the discourse and the language used within engagement and finally, to encourage organisations to really consider how they connect with priority participants from the perspective of the participant to ensure that there are minimal barriers to access.

<u>Recommendation One – Replacing the term 'hard to reach' with the term priority participants</u>

Hard to reach' is a phrase widely used within engagement settings for communities either perceived to be disengaged or "inaccessible to most traditional and conventional methods for any reason" (HSE: 2004). There is however, despite the wide use of the phrase both in policy and practice, (Flanagan; Hancock; 2010), no clear definition of who the phrase describes. There are a 'multiplicity' of alternative definitions and categorisations (Ibid, p1) but within the context of this research i.e., which participants might the phrase describe when considering youth theatre recruitment strategies, a definition could be aligned to the

Audience Agency data[88] which isolates the least likely groups to attend or engage with theatre: those from low socio-economic backgrounds and those from ethnically diverse communities (Audience Agency:2020).

It is argued that by categorising a group of participants as 'hard to reach' it frames the discourse negatively with the inference made that the group is making itself 'hard to reach;' This frames the responsibility for the disassociation of cultural opportunity is with the potential participants and the discourse itself becomes a barrier to engagement. Psychological studies also show that word association related to groups may reinforce stereotypes and underlines preconceptions (Spencer-Rogers et all: 2007). 'Hard to reach' is also a nebulous and undefined term which does not describe the relative differences there may be between different disassociated groups.

It is recommended that groups which may previously have been categorised as 'hard to reach' should be renamed 'priority groups'. This reframes the discourse of engagement with a positive adjective, 'priority', and, from the perspective of this research, is also reflective of the urgent need to ensure that the 'disadvantage gap' does not continue to widen (EPI:2020), and that funding given to arts organisations for youth programmes is properly focused and delivers effective first engagement strategies. This is a recommendation that has no financial implications and can be used at both an organisational level and a strategic level to influence and support positive change.

At the time of writing this conclusion, further to representations made to the Arts Council regarding the use of the phrase 'hard to reach', they have agreed that their internal and external communications will no longer use the term and instead, replace it with the phrase 'priority participants'. One of the recommendations made is therefore creating institutional change and it is hoped that the use of the phrase by a core stakeholder in the cultural sector will lead to wider implementation and positive change within organisational engagement strategies.

[88] Until 2023 the Audience Agency provided the framework by which organisations funded by ACE reported their engagement numbers and demographic reach.

Recommendation Two – Replacing the interchangeable terms 'soft skills' and 'transferable skills' with the term pervasive skills

It is a conclusion of this research that the discourse surrounding education policy change has been focused on employability since 1963 and yet that within the planning of the core curriculum there has been no real consideration of what preparing a young person for employment means. Educational policy has supposedly focused on the needs of business and industry, but much of the curriculum and pedagogical approach measures results based on the ability of pupils to simply reproduce facts, rather than measuring the skills they have gained and developed.

The 'soft' skills of teamwork, communication, flexibility, and positivity are those prized by employers as the National Careers Website indicates they are 'the skills that most employers look for when recruiting and are needed for most jobs.' (National Careers Service: 2021)

It is recommended that these skills should be classified as 'pervasive' skills, those skills and attributes which impact all areas of life and work. The non-exhaustive examples, of self-advocacy; persistence; presentation skills and self-critique are attributes which contribute to effective functioning as an adult in and out of the workplace and, seventy three percent of graduate employers' report that there is a current shortage of graduate candidates able to demonstrate those skills (SHRM: 2019, p.4).

Discourse analysis throughout this research has highlighted the power of language within policy making and the use of the word 'soft' to describe such important skills, diminishes both their power and the necessity to acquire them. It is recommended that the discourse pertaining to the acquisition of these skills is reframed to underline the necessity for their acquisition.

Reframing the discourse from one of preference to one of necessity emphasises that pervasive skills acquisition is an essential element of equity within the employment

marketplace and adult world and children and young people need to be equipped with those skills. This builds on the established understanding both that cultural and social capital are factors which accelerate social mobility (Goldthorpe:2016) and that employers seek young people with pervasive skills (CBI:2019).

The word pervasive also highlights how drama as a cross curricular educational tool can deliver measurable benefits for young people both academically and socially and could be utilised as an effective method of improving attainment for a wide range of young people within the state education system (DICE: 2016). The acquisition of cultural and social capital through drama develops through the process of creation which teaches creative habits and skills and, consequently advances social competencies and learning behaviours resulting in improved outcomes.

There is some evidence that this is a term already in limited use (Viviers et al: 2016) and building on this usage can therefore support the wider reframing of this discourse from one of preference to one of necessity. This change in the discourse can also be used at an organisational level and a strategic level to influence and support positive change and has no financial implications. The use of the term pervasive skills also has wider scope and could be applied in educational, careers and human resources development.

<u>Recommendation Three – Funded Youth Theatre should work to a model of barrier reduction for priority participants</u>

The core focus of this research is the process by which funded youth theatre can help bridge the gap of pervasive skill acquisition for priority participants. Whilst an overhaul of the national curriculum recognising the skill based needs of young people in the 21st century would be something to celebrate, it is unlikely to happen in the short or medium term given the direction educational policy has continued to take over the last sixty years, as evidenced in Chapter Four. Consequently, where there is a demographic of disadvantaged young people who would significantly benefit from access to drama provision, it is important to ensure that programmes which are funded to widen access to cultural activity are reaching

this specific group, i.e., Group Four participants defined as those 'children and young people without connection to culturally engaged adults who are not in a targeted category'.

Organisations funded by Arts Council England to deliver work with children and young people, must show that they are 'widening and improving opportunities for children and young people to take part in creative activities' either in school or outside of school or, more broadly that they are 'supporting children and young people to develop their creative skills and potential' (ACE:2022)[89]. There is therefore a principal focus on ensuring that the funded activity widens access and opportunity for participation within the organisations immediate and wider community. An effective strategy to widen cultural access and opportunity would have to, by definition, produce first engagements with priority participants.

It has been established that priority participants are more likely to be from lower socio economic backgrounds[90], consequently it is argued that funded organisations will impact this group the most by providing drama provision pathways which are free at the point of access. Organisations should develop recruitment pathways which reduce barriers for priority participants as evidenced in Chapter Eight and these are set out in a practical format within the best practice guide annexed at Appendix Four, which also includes the proposed changes to terminology. These guidelines centre changes which are low cost, and which seek to focus an organisation on the recruitment journey of the participant from awareness to attendance. The recruitment methodology guidelines are split into three sections, Discovery, Connection and Participation and this core content is summarised as follows.

Discovery – How Does a Priority Participant Discover your Youth Theatre Offer?

Priority Participants

Priority participants are defined as children and young people who are not culturally engaged and who are not in a targeted category. Identification of priority

[89] Appendix Two of this research fully details the three Outcomes and eighteen elements applicants can apply for funding against.

[90] Sutton Trust (2018); Arts Emergency (2019), Durham Commission (2019), Tambling & Bacon: 2023

participants will be different in each youth theatre setting depending upon place based need. Priority participants can be identified through local data, e.g., schools; youth centres and residential postcodes falling within high IMD areas; from shared data through partner organisations e.g., Local Cultural Education Partnerships; and, through focused outreach.

Whole Family or Grapevine Approach

If a participant's guardians are not culturally engaged, they may feel that the arts and drama are 'not for them' or their children. Using a wider family approach to engagement with free taster days; school holiday activity or performance activity within community settings can alter perceptions as the impact of youth theatre activity is seen first-hand and then positively shared.

Local Cultural Education Partnership (LCEP)

Connecting with the LCEP can deliver significant benefits through the sharing of information, collaboration on outreach offers and connecting with priority place based settings.

Youth Voice

Working with young people through youth boards; young advisors or young trustees has a demonstrable and positive impact on the recruitment of young people through peer to peer modelling and programming. Organisations working towards best practice in youth delivery should consider Youth Adult Partnerships as a governance and delivery model.

Connection - How Does a Priority Participant Connect with your Youth Theatre Offer?

Website

The first step a priority participant may take to make a connection with your youth theatre is via your website. Using sector terminology on the youth theatre page or

emphasising the 'professional' or advanced standard of youth theatre output may be a barrier to a participant looking to take their first steps.

A simple solution is a single extra enquiry page aimed at participants who are 'New to Theatre' with a link on the organisation's homepage. This would connect to a page focused on first engagement pathways for participants. This page might include information on the times and locations of drop in groups; how to connect with someone who can help them and details of first engagement offers such as free ticket schemes, theatre tours and taster sessions.

Associative Marketing

Utilising existing customer/audience databases and organisational social media will only connect with participants who have already engaged with or follow you. Marketing for youth theatre and participatory offers should focus on widening awareness with the community groups with which the organisation wants to connect. Outreach taster sessions in schools and community venues and peer to peer marketing through youth performance and festival/social events can create awareness within wider communities. Open days which specifically invite community groups and schools which build in free ticket offers and youth theatre taster sessions can also build connection.

Application

There will always be an administrative element of the enrolment process to meet safeguarding requirements. However, this should be kept to a simple one page form meeting the basic requirements of the participants name, date of birth and address; two emergency contact names and numbers and any allergy or medical information. A participant may need help completing this form and it is important that there is support in place to complete this with them either at the first session or, if the information is required in advance, during a drop-in or orientation tour.

Audition

The prospect of an audition or a workshop for a participant who has not attended youth theatre before is a significant barrier, as a priority participant engaging for the first time cannot demonstrate skills they have not yet learned or distinguish themselves confidently with other more experienced auditionees. Auditions should not be used as a connection method in youth theatres which seek to engage priority participants.

Waiting Lists

A full waiting list is not a measure of success in many ways, firstly, it is an indication that there is a lack of enough available provision to serve community needs and secondly, it indicates that an organisation has not considered alternative offers to support the needs of participants waiting to join the youth theatre. Where a programme is over-subscribed this can be mitigated by additional drop in groups and by recruitment on a project to project basis which rotates both priority participants and secondary engagers between skills focused work and production work. Drop-in groups can also be an effective way for youth theatre participants to continue their connection during busy times such as GCSE and A Level study periods.

Costs

If a priority participant engages with an organisation only to find they are unable to attend because of the required fees, then this is a barrier which extends the disadvantage gap and penalises those children and young people who are most at need of pervasive skill development. If a core aim of the organisation is to ensure equity of delivery to all children and young people including priority participants, then places should be free at the point of access. Alternatively, payment can be on a voluntary basis or on a donation basis as these methods do not require a priority participant to apply for an exemption or bursary which singles them out from their peers.

Participation – Managing Initial Session Participation to Improve Participant Retention

Managing Expectations

Attending a new place for the first time is daunting for anyone. Where a young person has connected with an organisation, they will understandably be nervous in advance of their first youth theatre rehearsal or workshop. Organisations can help to manage those nerves through communications which give the participant a clear understanding of what will happen at their first session from the time they arrive at the building. This should include basic information such as:

- Travel information.
- Which venue entrance the participant should use.
- Who will meet the participant when they arrive.
- What they need to wear or bring with them.
- What the format of the session will be.
- Basic housekeeping information such as where they can store coats and bags and where the toilet facilities are.
- Who to speak to if they have a question or are unsure about anything.

Clear information on what to expect reduces the number of unknown factors for each participant prior to the session. As each step is confirmed during the first session, i.e., they enter through the correct door, the named person meets them, the session format runs as described, this builds trust and connection more quickly between the participant and organisation.

Balancing experience levels

In an initial session where there are a range of experience levels, the facilitator must endeavour to ensure that, while the group dynamic establishes itself, the children, and young people with experience or 'secondary engagers' are kept engaged yet supportive of the pace of their priority participant peers. This can be done effectively by regularly mixing participants for small group work to better develop their abilities and skills whilst obtaining and learning from differing perspectives. Peer to peer

learning in small groups or one to ones also has evidenced benefits for both the more experienced and less experienced participant and can not only support communication skills development but strengthen group bonds and promote teamwork.

Facilitator Considerations

Priority participants need to navigate their own response to drama e.g., dealing with nervousness, understanding that mistakes are allowed and developing skills which enable them to communicate effectively within the space. So that newcomers can fully take part and feel like a participant rather than an observer, facilitators should think carefully about their language, avoiding using sector terminology e.g., 'circle time,' 'downstage;' or the expectation of knowledge, such as the names or rules of warm-up games.

It could be argued that the above guidelines are so simple that they fail to consider the experience and excellence in youth theatre delivery of many facilitators and organisations. This could be seen as a weakness of these recommendations, namely that the guidelines may not be of particular benefit to some organisations, e.g., youth theatre programmes identified in Chapters Six and Seven as modelling best practice; commercial offers which must be profitable and organisations only offering limited schemes such as paid Summer Schools. This weakness is acknowledged yet; as highlighted in Chapters Seven and Eight analysis of the wider data set revealed a largely standardised format of recruitment practice in funded youth theatre, and a generalised lack of focus by many organisations on who they recruit. These guidelines provide more than their specific content, they are a provocation to organisations to both consider their youth theatre recruitment practice methodology and for them to consider change.

The evidenced benefits to children and young people of drama provision[91] on the acquisition of pervasive skills and the social and cultural capital which has been shown in a

[91] Eriksson et al: 2014

range of studies to improve outcomes[92] was highlighted in Chapter Four. There remains however, a disconnection between the evidenced benefit of drama and the value placed upon drama as a subject during decades of education policy and the value often placed upon drama by parents and guardians (Gainer: 1997). There is evidence, highlighted in Chapters Six and Seven that some organisations acknowledge this problem and work to recruit priority participants. And yet, the wider analysis undertaken has identified that providing equity of access is the exception and not the rule. As previously considered, organisations may have this standardised approach in managing youth theatre recruitment simply because they do not consider the importance of who accesses the offer. A second possibility is that organisations are aware of priority participant need but do not have the resources to connect that knowledge with equitable access to their offer. Alternatively, whilst organisations may understand that drama can make a significant impact on priority participant's outcomes, they may not understand that wider societal perception fails to connect drama with improved attainment and mobility.

More simply put, drama improves outcomes for disadvantaged children and young people, and yet analysis in Chapter's Seven and Eight has identified that funded youth theatre organisations have an inconsistent approach to ensuring access to drama for this group. The majority of youth theatre recruitment practice evaluated had multiple barriers to access. If the youth theatre sector understands the benefits of equitable access, then why is much of the recruitment practice fixed in a formula which fails to acknowledge this? The practice guidelines proposed are acknowledged to be simple, they are a provocation and a starting point for organisations to consider why they might approach recruitment and engagement processes and terminology differently.

It is not possible to look behind individual organisational practice to comment on their motivations for their current recruitment framework. Nevertheless, a wider overview can be taken of the funding landscape and the practical difficulties for organisations in changing their approach. A principal barrier to change is the additional cost of outreach, free at the point of access delivery and the loss of an income stream from youth theatre fees if those

[92] Friedman et al: 2016; Goldthorpe: 2016

fees have been generating profit. The simplicity of many of the recommendations made, such as the consideration of language used, not only using associative marketing methods, and creating an additional 'New to Theatre' page can reduce barriers without additional cost. It must be acknowledged that funding is and will remain a core factor in providing equity of access to youth theatre.

The additional recommendations below would have a significant financial cost, but they have the potential to create positive change and deliver results which could be transformative. Whilst it is acknowledged that organisations, local government, and funders have limited resources and that the following recommendations may therefore appear impractical, it remains important to propose them as a template for best practice at a more strategic level.

Recommendation Four – The Arts Council should place conditions on funding for Youth Theatre which requires organisations to offer free at the point of access provision and to effectively measure first engagement data.

Arts Council England should set specific requirements for organisations which receive core funding for youth theatre delivery. Firstly, that all youth theatre offers are free at the point of access and secondly that the organisation provides regular key performance data relating to first engagement.

Arts Council England currently do not monitor whether NPO organisations are ensuring that their youth theatre offers are reaching those young people who need them the most. Although it is not possible to ensure that NPO's have specific percentage rates of first engagement participation, it would be an incentive in structuring their recruitment process to require them to provide data on how effective they are at widening access to their provision. Widening access for children and young people is key outcome goal for the Arts Council.

It is also recommended that youth theatre provision funded by the Arts Council must guarantee free at the point of access provision for children and young people. This

requirement would form part of the terms and conditions of the funding contract. Consideration would have to be given whether this requirement necessitated an increase in grant funding to organisations and that increase would have to be found from the Arts Council's distributable funds. This could be an area in which the Arts Council's commitment to lobbying the Department of Education for improved creative access could be utilised in the creation of a new fund specifically aimed at improving pervasive skill acquisition for Group Four children and young people through extra-curricular activity.

Recommendation Five – LCEPs are key to developing effective place based strategies and should be centrally funded

Local Cultural Education Partnerships (LCEPS) should have a formalised structure which receives centralised funding to create cohesive cultural strategies for children and young people. Core funding would ensure that the administrative burden of connecting organisations, signposting young people, and promoting outreach does not fall on teachers or arts organisations. The 2019 Arts Council commissioned report on LCEPs stated that their efforts to 'bring about a more coherent and visible delivery of cultural education' (ACE/BOP: 2020) were being significantly impacted by infrastructure difficulties due to cuts in both cultural and educational spending.

If, as the Arts Council have indicated, LCEPs 'will play an important role in our delivery plan theme of strengthening our place-based approach and supporting the levelling up of communities most in need'. (ACE: 2023), then a key factor in the success of that approach will be funding.

It is argued that the use of the combined local intelligence and structure of LCEPs is a key tool in first engagement strategies for children and young people. This is no better demonstrated than in the success of Stage Directions who, as an LCEP commissioned and backed project have engaged with 5317 priority participants over a three year period. It is recommended that all Local Authorities should be required to form and support an LCEP,

although the LCEP could be led by one of the other stakeholders e.g., an IPSO[93] or a cultural organisation.

It is also argued that within a calculation of the cost per head of any first engagement offer must be the cost of the outreach necessary to reduce barriers for priority participants. This could be reduced through centralised work undertaken by LCEPs, as their connection with local networks and communities is one of the key success factors identified in priority participant engagement. Where an organisation is developing a holistic approach to recruitment as considered earlier, and where a range of demographic target factors are utilised e.g., at least forty percent free school meal recipients and twenty percent global majority; with a minimum of fifty percent first engagements then the costs of the detailed planning and research required could be mitigated by the shared intelligence of the LCEP.

Finally, an ideal approach would be for the success of the Stage Directions pilot programme to be replicated across England within each Local Authority. This could be delivered as a structured programme for pervasive skill development, accessible to school settings across the country on a rolling basis, where each KS2 pupil can experience a year's delivery on a mandated basis which is then repeated as a terms project in KS3 (Year 9). This would provide a centralised focus for pervasive skills development for priority participants, improve educational outcomes at both primary and secondary level and the structure of the LCEP would then enable young people to be signposted to wider cultural offers. Whilst it is accepted that the cost of this recommendation would be high, the benefits to improved outcomes would be significant as evidenced by the outcomes from Stage Directions and from the other successful youth theatres analysed within this research. This would also reduce the burden on funded youth theatres to be the primary point of access for priority participants.

I have also identified gaps in the research in this area which would benefit from further study. Firstly, there is no major study analysing the impact of reduced arts teaching hours on socially disadvantaged children and young people. Whilst there are studies showing the

[93] Investment Principal Support Organisation

benefits of that teaching, it could be argued it's absence could be of even greater significance, in the attainment and outcome of young people, a reduced creative talent pipeline and a wider economic impact of a less skilled workforce. Secondly, whilst there is evidence that the parental perceptions of creative subjects including drama is one of 'luxury' rather than necessity (Gainer: 1997 p.264), it would be beneficial to conduct a more up to date study which considers parental perceptions of drama both as a subject choice and as a means of skills acquisition. A study could be undertaken measuring parental perception to drama both before and after a term of delivery in KS2 and/or KS3. The study could examine whether a programme which highlights the aims of the drama sessions and measures the post programme outcomes also impacts parental attitudes.

Finally, it would also be beneficial to conduct a longer term analysis of the impact of drama delivered through a Stage Directions model. This model was the most effective at connecting with priority participants because of the in-school delivery and the results achieved are promising as highlighted in Chapter Six. The impact of this programme could be more fully measured, through analysing outcomes such as attainment and career development pathways, against the same data from a control group of children and young people from the same schools who did not take part. This would then provide clearer evidence for the impact of the programme and whether the already evidenced short term impact provides longer term benefits.

In conclusion, the research undertaken has explored the issues pertaining to reduced arts teaching hours, the disadvantage gap and how drama can be a significant tool in improving outcomes for children and young people through improved cultural and social capital. This does not mean that the only measure that matters within youth theatre is first engagement, it is of course important to ensure that once a young person has participated in youth theatre that there are pathways for them to continue to develop their skills. These two requirements, firstly to initially engage with young people and secondly to support them in further skills development need to be considered holistically.

Nevertheless, what remains key is the need to reframe the discourse surrounding drama and youth theatre delivery away from one of preference and towards one of need. This is necessary to ensure that the value of the pervasive skills which are key to improved outcomes for the most disadvantaged children and young people is highlighted. Funding bodies, including the Arts Council, should also make changes to build youth engagement infrastructure through Local Cultural Education Partnerships and funded organisations ensuring that those organisations are able to make their youth theatre offers barrier free.

Appendix One

Examples of Excellence in Targeted Youth Engagement

Organisation	Location	Type	ACE Funded	Targeted Offer
About Face	Hereford	Specialist SEND Theatre Company	Yes	Professional Theatre Company for actors with learning disabilities. Whilst this is not a specific youth theatre the opportunities are open to young people on an open access basis.
Acta Theatre	Bristol	Specialist Theatre Company	Yes	Specialist theatre company focused on community engagement. Groups for Young carers, over 55's and young Muslim women.
Bamboozle	Leicester	Specialist Theatre Company	Yes	Professional Theatre Company producing accessible shows for disabled children and their families alongside workshop opportunities for children with a range of needs.
The Big House	London	Specialist Theatre Company	No	Specialist charity using theatre as a means of upskilling and improving the prospects of young people who have left care and are at risk of social exclusion.
Cardboard Citizens	London	Specialist Theatre Company	Yes	Targeted offer for young people aged 16 - 25 delivering drama sessions and producing theatre with people who are homeless, at risk of homelessness or who have lived experience of homelessness.

CAST Doncaster	Doncaster	Producing Theatre	Yes – NPO	Strong offer for SEND[94] young people. Theatre of Sanctuary offer for asylum seekers including children and young people.
Chicken Shed	London	Specialist Youth Theatre	Yes - NLPG	Whilst this theatre does not have specific targeted work, the fully inclusive nature of the work for SEND children and young people and children with disabilities and the excellence in delivery means that it serves as a targeted programme for those groups.
Deafinitely Theatre	London	Specialist Theatre Company	Yes	Specialist Theatre Company for adults, children and young people who are deaf or hard of hearing.
Derby Theatre	Derby	Producing Theatre	Yes - NPO	Youth Theatre programme for children aged 10 -16 who are deaf or hard of hearing. Free at point of access.
DIY Theatre	Manchester	Specialist Theatre Company	YES - NPO	Specialist theatre company for learning disabled children, young people, and adults. Their participants are also involved in leadership roles including as board members.
The Dukes	Lancaster	Producing Theatre	Yes - NPO	Projects for care experienced young people; elders and NEET[95] young people.

[94] The SEND acronym stands for Special Educational Needs
[95] The NEET acronym stands for Not in Education, Employment or Training

The Edge	Manchester	Arts Centre	Yes - NLPG	Targeted offer for SEND children and young people who are given training, work experience and positions of responsibility. Partnership with the Booth Centre delivering drama sessions and producing theatre with people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
Freewheelers	Basingstoke	Specialist Arts Company	No	Wide ranging creative arts offer for adults and children with disabilities. Includes a youth theatre which welcomes children and young people with a range of needs, and which produces full length productions each year.
FUSE	North Yorkshire	Specialist Youth Theatre	No	Professionally led specialist youth theatre which provides an accessible and inclusive company for both SEND and non-SEND children and young people.
Graeae	London	Specialist Theatre Company	YES	Specialist Theatre Company for adults and children and young people who are disabled; have learning disabilities or are deaf or hard of hearing. The group produces professional theatre as well as a wide ranging creative engagement and education offer. As specialists in this area, they also provide consultation for other theatres/theatre companies who want to develop their work with disabled artists.

Heart 'n' Soul	London	Specialist Arts Venue	YES	A wide ranging specialist offer which includes Do Your Own Thing a group for SEND and disabled children and young people ages 10 - 25. This includes drama, music, and wider creative arts.
Horse & Bamboo	Rossendale	Arts Centre	Yes	Specialist work with NEET young people; early years and families with English as a second language.
The Lowry	Salford	Arts Centre	Yes	Specialist programmes for Care experienced young people; Young Carers; Young Parents and NEET young people. Best practice in targeted engagement with strong local networks and partnerships.
Lyric Hammersmith	London	Receiving House	YES	A range of targeted programmes including START - a six week intensive for 16 -25 year old NEET young people. The programme delivers an Arts Award.
Make a Scene Theatre Company	Surrey; Kent; London; Sussex	Specialist Theatre Company	YES	Specialist theatre company for SEND children and young people (also a more limited offer for adults with disabilities and complex needs). Strong partners including MENCAP. Open access although costs apply to those who can afford them.
Mercury Theatre	Colchester	Receiving	YES	Strong offer for SEND young people in partnership with Essex short breaks.
Mind The Gap	Bradford	Specialist Theatre Company	YES	Specialist theatre company for learning disabled children, young people, and adults.

Nottingham Playhouse	Nottingham	Producing Theatre	Yes - NPO	Young women's devising group - Wolfpack - also open to trans and non-binary young people and a targeted programme for care experienced young people.
Prism Arts	Cumbria	Specialist Arts Organisation	YES	Specialist visual arts and theatre company for learning disabled children and young people and adults.
River Drama	Tonbridge	Specialist Community Arts Group	NO	Volunteer run drama group specifically for children, young people, and adults with Downs Syndrome.
Sheffield Theatres	Sheffield	Mixed Producing/Receiving Model	Yes	Launchpad - specialist programme for anyone over 18 with learning disabilities and/or autism.
Tandem Theatre	Manchester	Specialist Arts Organisation	YES - NLPG	The mission of Tandem is to provide arts opportunities for people who are marginalised and socially excluded: including young offenders; people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness; children and young people struggling with mental health.
TiPP	Manchester	Specialist Theatre Company	YES	Working within prison settings with both adults and young offenders.
Travelling Light	Bristol	Specialist Theatre Company	YES	Professional Theatre Company producing accessible shows for disabled children and their families together with a full range of workshops for children with a range of needs.

Unfolding Theatre	Newcastle Upon Tyne	Theatre Company	YES	Theatre company who also run applied theatre projects and programmes. Their work includes targeted work with older people; a youth theatre group for children and young people who are deaf or hard of hearing and projects focused on youth mental health.

Appendix Two

Arts Council Let's Create Delivery Plan Outcomes and their Constituent Elements

The Outcomes set out below are the goals that ACE hope to achieve by their delivery plan, Let's Create and which they ask every applicant organisation and artist to reference and focus their funded work towards. Each outcome is made up of the constituent elements which show how the outcome is to be met, for example, to deliver more 'creative people' one method would be to 'provide creative opportunities within the local community for people at all stages of their lives' as per element B of the Creative People outcome.

The following is taken from the delivery plan which can be downloaded directly from the Arts Council website (Arts Council: 2023).

Creative People

A Supporting people at all stages of their lives to design, develop and increase their participation in high quality creative activities.

B Providing creative opportunities in the local community to people at all stages of their lives.

C Providing high quality early years activities that reaches families from a wider range of backgrounds.

D Widening and improving opportunities for children and young people to take part in creative activities inside schools.

E Widening and improving opportunities for children and young people to take part in creative activities outside schools.

F Improving teaching for creativity in schools.

G Supporting children and young people to develop their creative skills and potential.

H Developing and improving pathways towards careers in the creative industries.

Creative Communities

I Improving access to a full range of cultural opportunities wherever people live.

J Working with communities to better understand and respond to their needs and interests, resulting in increased cultural engagement and the wide range of social benefits it brings.

K Working collaboratively through place-based partnerships to support and involve communities in high quality culture, improve creative and cultural education for children and young people, improve health and well-being through creative and cultural activity, build skills and capacity in the cultural sector and grow its economic impact.

L Connecting people and places, including diaspora communities and nationally and internationally.

A Creative and Cultural Country

M Supporting new types of creative practise, new forms of cultural content and new ways of reaching you an existing audiences and participants.

N Collaborating with other cultural organisations and/or with the commercial creative industries and/or with further and higher education that focuses on innovation, research and development and training, especially in relation to the use of new technologies.

O Strengthening the international connections of cultural organisations and creative practitioners, including coproduction and touring.

P Bringing world class culture to audiences in England.

Q Giving more opportunities to people to start a professional career in the creative industries, especially those who are currently under-represented.

R Ensuring people have opportunities to sustain their careers and fulfil their potential in the creative industries, especially those who are currently underrepresented.

Appendix Three – Youth Theatre Recruitment Practice Data

Core Comparator Data Set

	Organisation	Location	Type	ACE FUNDED	Offer	Recruitment Method
1	Belgrade	Coventry	Producing House	Yes - NPO	Acting classes - age 7 - 17. Skills based focused around devising a new piece each term. £100 per term. Theatre Hubs - ages 8 - 11; 11 - 16; 16 – 25. £67 per term - focus on building skills and creating a piece of theatre based on one of the Theatre's productions. Limited bursaries available.	Application by email and form but no audition. No peer or direct community outreach for young people although there is a strong offer for early career creatives and schools. The youth offer does offer bursaries, but these are limited and consequently this is an offer which is targeted at Group One and Group Two Young People.
2	Blackpool Grand	Blackpool	Receiving House	Yes - NPO	Youth Theatre - ages 14 - 18 (free at point of access but limited places) focus is NT Connections; RSC Associate Schools Programme	Recruitment for Youth Theatre is via Application and for limited numbers, unlikely to connect with Group Four young people. Schools programme is strong with 600 children and young people taking part in a skills acquisition programme built around Shakespeare as part of RSC programme.

3	Bolton Octagon	Bolton	Producing House	Yes - NPO	Three groups 7 - 11; 11- 14; 14 - 17; cost £75 per term. Skills workshops with sharings for parents. These could feasibly be first engagement options. Young Octagon 13 - 19 performs NT Connections and requires auditions. Basic offer with no youth voice or co-creation elements.	Application by email and completed form but no audition. No peer or direct community outreach for young people although there is a strong offer for adults and young people with educational needs. The youth offer does offer bursaries, but these are limited and consequently this is an offer which is targeted at Group One and Group Two Young People.
4	Bristol Old Vic	Bristol	Producing House	Yes - NPO	Young Company wide range of sessions covering ages from 3 - 25 (13 groups per week). Term costs range from £70 - £98 per term with bursaries. Young SixSix offers pathways to theatre that young people may not have considered before and works from referrals or direct requests. Strong Schools package. Young Company City is an annual outreach project which is designed to build project work with schools and organisations within Bristol.	Application by booking a place online there are no auditions. Young Six Six and Young Company City are direct outreach and as such could offer pathways to Group Four Young People. This is a mixed recruitment approach which appears to balance the needs of all four Groups of young people and has best practice elements regarding recruitment and the balancing of individual needs. A strong offer apparent in the number of young people engaging with the work - 300 per week.
5	Brookdale Youth Theatre	Stockport	Community/Amateur	No	Youth Theatre covering drama and musical theatre with weekly classes - ages 5 - 18 which lead to one fully staged production each year. Annual subscription of £12. Amateur tutors and not for profit.	Recruitment by enquiry and taster session. Place based setting within Community Club base in middle class area. The groups are oversubscribed. Whilst this is a positive offer given the low cost and community feel there is no outreach which may result in circular recruitment through club members decreasing the likelihood of first engagements.

6	CAST Doncaster	Doncaster	Producing House	Yes – NPO	Wide ranging offer from age 3 to 18 (26 for SEND YP). Age ranges 3 - 5; 6 - 8; 8 - 11; 11 - 14, 14 - 18 £220 per year - £22 per month with subsidised and bursary places. They are a Children's University theatre and there is a strong inclusion policy.	Recruitment for Youth Theatre is by booking a place online there are no auditions. There is a clear commitment to inclusion through their policy approach and the LCEP, but the outreach work is not as clearly defined in relation to recruitment to youth theatre.
7	CATS Youth Theatre	Bolton	Community/Amateur	No	Volunteer Run Amateur Youth Theatre ages 5 - 21. Kittens - ages 5 - 7; Primary Juniors aged 8-11; Secondary Juniors aged 12 - 14 and Seniors aged 14+. Focus on skills for the younger groups. Junior Groups work towards an annual musical production and the Seniors staging two book musicals each year. LAMDA exams are also offered. Cost - a subscription per year which equates to £30 per term with free places offered.	Recruitment is by booking a place - there are no auditions. Venue sits in an area of significant deprivation. There is a strong connection to place, and the demographics of the Group are reflective of this area. There is a commitment to an open offer and recruitment through peer to peer connection. This group has a remarkable level of success with past participants making viable industry careers following successful auditions for drama schools - this is not however the stated vision of the organisation which is to provide access and 'transferable skills'.

8	Chicken Shed	London	Specialist Youth Theatre	Yes - NLPG	Very wide ranging offer with Youth Theatre age 5 – 21. Forty different classes and types of workshop including tasters and short projects. Drop in workshops for non-members and a membership of 600 young people in the main youth theatre across age ranges; venues and experience groups. Cost - £90 per term but free places available.	Recruitment is by completing a form - there may be a waiting list. Highly inclusive - strong specialist offer with best practice elements.
9	Cotton Shed	Rossendale	Specialist Youth Theatre	Yes - NLPG	Youth Theatre ages 4 - 16. £6 per session. Early years sessions for 0-4s - Sign and Rhyme.	Recruitment is by booking online and there is a strong partnership with three local schools. Similar model to BYT and ChickenShed but a younger and less developed organisation - now partnered with Horse & Bamboo. Place based grassroots offer with the potential for best practice.
10	Derby Theatre	Derby	Producing House	Yes - NPO	Youth Theatre - Ages 8 - 11; 12 - 14; 15 - 18. NT Connections Company - Ages 13-19; Site Specific group. Cost £100 per term with half price bursaries at £50 (no free places). Deaf Youth Theatre - ages 10 -16 - free at point of access. Theatre Makers - 17+ ensemble. Young Programmers Group - age 14+ is free at point of access. Reimagine project in five hubs across Derby with partner organisations and schools.	Online waiting list application form as all groups are stated to be full. No free places on main Youth Theatre offer is a significant barrier and means this is a Group One and Two offer or would be without the hook of Reimagine as a feeder group. There are free at point of access offers for targeted groups – e.g., Deaf Youth Theatre and over 17's who want to develop skills. Strong sense of place with Reimagine offer and CAN network. Potential issues with young people graduating onto a more formal theatre offer - runs the risk of being a two tier off. Strong offer with best practice elements.

11	Half Moon	London	Specialist Theatre Company	Yes - NPO	Youth Theatre - Ages 5 - 18; within age bands. For disabled and SEND young people classes to age 25. Creative play sessions for early years. £6 per session with half price bursaries at £3 (no free places and all fees must be paid termly). Strong community and schools' connections. Artsmark and Arts Award.	Online waiting list application form as all groups are stated to be full. Despite low fees the lack of free places on main Youth Theatre offer is a barrier. There is a strong sense of place and community working with an excellent school's programme which includes in-school delivery. Example of strong offer with clear ethos which may still be populated by Group One and Group Two. Strong offer with best practice elements particularly the Year 6 - 7 transition programme.
12	Hull Truck	Hull	Producing House	Yes - NPO	Youth Theatre ages 7 - 18 in three age bands. Age 7 - 11; age 12 - 14 and the Young Company aged 15 - 18. £55 full fee with reduced fees and bursaries available. Young Creators 14 - 18 devising company - free at point of access.	Recruitment is by booking a place. The Young Creators scheme is confined to specific postcodes representing priority participant demographics - as places become available taster workshops are run in schools serving those postcodes and they also invite teacher referrals. This is a mixed recruitment approach like that of the LBT and BYT, but the limited places could reduce its effectiveness.
13	Lawrence Batley Theatre	Huddersfield	Producing House	Yes - NPO	Youth Theatre - weekly sessions for ages 6 - 16 - split into age brackets. Full scale annual community theatre productions.	Recruitment is by booking a place and there are no auditions. There's a strong community outreach programme and a strong sense of place. There's an opportunity for whole families to engage.

14	Leeds Playhouse	Leeds	Producing House	Yes - NPO	Youth Theatre - weekly sessions for ages 5-21; Sessions in community sessions; Drop in sessions - music; art and drama. Professional artists and youth workers across Bursary places available to everyone- £35 per term or £110 full price.	Recruitment is by booking a place and there are no auditions. There's a strong community outreach programme and a strong sense of place. There's an opportunity for whole families to engage and Leeds Playhouse is a Theatre of Sanctuary.
15	Leicester Curve	Leicester	Producing House	Yes - NPO	Young Community Company or ages 5 - 19 - "with a passion for the performing arts". There are different strands of the company in Musical Theatre - for 11 - 14 and 15 - 18. An acting group for 11 - 14 and 15 - 18. Both these strands work towards performance. A weekly Skills group for children aged 5 - 11.	Recruitment is by application and audition once per year. There are wide ranging community activities which could bring in families and they have a group of community ambassadors who could conceivably refer young people and there has been outreach within the community but the discourse relating to workshops 'all you need is a passion for the performing arts' demonstrates that this is not a theatre of first engagement and unlikely to attract Group 4 young people.
16	Lewisham Youth Theatre	London	Specialist Youth Theatre	Yes - NLPG	Strong offer very similar in scope to BYT and with youth voice model not dissimilar to Contact. Very good comparator. Peer mentoring programme. Outreach - very strong schools outreach. Free after-school and week-end workshops in Lewisham	Recruitment is by completing a form although they are over-subscribed and there is a waiting list. No auditions and co-creation and creativity are at the heart of the model. Similar outreach model to Contact. Sense of place strong and excellent first engagement outreach strategy. Demographics in Lewisham like those in Manchester, Salford, and Burnley.

17	Liverpool Everyman	Liverpool	Producing House	Yes - NPO	Youth Theatre offer is in transition but there are no current opportunities for young people under the age of 13. There are Directors; Marketers; Producers; Technicians and Writers Groups but these are for young people aged 18-25. The only group for 13-18 is the acting company. All groups are free to access and entitle the children and young people to free tickets to Everyman and Playhouse productions.	Recruitment is by application once a year. This is not a first engagement programme and despite the free at point of access offer is unlikely to attract Group 4 young people who have had no gateway experiences.
18	Liverpool Empire	Liverpool	Receiving House	NO	Junior Youth Theatre - 11 - 14; Liverpool Empire Musical Theatre Company - ages 14 - 20 free at the point of access. There is a good community offer but this is principally focused on activity around visiting productions and ticketing offers rather than community participation.	Recruitment for the MTC is by audition with an average of 3 children and young people for each place. Group One and Two offer.

19	M6 Theatre Company	Rochdale	Specialist Theatre Company	Yes - NPO	Professional theatre productions which tour schools, community, and youth settings as well as youth theatre provision. Youth theatre offer from ages 8 to 18. Strong sense of place and outreach in community is focused on place based need. Strong local partnerships with LCEP and LA and a model based on strong schools connections.	Recruitment is by completing a form. No auditions, open access and cost is one of the lowest paid offers at £30 per term (£3 per session) with sibling discounts. With the schools connection and the place based working this offer has best practice elements although groups are oversubscribed.
20	Mortal Fools	Tyne Valley	Specialist Theatre Company	Yes	Theatre company creating professional productions which tour schools, community, and youth settings. Strong multi-media and digital offer as well as in-person youth theatre from ages 7 to 19. Strong local and national partnerships and excellent creative learning training resources.	Recruitment is by completing online form. Enquiry web page is excellent in terms of language and accessibility and there are also welcome resources for new members which are a model of best practice. Free at the point of access and clear that the intention is for skills development. Groups are oversubscribed and there is a waiting list, but they offer online sessions which provides a point of connection.
21	Mossley AODS	Mossley	Community/Amateur	No	Wide ranging offer covering Musical Theatre; Dance, Drama an ages 3 - 21. £5 per session with bursaries available. Professional tutors paid within an amateur not for profit setting.	Recruitment is by application form with no experience required. Auditions are introduced for performance opportunities although all young people have an opportunity to perform. Well embedded in the community they celebrate alumni both in creative industries and those who have used transferable skills in other careers. Elements of best practice in terms of place but in terms of additional costs and focus on performance may mean this is a programme attracting Group One and Two.

22	Nottingham Playhouse	Nottingham	Producing House	Yes - NPO	Wide ranging offer from age 2 to 16+. Age ranges 2 -5; 5 - 7; 8 - 11; 12 - 16; and 16+. £80 per term with limited number of bursary places. The Shine project is a targeted programme working within schools and community settings. There are NT Connections programmes; a young women's devising group - Wolfpack and a targeted programme for care experienced young people.	Recruitment for Youth Theatre is by booking a place online there are no auditions. The Shine programme is direct outreach connected with 13 schools and community organisations and as such could offer pathways to Group Four Young People. This is a mixed recruitment approach which appears to balance the needs of all four Groups of young people and has best practice elements regarding recruitment and the balancing of individual needs.
23	Royal Exchange	Manchester	Producing House	Yes - NPO	Young Company from 14 -21 with three cohorts - Writers; Makers and Performers £200 per year. Skills acquisition working towards a summer production. Young Collective 14 - 21 - a range of drop in workshops for a year at a cost of £20 per year.	Young Company recruitment is geared towards young people with significant experience of drama and an understanding of how they would like to specialise. Only one opportunity a year to join main company. The drop in sessions are a good alternative but significant barriers for first engagement. Relies on children and young people being conversant with language in the room. Whilst there are good engagement strategies through Local Exchange, any connection made needs to navigate the discourse used for the Youth Theatre offer.
24	Royal Court	Liverpool	Producing House	Yes - NPO	Youth Theatre weekly sessions for ages 6-25, all free at the point of access. Youth voice led with 'designed by young people for young people'.	Recruitment is by booking a place and there are no auditions. There's a strong community outreach programme and a strong sense of place. Best practice elements.

25	Royal & Derngate	Northampton	Receiving House	Yes - NLPG	Youth Theatre ages 8 - 25. Skills sessions for 8 - 10 and 11 - 13 years - £70 per term. Musical Theatre classes and NT Connections class both working towards an annual production - £75 (bursaries available). NextGen Arts Leadership (Arts Award) programme: events management; marketing; producing - free to attend. NextGen Assistant Practitioners 16+ facilitating sessions as an assistant practitioner potentially leading to paid work. Free to attend.	Recruitment by application form and booking online. There is a strong community offer and they are part of the local LCEP. There is a strong range of opportunities and there is some element of outreach through the wider community programme and LCEP - there is very strong engagement practice with some evidence of youth voice although there is no youth board. There is a strong education offer with After School Theatre Hubs which could engage Group Four young people and the Saturday skills offers are a good entry programme. There are elements which support best practice but with links missing which if developed with a more mixed method approach could elevate the offer.
26	Sheffield Theatres	Sheffield	Producing House	Yes - NPO	SPT Young Company. 18-25 professional training over the course of a year, application, and audition process. No regular offer for children that isn't attached to schools via the Children's University programme which means that unless a child's school is a member there are no term time activities available. Three day Summer School for ages 9-17 at a cost of £100 with limited bursaries.	No recruitment method as there is no outreach focused on children and young people and the offer for children is almost entirely school-centric.

27	Stephen Joseph Theatre	Scarborough	Producing House	Yes - NPO	Youth Theatre - weekly sessions for ages 4 - 14 focused on skill acquisition. Youth Theatre for 15+ focused on working towards performance. £40 per term with bursaries available. Eastfield - free youth theatre in a community setting. Fuse - inclusive sessions for mixed cohort of young people with learning disabilities and young people aged 14 - 18 in mainstream education. Free.	Recruitment for bulk of youth theatre is simply by booking a place - no auditions. Free community youth theatre sessions for children and young people aged 8-12 (commercially sponsored). Can join at any stage. Best practice elements.
28	Theatre By the Lake	Keswick	Producing House	Yes - NPO	Three Youth Theatre groups 7 - 11; 11- 14; 14 - 17; cost £50 per term (bursary places available). Focused on skills with some performance opportunities and oldest age group - the Young Company performs NT Connections.	Recruitment is by booking a place and there are no auditions. Theatre covers a wide geographic area - there's not as much outreach detailed as might be expected and consequently the places are far more like to be taken by Group One and Two young people.
29	Theatre Porto	Ellesmere Port	Arts Centre - Specialist Theatre Company	Yes - NPO	Drama Droplets (drama skills sessions) - ages - 7-11; 12 - 18 free at point of access; Young Creatives for performers. producers and directors - age 14 - 21 - free at point of access. Young writers - ages 13 - 17 - free at point of access.	Recruitment is through community outreach and contacts. Very strong place based offer with best practice elements and a focus on theatre 'by with and for young people'. Whilst they produce theatre, they are placed in the Arts Centre category because of the focus of their building and location on their work.

30	20 Stories High	Liverpool	Specialist Youth Theatre	Yes - NPO	Youth theatre - ages 14 -21; Launch which is an emerging artists programme. Strong emphasis on co-creation and youth voice with a highly diverse company.	Recruitment is either through outreach or open workshops. Similar model of working to Contact with a focus on systemic reflection of communities with staff and volunteers. Best practice elements.

Wider Data Set

	Venue/Organisation	Place	Venue Type	ACE	Reason Dismissed from Core Comparator Set
31	Alhambra	Bradford	Receiving House	Yes	No youth theatre offer.
32	Almeida	London	Producing House	Yes	London ecology and children and young people offer has no real first engagement element.
33	Alnwick Playhouse	Alnwick	Receiving House	Yes	Term based paid skills workshops very similar to other offers and does not give additional insight into best practice.
34	Altrincham Garrick	Altrincham	Community/Amateur	Yes - NLPG	Group one and group two offer with no outreach or first engagement strategy.
35	Angel Shed	London	Specialist Youth Theatre	Yes	Great open access and inclusive offer but on same model to that of Chicken Shed and Cotton Shed so does not add breadth to analysis.
36	Aylesbury Waterside	Aylesbury	Receiving House	No	Some creative learning workshops for young people but no youth theatre offer.
37	Battersea Arts Centre	London	Arts Centre/Receiving House	Yes	Recruitment is by completing a form. No auditions and co-creation and creativity are at the heart of the model. Similar outreach model to Contact. Sense of place strong although there are no first engagement drama sessions.

38	Blackburn Empire	Blackburn	Community/Amateur	No	No ACE & children and young people is outsourced.
39	Birmingham Rep	Birmingham	Producing House	Yes	Good children and young people model - very similar to others but first engagement model not defined.
40	Birmingham Youth Theatre	Birmingham	Community/Amateur	No	Basic children and young people model - very similar to others but first engagement model not defined. Reasonable Group One and Two offer.
41	Bristol Hippodrome	Bristol	Receiving House	No	Some creative learning workshops but no youth theatre offer.
42	Burnley Mechanics	Burnley	Receiving House	Yes	No youth theatre offer.
43	Bush Theatre	London	Producing House	Yes	Youth theatre runs from age 14 - 25. Free at the point of access but annually auditioned. Similar model to others and does not add breadth to study.
44	Buxton Opera House	Buxton	Receiving House	Yes	Children and young people offer limited to occasional workshops.
45	Cambridge Arts Theatre	Cambridge	Receiving House	No	No youth theatre offer.
46	Carver Theatre	Stockport	Community/Amateur	No	Limited children and young people offer.
47	Centrestage Productions	Eastleigh	Community/Amateur	No	Similar model to CATS Youth Theatre but engagement model not as clearly defined and so does not add breadth to study.
48	CHADS Theatre	Cheadle Hulme	Community/Amateur	No	Children and young people offer limited and not good comparator to principal analysis.
49	Chichester Festival Theatre	Chichester	Producing House	Yes	Demographic variance to principal study - offers contrast but no first engagement offer.
50	Chorley Little Theatre	Chorley	Community/Amateur	No	Children and young people offer limited to an annual show and not good comparator to principal analysis.

51	Churchill Theatre	Bromley	Receiving House	Yes - NLPG	Demographic variance to principal study - Commercial youth theatre no first engagement. offer
52	Cleadon Little Theatre	Sunderland	Community/Amateur	No	No youth theatre offer.
53	Company Three	London	Specialist Youth Theatre	Yes - NPO	Specialist Youth Theatre with a YAP model. Very strong in terms of delivery model. Recruitment model is by referral only through teachers, social workers, or youth workers. Whilst the work and delivery are excellent the agency of the young people is not apparent in their recruitment and therefore with a closed recruitment model this cannot be considered for analysis.
54	Corn Exchange	Newbury	Receiving House	No	Commercial Youth Theatre - demographic variance to principal study.
55	The Courtyard	Hereford	Arts Centre/Receiving House	No	Skills based paid termly youth theatre offer which works as part of a wider participatory programme. Like other models and does not add to the breadth of the analysis.
56	Darlington Hippodrome	Darlington	Receiving House	Yes	Commercial Youth Theatre - demographic similarities but no clear outreach for Group Four to connect with venue.
57	Darwen Library Theatre	Darwen	Receiving House	No	No youth theatre offer.
58	Doncaster Little Theatre	Doncaster	Community/Amateur	No	Amateur run with biannual performance opportunities. Weekly workshop fees. Does not add to analysis.
59	Donmar Warehouse	London	Producing House	No	No youth theatre but strong schools programme through their Take the Stage initiative.
60	The Dukes	Lancaster	Producing House	Yes - NPO	Skills based basic offer with limited performance opportunities. £90 per term with bursaries. Strong offer for creative space for early career artists. Free membership to young people aged 16-25. Does not add to analysis.

61	Epsom Playhouse	Epsom	Receiving House	No	No youth theatre offer.
62	Everyman Theatre	Cheltenham	Receiving House	Yes	Basic children and young people model - very similar to others but first engagement model not defined. Reasonable Group One and Two offer.
63	Farnworth Little Theatre	Bolton	Community/Amateur	No	No youth theatre offer.
64	First Act Arts	Warrington	Community/Amateur	No	Specialist Youth Theatre focused on drama but also offering Musical Theatre. Graded classes from age 7 - 15 teaching skills including theatrical terminology and conventions. £100 per term. First Act Academy is the performance group Young Company from ages 11 - 16. Recruitment is via enquiry and class booking and whilst the curriculum is very well set out in a classical theatre style this is an offer for Group one and Group Two parents.
65	Formby Little Theatre	Formby	Community/Amateur	No	No youth theatre offer.
66	The Forum	Barrow in Furness	Receiving House	No	No youth theatre offer.
67	Gatehouse	Stafford	Receiving House	No	Good offer - but commercial in focus - excellent for Group One and Two but no first engagement strategy.
68	Georgian Theatre Royal	Richmond	Community/Receiving House	No	Basic children and young people model - very similar to others but first engagement model not defined. Reasonable Group One and Two offer.
69	Gordon Craig Theatre	Staffordshire	Receiving House	No	Basic children and young people model - very similar to others but first engagement model not defined. Reasonable Group One and Two offer.
70	Grand Theatre	Leeds	Receiving House	No	Basic children and young people offer but Group One and Two model given fees of £435 per year. Very similar model to others and therefore does not add to best practice consideration.

71	Grand Theatre	Wolverhampton	Receiving House	No	Group One and Two youth theatre model - oversubscribed and no first engagement. Similar to others and doesn't add to analysis.
72	Hackney Empire	London	Receiving House	Yes	Strong creative talent model offering a range of opportunities for young people but no youth theatre offer.
73	Hampstead Theatre	London	Producing House	No	No youth theatre offer.
74	Halifax Playhouse	Halifax	Community/Receiving House	No	No youth theatre offer.
75	Hall for Cornwall	Truro	Receiving House	Yes	Basic children and young people model - very similar to others but first engagement model not defined. Does not add depth to analysis.
76	Harlow Playhouse	Harlow	Receiving House	No	No youth theatre offer.
77	Harrogate Theatre	Harrogate	Receiving House	Yes	Youth theatre offer but Group One and Two model - oversubscribed, fee paying and very similar to other models therefore does not add to analysis.
78	Haymarket Theatre	Basingstoke	Receiving House	Yes	No youth theatre offer.
79	HOME	Manchester	Receiving House	Yes	No youth theatre offer.
80	The Hexagon	Reading	Receiving House	No	No youth theatre offer.
81	Hull New Theatre	Hull	Receiving House	No	No youth theatre offer.
82	Ilkley Playhouse	Ilkley	Community/Amateur	No	No youth theatre offer.
83	Jacob Rowntree Theatre	York	Community/Amateur	No	Some opportunities for children and young people but no youth theatre.

84	Kings Lynn Corn Exchange	Kings Lynn	Receiving House	No	No youth theatre offer.
85	Kings Theatre	Newmarket	Community/Amateur	No	Reasonable scope of offer with three age groups. Similar to Mossley and as Mossley are North based they are the better comparator. Not a first engagement model.
86	Kings Theatre	Portsmouth	Receiving House	No	Good commercial Group One and Two offer. Not as clear a comparator as others given funding model.
87	Lancaster Grand Theatre	Lancaster	Receiving House/Community	No	Amateur run with biannual performance opportunities. £10 per year fees. Not a first engagement model.
88	Lantern Theatre	Sheffield	Community/Amateur	No	No youth theatre offer.
89	Leas Cliff Hall	Folkestone	Receiving House	No	No youth theatre offer.
90	Leicester Little Theatre	Leicester	Community/Amateur	No	Youth Theatre outsourced to commercial provider.
91	Lichfield Garrick	Lichfield	Receiving House	No	Limited commercial style children and young people offer - youth board but no commitment to outreach or evidence that young people influence engagement strategy.
92	Little Theatre	Bolton	Community/Amateur	No	No youth theatre offer.
93	Little Theatre	Hyde	Community/Amateur	No	Children and young people offer limited to occasional workshops and rehearsals for specific annual shows.
94	Little Theatre	Chester	Community/Amateur	No	No youth theatre offer.
95	Little Theatre	Leicester	Community/Amateur	No	Basic children and young people model - very similar to others but first engagement model not defined. Group One and Two offer.

96	Lowther Youth Theatre	Lytham St Annes	Community/Amateur	No	Basic children and young people model - very similar to others but no first engagement model. Group One and Two offer.
97	Lyceum Theatre	Crewe	Receiving House	No	Group One and Two model (£360 per year) No first engagement, similar to other models and does not add depth to the analysis.
98	Malvern Festival Theatre	Worcester	Receiving House	No	Children and young people offer limited to occasional workshops and rehearsals for specific annual shows.
99	Mansfield Palace	Mansfield	Receiving House	No	Basic children and young people model - skills based workshops very similar to others but no first engagement or outreach. Reasonable Group One and Two offer which does not add to the analysis.
100	Marina Theatre	Lowestoft	Receiving House	No	Basic children and young people model - very similar to others, no first engagement model. Group One and Two offer.
101	Marlowe Theatre	Canterbury	Receiving House	No	Children and young people is outsourced - a standard Group One and Two offer with limited scope for children and young people to develop.
102	Mayflower Theatre	Southampton	Receiving House	No	Offer limited to occasional workshops and rehearsals for specific annual shows. No first engagement. Cost per show per child £225 - no first engagement.
103	Mercury Theatre	Colchester	Producing House	Yes	Good offer - but commercial in focus - excellent for Group One and Two. Bursaries on offer but no outreach or clear first engagement strategy.
104	Met Theatre	Bury	Receiving House	Yes	Basic children and young people model - very similar to others but first engagement model not defined and does not add to analysis.
105	Middlesborough Theatre	Middlesborough	Receiving House	No	Youth theatre offer provided commercially by a PQA franchise.
106	Milton Keynes Theatre	Milton Keynes	Receiving House	No	Basic skills based model - termly with fees. No first engagement. Group One and Two offer.

107	New Theatre	Oxford	Receiving House	No	No youth theatre offer.
108	New Vic	Newcastle Under Lyme	Producing House	Yes	Good offer - but commercial in focus - excellent for Group One and Two but not a first engagement offer. While a good delivery model this does not add to the recruitment analysis.
109	New Victoria Theatre	Woking	Receiving House	No	No youth theatre offer.
110	New Wimbledon Theatre	Wimbledon	Receiving House	No	No youth theatre offer.
111	Norwich Playhouse	Norwich	Receiving House	No	No youth theatre offer.
112	Northcott Theatre	Exeter	Receiving House	No	Basic termly workshop skills model - very similar to others and does not add to analysis.
113	Opera House	Manchester	Receiving House	No	No youth theatre offer.
114	Old Vic	London	Producing House	Yes	Wide ranging participatory offer including community choirs and schools work but no youth theatre offer.
115	Orchard Theatre	Dartford	Receiving House	No	Children and Young people offer limited to an annual summer school.
116	Palace Theatre	Newark	Receiving House	No	Youth theatre commercially outsourced.
117	Palace Theatre	Manchester	Receiving House	No	No youth theatre offer.
118	Palace Theatre	Watford	Receiving House	Yes	Term based fee paying workshops model - very similar to others does not add to analysis.

119	Park Theatre	London	Producing House	Yes - NLPG	Good participatory offer with a range of elders, young people, and community workshops. Youth theatre model is basic paid termly workshops with scholarships offered. No clear outreach strategy although they do allow drop-in attendance. This model doesn't add breadth to the analysis.
120	Polka Theatre	London	Specialist Theatre Company	Yes	Strong early years offer with weekly classes from 0 - 12 split into age bands. As this is a very specialist offer based in a children's theatre the model is not replicable more widely.
121	Princess Theatre	Torquay	Receiving House	No	No youth theatre offer.
122	Priory Theatre	Kenilworth	Community/Amateur	Yes	Basic production based model - very similar to others no first engagement model. Does not add to analysis.
123	Regent Theatre	Stoke on Trent	Receiving House	No	No youth theatre offer.
124	Questors	Ealing	Community/Amateur	No	Good Group One and Two offer with annual fees of £300 plus. No outreach and not a first engagement offer.
125	Richmond Theatre	Richmond	Receiving House	No	No youth theatre offer.
126	Riding Lights Youth Theatre	York	Community/Amateur	No	Offers a summer school for children and young people but no regular youth theatre.
127	Rose Theatre	Kingston	Receiving House	No	Good offer, but commercial and is likely to attract Group One and Two. Not a first engagement offer.
128	Royal Spa Centre	Leamington Spa	Receiving House	No	No youth theatre offer.
129	Shakespeare North	Knowsley	Receiving House	No	Youth Theatre outsourced to independent specialist community company Imaginarium.
130	Stockton Arc	Stockton	Arts Centre/Receiving House	No	No youth theatre offer.
131	Stockton Globe	Stockton	Receiving House	No	No youth theatre offer.

132	Stoke Regent	Stoke on Trent	Receiving House	No	No youth theatre offer.
133	Swan Theatre	High Wycombe	Receiving House	No	Basic children and young people model - very similar to others no first engagement model. Reasonable Group One and Two offer with bursaries offered but no outreach strategy. Adds nothing further to the analysis.
134	Sunderland Empire	Sunderland	Receiving House	No	No youth theatre offer.
135	The Sands Centre	Carlisle	Receiving House	No	No youth theatre offer.
136	Theatre Royal	St Helens	Receiving House	No	No youth theatre offer.
137	Theatre Royal	Bath	Receiving House	No	Basic children and young people model - very similar to others no first engagement model. Group One and Two offer with bursaries offered but no outreach strategy. Adds nothing as a comparator e.g., fees are £200 per term - £600 per year.
138	Theatre Royal	Brighton	Receiving House	No	No youth theatre offer.
139	Theatre Royal	Plymouth	Receiving House	Yes	Range of weekly workshops including SEND group - comparatively low fees at £70 per term. Basic children and young people model - very similar to others and no clear engagement strategy does not add to analysis.
140	Theatre Royal	Wakefield	Receiving House	No	Commercial offer very similar to a Stagecoach/PQA model - no first engagement strategy and fees for assisted places are £180 per term. £295 per term for basic fees.
141	Unity Theatre	Liverpool	Receiving House	Yes	Strong early career development/talent development venue but no youth theatre offer.
142	Watermill Theatre	Berkshire	Producing House	Yes	Basic term based workshop model - very similar to others and does not add to analysis.

143	Waterside Arts	Stockport	Arts Centre/Receiving House	No	Wide ranging multi-generational participatory offer including some children and young people's workshops. Reasonable Group One and Two offer with but no outreach strategy.
144	Winter Gardens	Blackpool	Receiving House	No	No youth theatre offer.
145	Wyvern Theatre	Swindon	Receiving House	No	Offers an annual summer school but no regular youth theatre.
146	Young Vic	London	Producing House	Yes	No youth theatre offer.
147	Z Arts	Manchester	Arts Centre/Receiving House	No	Embedded family participatory offer but no youth theatre offer.

Identification of Engagement Barriers in Organisations with Youth Theatre Provision

	Organisation	Type	Region	Application	Audition	Fees	Recruit p.a.	Waiting List	Drop in's	Multiple
1	Almeida	Producing	London	Yes	Yes	Unclear	Yes	No	Yes 18-25	Yes
2	Alnwick Playhouse	Receiving House	North	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
3	Altrincham Garrick	Community	North	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
4	Angel Shed	Specialist Youth Theatre	London	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
5	Battersea Arts Centre	Receiving House	London	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
6	Belgrade Theatre	Producing	Midlands	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
7	Birmingham Rep	Producing	Midlands	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
8	Birmingham YT	Community	Midlands	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No

9	Blackpool Grand	Receiving House	North	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
10	Bolton Octagon	Producing	North	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
11	Bristol Old Vic	Producing	SW	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
12	Brookdale	Community	North	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
13	Burnley Y.T.	Specialist Youth Theatre	North	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
14	Bush Theatre	Producing	London	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
15	Cast Doncaster	Producing	North	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
16	CATS YT	Community	North	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
17	Centrestage	Community	SW	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
18	Chichester Festival	Producing	SE	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
19	Chicken Shed	Specialist Youth Theatre	London	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
20	Churchill Theatre	Receiving House	London	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
21	Company Three	Specialist Youth Theatre	London	Referral	No	No	No	No	No	closed recruitment
22	Contact	Specialist Youth Theatre	North	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
23	Corn Exchange	Receiving House	SE	Yes	No	Yes	Termly	No	No	Yes
24	CottonShed	Specialist Youth Theatre	North	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
25	The Courtyard	Arts Centre/Receiving	Midlands	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
26	Darlington Hippodrome	Receiving House	North	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
27	Derby Theatre	Producing	Midlands	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
28	Doncaster Little Theatre	Community	North	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes

29	The Dukes	Producing	North	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
30	Everyman Cheltenham	Receiving House	SW	Yes	No	Yes	Termly	No	No	Yes
31	First Act	Community	North	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
32	Gatehouse, Stafford	Receiving House	Midlands	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
33	Georgian Theatre Royal	Community	North	Yes	No	Yes	Termly	No	No	Yes
34	Gordon Craig Theatre	Receiving House	Midlands	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
35	Grand Theatre, Leeds	Receiving House	North	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
36	Grand Theatre, Wolver	Receiving House	Midlands	Yes	No	Yes	Termly	Yes	No	Yes
37	Half Moon	Specialist Youth Theatre	London	Yes	No	Yes	Termly	Yes	No	Yes
38	Hall for Cornwall	Receiving House	SW	Yes	No	Yes	Termly	No	No	Yes
39	Harrogate Theatre	Receiving House	North	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
40	Hull Truck	Producing	North	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
41	Kings T Newmarket	Community	SE	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
42	Kings T Portsmouth	Receiving House	SW	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
43	Lancaster Grand	Receiving House	North	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
44	Lawrence Batley Theatre	Producing	North	Yes	No	Yes	Termly	No	No	Yes
45	Leeds Playhouse	Producing	North	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
46	Leicester Curve	Producing	Midlands	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
47	Lewisham Youth Theatre	Specialist Youth Theatre	London	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
48	Lichfield Garrick	Receiving House	Midlands	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes

49	Liverpool Everyman	Producing	North	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
50	Liverpool Empire	Receiving House	North	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
51	Little Theatre (Hyde)	Community	North	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
52	Little Theatre (Leicester)	Community	Midlands	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
53	Lowther Youth Theatre	Community	North	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
54	Lyceum Theatre	Receiving House	North	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
55	M6 Theatre Company	Specialist Youth Theatre	North	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
56	Mansfield Palace	Receiving House	Midlands	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
57	Marina Theatre	Receiving House	SE	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
58	Mercury Theatre	Producing	SE	Yes	No	Yes	Termly	No	No	Yes
59	Met Theatre	Receiving House	North	Yes	No	Yes	Termly	No	No	Yes
60	Milton Keynes Theatre	Receiving House	SE	Yes	No	Yes	Termly	No	No	Yes
61	Mortal Fools	Specialist Youth Theatre	North	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
62	Mossley AODS	Community	North	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
63	New Vic	Producing	Midlands	No	No	Yes	Termly	No	No	Yes
64	Northcott Theatre	Receiving House	SW	Yes	No	Yes	Termly	No	No	Yes
65	Nottingham Playhouse	Producing	Midlands	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
66	Palace Theatre, Watford	Receiving House	SW	Yes	No	Yes	Termly	No	No	Yes
67	Park Theatre	Producing	London	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
68	Polka Theatre	Specialist Theatre	London	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No

69	Priory Theatre	Community	Midlands	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
70	Questors	Community	London	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
71	Rose Theatre Kingston	Receiving House	London	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
72	Royal Exchange	Producing	North	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
73	Royal Court	Producing	North	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
74	Royal & Derngate	Receiving House	Midlands	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
75	Sheffield Theatres	Producing	North	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	closed recruitment
76	Stephen Joseph Theatre	Producing	North	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
77	Swan Theatre, Kingston	Receiving House	London	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
78	Theatre by the Lake	Producing	North	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
79	Theatre Porto	Specialist Theatre	North	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
80	Theatre Royal, Bath	Receiving House	SW	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
81	Theatre Royal, Plymouth	Receiving House	SW	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
82	Theatre Royal, Wakefield	Receiving House	North	Yes	No	Yes	Termly	No	No	Yes
83	Watermill Theatre	Producing	SE	Yes	No	Yes	Termly	No	No	Yes
84	Waterside Arts	Receiving House	North	Yes	No	Yes	Termly	No	No	Yes
85	20 Stories High	Specialist Youth Theatre	North	No	No	No	No	No	No	No

Best Practice Recommendations for Youth Theatre Participatory Recruitment

CONTENTS

Introduction

These recommendations were developed during a PhD research project which examined the question – ‘how can funded youth theatres ensure that they recruit the children and young people most in need of the pervasive skills taught through drama?’’. During the research findings from several areas of study including educational policy, pervasive skill acquisition, and youth theatre practice were considered including an analysis of the recruitment methods and youth theatre programmes of more than one hundred organisations in England. This report is a way to share the learning which resulted from the research and to provide a starting point for organisations to consider the way in which children and young people access their youth theatre and participatory offers.

Reducing Barriers for Children and Young People

It was a predictable research finding that a successful youth theatre offer is one which provides a space for participants from a variety of experiences and backgrounds to develop their abilities and skills whilst obtaining and learning from differing perspectives. Numerous studies and reports have highlighted the benefits of cultural experiences for children and young people with participants showing a 17% increase in cognitive abilities[96] and increased employability[97]. Drama as both a cross-curricular teaching tool and taught subject has been shown to significantly improve outputs against five of the Lisbon Key Competencies of Learning[98]. The research also considered the impact of the growing disadvantage gap[99] on children and young people and the reduced opportunities for many participants to access cultural education and in particular drama in school.

As drama has been shown to have a measurable impact on both attainment and outcomes[100], a key initial finding of the research was the need to ensure that those children most in need of pervasive skill development are able to access a youth theatre offer. Organisations who are funded to widen participation should prioritise those participants who are most in need of access, and it should be ensured that young people encounter as few barriers as possible on their pathway to becoming a youth theatre participant.

During the research process evidence of excellence in targeted children and young people's work was apparent. Programmes working with deaf and disabled children and young people[101]; young carers[102]; care leavers[103]; LGBTQ+ youth[104] and NEET[105] young people[106] are all making an evidenced difference to the lives of their young participants.

[96] Cultural Learning Alliance, Key Research Findings: the value of cultural learning (2017)
[97] Ibid
[98] DICE: 2010
[99] EPI:2020
[100] Cultural Learning Alliance 2019
[101] Chicken Shed; Deafinitely Theatre; Derby Theatre; DIY Theatre; The Edge
[102] ACTA; The Lowry
[103] The Big House
[104] Burnley Youth Theatre; Nottingham Playhouse
[105] Not in education, employment, or training
[106] The Lowry; Lyric Hammersmith

Where the research found a gap however was in the pathways open to young people who do not fall into targeted classifications but have limited access to arts activities in school and at home. These children and young people are more likely to be from disadvantaged backgrounds and/or communities which have been traditionally classified as ‘hard to reach’. An analysis of youth theatre recruitment practice was undertaken from the perspective of a child or young person new to drama/youth theatre to assess the ease with which they could access each participatory offer, 83% of the youth theatre offers analysed had multiple barriers for a participant to navigate.

These recommendations are proposed for two reasons, firstly to provide a stimulus for organisations to assess their recruitment methods and consider how they engage with children and young people and secondly, to share elements of best practice which were identified during the research process to be effective in reducing barriers for children and young people and widening participation.

Priority Participants & Pervasive Skills

The first two recommendations relate to two elements of engagement phraseology. Firstly, it is recommended that groups which may previously have been categorised as *hard to reach* should be renamed '*priority groups'* and individually *priority participants*.

Hard to reach' is a phrase widely used within engagement settings for communities either perceived to be disengaged or "inaccessible to most traditional and conventional methods for any reason" (HSE: 2004). There is however, despite the wide use of the phrase both in policy and practice, (Flanagan; Hancock; 2010), no clear definition of who the phrase describes. By categorising a group of participants as 'hard to reach' it makes a negative inference that the group is making itself 'hard to reach' and therefore the responsibility for the disassociation with cultural opportunity is theirs and the language used becomes a barrier to engagement. Psychological studies also show that word association related to groups may reinforces stereotypes and underlines preconceptions (Spencer-Rogers et al: 2007). Replacing this term with priority groups/priority participants reframes the language of recruitment with a positive adjective, 'priority', and, from the perspective of this research, is also reflective of the urgent need to ensure that youth theatre recruitment prioritises effective first engagement strategies.

Secondly, it is recommended that the skills acquired from drama, often referred to as *soft skills* or *transferable skills* are renamed *pervasive skills*. Pervasive skills are those skills and attributes which impact all areas of life and work. The non-exhaustive examples, of self-advocacy; persistence; presentation skills and self-critique are attributes which contribute to effective functioning as an adult in and out of the workplace and, 73% of graduate employers report that there is a current shortage of graduate candidates able to demonstrate those skills (SHRM: 2019, p.4). The use of the word 'soft' to describe such important skills, diminishes their power and reframing their description underlines the need for young people to acquire them to improve their outcomes.

There is some evidence that this is a term already in limited use (Viviers et al: 2016) and building on this usage can highlight the importance of the skills acquired through drama participation to the potential benefit of the sector as a whole.

The Participant's Pathway

The following recommendations relate to the process of recruitment and to the practical steps that can be taken to reduce barriers for priority participants.

Considered from the perspective of the participant the steps taken from awareness to attendance can be broken down simply as follows:

- Discovery – How Does a Priority Participant Discover your Youth Theatre Offer?
- Connection - How Does a Priority Participant Connect with your Youth Theatre Offer?
- Participation – What barriers might a Priority Participant face when attending youth theatre for the first time?

Discovery – How Does a Priority Participant Discover your Youth Theatre Offer?

Priority Participants

Priority Participants are defined as children and young people who are not culturally engaged and who are not in a targeted category. Identification of priority participants will be different in each youth theatre setting depending upon place based need. Priority participants can be identified through local data, e.g., schools; youth centres and residential postcodes falling within high IMD areas[107]; from shared data through partner organisations e.g., LCEP; and, through focused outreach.

[107] It is acknowledged that the use of postcodes in high IMD areas is a broad approach, however, there is evidence that it is a helpful tool is identifying priority participants (Goodman; Gatward: 2008). Used in conjunction with intelligence from community networks this information can be used when identifying areas in which to undertake outreach work.

Whole Family or Grapevine Approach

If a participant's guardians are not culturally engaged, they may feel that the arts and drama are 'not for them' or their children. Using a wider family approach to engagement with free taster days; school holiday activity or performance activity within community settings can alter perceptions as the impact of youth theatre activity is seen first-hand and then positively shared.

LCEPs

Connecting with the Local Cultural Education Partnership can deliver significant benefits through the sharing of information, collaboration on outreach offers and connecting with priority place based settings.

Youth Voice

Working with young people through youth boards; young advisors or young trustees has a demonstrable and positive impact on the recruitment of young people through peer to peer modelling and programming. Organisations working towards best practice in youth delivery should consider Youth Adult Partnerships as a governance and delivery model for their youth programmes.

Connection - How Does a Priority Participant Connect with your Youth Theatre Offer?

Website

The first step a priority participant may take to make a connection with your youth theatre is via your website. Using sector terminology on the youth theatre page or emphasising the 'professional' or advanced standard of youth theatre output may be a barrier to a participant looking to take their first steps.

A simple solution is a single extra enquiry page aimed at participants who are 'New to Theatre' with a link on the organisation's homepage. This would connect to a page focused on first engagement pathways for participants which might include information on the times and locations of drop in groups; how to connect with

someone who can help them and details of first engagement offers such as free ticket schemes, theatre tours and taster sessions.

Associative Marketing

Utilising existing customer/audience databases and organisational social media will only connect with participants who have already engaged with or follow you. Marketing for youth theatre and participatory offers should focus on widening awareness with community groups with which the organisation wants to connect.

Outreach taster sessions in schools and community venues and peer to peer marketing through youth performance and festival/social events can widen awareness within wider communities. Open days which specifically invite community groups and schools which build in free ticket offers and youth theatre taster sessions can also build connection.

Application

There will always be an administrative element of the enrolment process to meet safeguarding requirements. However, this should be kept to a simple one page form meeting the basic safeguarding requirements of the participants name, date of birth and address; two emergency contact names and numbers and any allergy or medical information. A participant may need help completing this form and it is important that there is support in place to complete this with them either at the first session or, if the information is required in advance, during a drop-in or orientation tour.

Audition

The prospect of an audition or a workshop for a participant who has not attended youth theatre before is a significant barrier, as a priority participant engaging for the first time cannot demonstrate skills they have not yet learned or distinguish themselves confidently with other more experienced auditionees. Auditions should not be used as a connection method in youth theatres which seek to engage priority participants.

Waiting Lists

A full waiting list is not a measure of success in many ways, firstly, it is an indication that there is a lack of enough available provision to serve community needs and secondly, it indicates that an organisation has not considered alternative offers to support the needs of participants waiting to join the youth theatre. Where a programme is over-subscribed this can be mitigated by additional drop in groups and by recruitment on a project to project basis which rotates both priority participants and secondary engagers between skills focused work and production work. Drop-in groups can also be an effective way for youth theatre participants to continue their connection during busy times such as GCSE and A Level study periods.

Costs

If a priority participant engages with an organisation only to find they are unable to attend because of the required fees, then this is a barrier which extends the disadvantage gap and penalises those children and young people who are most at need of pervasive skill development. If a core aim of the organisation is to ensure equity of delivery to all children and young people including priority participants, then places should be free at the point of access. Alternatively, payment can be on a voluntary basis or on a donation basis as these methods do not require a priority participant to apply for an exemption or bursary which singles them out from their peers.

Participation – Managing Initial Session Participation to Improve Participant Retention

Managing Expectations

Attending a new place for the first time is daunting for anyone. Where a young person has connected with an organisation there will understandably be nervous in advance of their first youth theatre rehearsal or workshop. Organisations can help to manage those nerves through communications which give the participant a clear understanding of what will happen at their first session from the time they arrive at the building. This should include basic information such as: -

- Travel information.

- Which venue entrance the participant should use.
- Who will meet the participant when they arrive.
- What they need to wear or bring with them.
- What the format of the session will be.
- Basic housekeeping information such as where they can store coats and bags and where the toilet facilities are.
- Who to speak to if they have a question or are unsure about anything.

Clear information on what to expect reduces the number of unknown factors for each participant prior to the session. As each step is confirmed during the first session, i.e., they enter through the correct door, the named person meets them, the session format runs as described, this builds trust and connection more quickly between the participant and organisation.

Balancing experience levels

In an initial session where there are a range of experience levels, the facilitator must endeavour to ensure that, while the group dynamic establishes itself, the children, and young people with experience or 'secondary engagers' are kept engaged yet supportive of the pace of their priority participant peers. This can be done effectively by regularly mixing participants for small group work to better develop their abilities and skills whilst obtaining and learning from differing perspectives. Peer to peer learning in small groups or one to ones also has evidenced benefits for both the more experienced and less experienced participant and can not only support communication skills development but strengthen group bonds and promote teamwork.

Facilitator Considerations

Priority participants need to navigate their own response to drama e.g., dealing with nervousness, understanding that mistakes are allowed and developing skills which enable them to communicate effectively within the space. So that newcomers can fully take part and feel like a participant rather than an observer, facilitators should think carefully about their language, avoiding using sector terminology e.g., 'circle time,' 'downstage;' or the expectation of knowledge, such as the names or rules of warm-up games.

Summary

The above guidelines are simple but are all focused on barrier reduction for participants who would most benefit from the delivery. Analysis of more than one hundred youth theatre programmes has evidenced that, despite the acknowledged experience and excellence in youth theatre delivery of many facilitators and organisations, there are very few offers without barriers for priority participants to overcome. These barriers reduce the likelihood that those children and young people will discover, connect, and participate with youth theatre.

The first question that an organisation should ask is ‘why do we provide a children and young people’s participation programme?’. If the response is at least in part to widen opportunities for children and young people, then it is worth taking time to consider the current recruitment methodology, whether there are barriers to access at any stage of the participant pathway and how these might be removed. Widening participation and introducing new audiences to a venue/organisation has sustained long term benefits in organisational profile and audience growth and can form part of longer term future proofing strategies.

The additional benefit to reducing barriers for priority participants is the creation of a recruitment pathway which is easy for all participants to navigate, regardless of their experience level. This produces an approach to engagement which promotes inclusivity and can be used across a full range of participatory programmes.

It must be acknowledged that funding is and will remain a core factor in providing equity of access to youth theatre. The simplicity of many of the recommendations made, such as the consideration of language used, not only using associative marketing methods, creating an additional ‘New to Theatre’ page, and clear communications to new participants can all reduce barriers without significant additional cost. Small changes can make a big difference.

The recommendations have been considered from a practical operational perspective and to act as a provocation to consider making changes which can benefit both the participants and the organisation.

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