

Title: Re-igniting the legacy of diversity in Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA): How the 1980s democratic ethos at Theatre Centre (UK) under the leadership of David Johnston can inform current theatre practice.

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Abstract: In this article I consider the legacy of my late mentor David Johnston, the pioneering producer of Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) in the UK. Prompted by a symposium at Derby Theatre in February 2018, I reflect on how Johnston's innovations as Artistic Director of the TYA company Theatre Centre (1977-1986) can inform current debates about diversity, dramaturgy and arts-in-education. I use Paolo Freire's pedagogic approach (1970), Jill Dolan's concept of "utopias in performance" (2005) and John Swain and Sally French's "affirmative model of disability" (2000) as theoretical frameworks to explore Theatre Centre's practice. Through analysis of a re-discovered 1986 documentary film about Theatre Centre, re-examination of David Holman's influential play *Peacemaker* (1982) and a consideration of other contributions at the symposium, I argue that the TYA theatre-makers of the '80s were part of a radical, democratic movement that can inform the creation of an alternative to current neoliberal practices. Finally, in recognition that Johnston's central talent was to apply democratic principles to fluctuating contexts, I propose some recommendations for current UK theatre practice in his spirit.

Keywords: Theatre; education; schools; diversity; democracy.

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“Tradition is not to preserve the ashes, but to pass on the flame.”

Attributed to Gustav Mahler

“Slowly a brick is moving and then is removed on the blue side. A blue hand is seen. It places a blue handkerchief in the space that has been made. SIMP comes back to the wall and takes the handkerchief. She looks at it and wraps it round her. She takes off her red handkerchief and lays it in the hole. She comes back to FRANNY. The blue hand reappears and takes the red handkerchief. Pause. The last brick is replaced. Music continues.”

Final stage direction of *Peacemaker* by David Holman (1982).ⁱ

Abstract

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My friend and mentor David Johnston, the pioneering producer of Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) in the UK, died on 23rd November 2017. On 21st February 2018, [a symposium](#) was curated in his honour by his long-time collaborator Ava Hunt. The symposium, held at Derby Theatre, emerged naturally from the theatre's partnership with Derby University, where Hunt now lectures. It was a moving gathering of remembrance for friends and colleagues, that also functioned as a way to consider the future of TYA in schools.

I first met David Johnston when I was a fledgling workshop-leader at the London Bubble in 1986 and later he was my boss as part of the pioneering educational theatre work in Nottinghamshire in the 1990s. He became my mentor, as he did with many others. This reflection on his work, then, is in part personal. David was an inspirational figure for many of my generation; he provoked, supported and inspired. Above all, he encouraged me to apply fundamental political principles to changing circumstances. In large part, then, this article is a consideration of his unheralded achievements, used as a lens to examine contemporary issues.

Derby was a fitting location for the symposium for two key reasons. Firstly, in contrast with much theatre work emerging from London and other key metropolitan hubs, the UK's ground-breaking TYA has very often thrived in defiantly unfashionable locations, as perhaps best epitomised by the origination of the term TiE (Theatre-in-Education) at the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry in 1965ⁱⁱ. This work is

therefore atypical; it is not innovation incubated with audiences with “cultural capital”, as the theorist Pierre Bourdieu would put it (1977). It occurs in corners where few are looking: in school halls. Secondly, Derby Theatre has been undergoing a renaissance under the inspired leadership of Artistic Director Sarah Brigham. Brigham was appointed in large part because of her long-standing championing of work with young audiences and with youth theatres. She has set about ensuring that education is built-in, not bolted-on, to Derby Theatre. As she said in an interview with theatre blogger Carl Woodward shortly after she was appointed in 2015:

One area that really worries me is the destruction of arts in education. It's vital that every young person is given access to high quality arts experiences and able to realise their own creativity. At the moment that seems hugely under threat and if we don't do something about it then we will be all the poorer not only in 20 years when we are looking for the next generation of artists but also straight away as our children and ultimately our society will suffer. We also need to turn a corner on diversity – it's not good enough that our creative leaders, our artists and our audiences don't represent the world we live in.ⁱⁱⁱ

Brigham's assertion is that work with young people is foundational for the future of a theatre that celebrates diversity. This is the latest restatement of an honourable tradition that could be said to go back to Joan Littlewood and her successors' tenures at the helm of Theatre Royal Stratford East and the work that David Johnston himself led, most notably at Theatre Centre and then as Director of Nottingham Roundabout in the 1990s, working with Nottingham Playhouse.

The 2018 symposium presented a varied menu. At the heart of the day was a consideration of Johnston's era as Artistic Director at Theatre Centre: the company, founded by Brian Way in 1953, that was the first to focus exclusively on bringing bespoke theatre to young people in schools in the UK. Hunt's students presented a production of *Peacemaker*, the David Holman play Theatre Centre produced in 1982,

that continues to engage audiences across the world. The performance was followed by contributions from Holman himself, the student actors, Dr Jo Robinson (Nottingham University) and Paul Harman - a stalwart of the TiE/TYA movement - who reflected on the importance of this work internationally through [ASSITEJ](#), the international TYA network^{iv}.

For me, the most remarkable moment in the day was the unearthing of part of a previously unseen film, made by the film-maker Tony Palmer in 1986. This film contained an interview with Johnston, captured in the year I met him. The interview is punctuated by footage of the Theatre Centre “Mixed Company” performing in a school and of actors discussing their work at Theatre Centre’s base.

Following an Open Space forum, friends and colleagues presented “legacies and epiphanies” celebrating Johnston’s remarkable impact on the TYA movement. These contributions also focused firmly on the future and how the remarkable energy and rigour of the ‘80s holds important lessons for today.

Although David Holman’s work features in a some publications (e.g. Milling, 2012, England, 1990) and he wrote a section of *Theatre for Children and Young People* (Ed. Bennett, 2005), the existing commentary on *Peacemaker* is largely confined to debates about how the TiE/TYA movement handled political content. This has deflected attention from the importance of *Peacemaker* as emblematic of Theatre Centre’s wider production context and its dramaturgical processes, and therefore of the paradigm shift that was realised under Johnston’s leadership. *Peacemaker* was part of a programme of work undertaken over several years that included Holman’s other peace plays (*Susuma’s Story* and *ABC*) and the emergence of the Theatre Centre’s Women’s Company. The Theatre Centre Women’s Company produced,

among other plays, Nona Shepherd's *Getting Through* (1985, unpublished), Bryony Lavery's *Over and Out* (1985, unpublished) and Lisa Evans' *Under Exposure* (1984)^v, as well as a host of other plays, developed within the company's democratic ethos. On the newly-discovered film, Shepherd herself speaks movingly about the emergence of the Women's Company, noting how feminism was informing learning for both girls and boys:

A lot of people misunderstand the feminist thrust. Feminism is obviously being positive towards girls; it's not being negative towards boys. If you're a feminist I don't consider that you're anti-male, but that you're pro-women, which is a very different thing. I don't agree that there's not positive role-models for boys. For instance, in the play ... *Getting Through*, the boy in that, who is the main character Kaz's best friend in the whole world, is a very positive role-model for boys. He's a very imaginative, talkative, lively, interested, compassionate, sympathetic boy. I deliberately wrote that, so I could think of a boy who would be my favourite sort of boy.^{vi}

As well as notable feminist theatre practitioners, the company attracted a range of artists from across the spectrum of alternative theatre, with strong influences from companies such as Black Theatre Co-Op, Gay Sweatshop, Graeae, Oval House and the Women's Theatre Group. As Johnston records in his interview with the website *Unfinished Histories* (Croft & Higgs, 2018), despite some very challenging conflicts in the company over issues of representation, the resulting plays - such as Noel Greig's play *Laughter from the Other Side* (1986, Unpublished) about an Asian boy in love with a white boy - started to tell stories that had previously been hidden.

At a time now when UK theatre is convulsed with debates around representation and diversity, my argument is that the UK TYA movement in the '80s, as epitomised by Theatre Centre's approach, was not only ahead of its time, but was significantly more progressive than current practice. David Johnston's role in this was pivotal. During his tenure at Theatre Centre, Johnston came to realise that his strengths

were not as a conventional director and writer, but as a facilitator of other people's talents. However, he did not establish himself as a vigilant producer-gatekeeper whose taste determined the artistic programme. Instead, he was expert at the alchemy of putting together artistic teams, informed by balancing his political thinking with an equal and complementary passion for improving the artistic quality of TYA. For Johnston, artistic quality was intimately connected to a democratic ethos, which reached beyond the rehearsal-room floor into the decision-making mechanisms of his company. As Johnston himself says in the newly-discovered film:

We do have people who are closer to working-class backgrounds; we do have people who are involved with the Black community; we do have people who are fighting those grass roots fights and those struggles for change, outside their work as well as within it. ... There's very little danger that they become detached, that they become patronising. It's very easy for theatre of this nature to become very liberal ... and to become a trendy flavour of the month ... There's a danger that the sort of things that we prioritise become token gestures for organisations and funding bodies who really aren't committed to change, but they want to dress it up. There's no doubt that supporting disabled people, supporting Black people, supporting feminism, gay rights and so on is often done now as a token gesture, to cover the deep innate resistance to change that they have ... After two years we created an equal wage policy ... We introduced company meetings and decisions, so everyone could participate in company decisions.^{vii}

This work had a profound, if unrecognised, influence on the UK theatre ecology and also extended its impact on TYA across the globe, mainly through the vehicle of ASSITEJ. It would be an interesting exercise, beyond the scope of this article, to track the careers of the many and diverse artists who cut their creative teeth at Theatre Centre and other TiE/TYA companies. This rich mix of diverse artists, then, led to Theatre Centre becoming a laboratory for finding artistic expressions to celebrate difference. This was *because* of the need to engage with young audiences and the schools' context. Theatre Centre was consistently exploring ways to make

their plays entertaining and engaging for every young person. Nona Shepherd's insight into writing feminist plays that work for boys, as well as girls, demonstrates this absolute focus on every audience member. As well as providing life-enhancing narratives for young people marginalised by mainstream culture, whose stories they mirrored, each company member used their life experience to inform a dramaturgy to reach those *not* sharing their backgrounds. However, Johnston himself was acutely aware that didactic plays with strong "messages" would not serve the company's purpose, despite the attention paid to the politics of representation and subject matter on a range of issues such as race, environmentalism and sexuality. This approach contrasted strongly with the more evangelical work of some of the alternative theatre movement at this time. As Johnston says about the Peace Plays series that included *Peacemaker*:

These did become controversial, but they weren't controversial in the schools, they were happily accepted in conservative areas ... we did have to fight off a challenge that said these plays were biased and political, and that challenge came from Norman Tebbit, who was a senior government minister at the time ... It was clear that our work was thought-out, that it wasn't biased, that it was well-done, entertaining and it was done in complete cooperation with parents and teachers.(Johnston 1987: p23)^{viii}

Peacemaker's controlling idea - of culture being a route to open up dialogue - was echoed in the company's ethos. Written seven years before the fall of the Berlin Wall, the story is simple (but not simplistic). The Reds and the Blues are divided by a wall. They stereotype each other as the enemy, with myths abounding about the other sides' malevolence. Through the characters Simp and Bluey's exchange of performance skills and friendship, they start to understand each other. However, Holman assiduously avoids the naïve and unrealistic solution that ordinary people can bring down the wall. Instead, at the end of the play, there's a small breach in the

wall symbolising the beginnings of understanding and dialogue, as quoted in the stage direction at the beginning of this article. Thus, the play is radical in its promotion of dialogue across what seems insurmountable difference. And it is this act of creative exchange across difference that was also a central theme of Johnston's leadership at Theatre Centre.

Thirty-six years later, of course, the play's themes are as potent as ever. Seemingly unbreachable walls, both literal and metaphorical, are our major challenge in classrooms, families, workplaces, international relations ... and in theatre.

It is worth emphasising the radicalism of Theatre Centre's practice at this time, in contrast to mainstream UK theatre. To take one pertinent example, the National Theatre's precis of their opening decade, *Stage by Stage South Bank: 1976-1987*^x almost exactly mirrors Johnston's time at Theatre Centre. It records no women directors or writers and no disabled people or people of colour as artists at all. Of course, these artists were present in very small numbers (For example, Indian actor Roshan Seth as the Fool in *King Lear* (1986) and disabled actor David Rappaport in *Illuminatus!* (1977)). However, they are not deemed to be significant enough to have been included in the National Theatre's most visible documentation^x. By stark contrast, the 1986 film records a green room conversation with one of Theatre Centre's touring acting companies. Actors Hamish MacDonald and Royce Ullah discuss their reception by teachers and colleagues as a disabled actor and Asian actor respectively:

Hamish: I think it was very much how I felt with able-bodied^{xi} people coping with me being disabled ... At one point in the show I had to be lifted up and thrown forward. "Good God! Can we do this?" Of course, I said: Go on, see what happens. If I break my leg, I'll

break my leg. They had my permission to do it, so they threw me, it was OK.

Royce: When we go to a school, a couple of us go in, we talk to a teacher, we find out where the toilets are and where we're performing and everything. There are times I've been in with Joe^{xii} and I've asked questions to the teacher and they've been answered back to Joe. And I felt I wasn't being taken seriously. Do you have any experience like that? Where you've gone in with an able-bodied person and all the information's been given to the able-bodied person?

Hamish: Yeah. All the time ... It's happened all my life. But, because my mother hasn't let me sit on my arse and has made me do things, if I ask a question, they answer my mother, she won't answer for me.

This exchange gives a significant flavour of the company's workplace culture. As well as working creatively with other theatre-makers in the rehearsal room, Theatre Centre actors were expected to engage with every aspect of the company's work. Working in schools, there was an educational purpose to all aspects of the visit: the liaison with teachers; conversations with the audience before and after the play; and the relationships within the company during get-ins and get-outs. In all these circumstances, the politics of class, disability, gender, race and sexuality were negotiated; not always without conflict, but always with a collective focus on producing the highest quality artistic and educational experience for the audience.

It was also significant that the acting companies were largely populated with young actors, some as young as seventeen. This was congruent with the company's emphasis on equalities in every aspect of its work. Since prejudice based on background was challenged at every opportunity, the company naturally championed the young. Therefore, children and young people were not viewed as nascent adults, but regarded with respect; this was a theatre that defiantly never patronised

its core audience. It is significant that Theatre Centre's most recent directors, Rosamunde Hutt and, currently, Natalie Wilson, not only have upheld the tradition of involving young professional theatre artists, but have consistently engaged school pupils at the heart of the dramaturgical process of creating new plays (Hutt, 2003).

Theatre Centre's actors in the '80s were therefore of necessity frequently recruited straight from youth theatres, as drama schools were, arguably, even more discriminatory than they are today. In addition to the presentation of a much more diverse stage picture than would be encountered habitually in the mainstream culture of the time, audiences would be welcomed into worlds inhabited, not by the proxy-parental figures that most of their teachers represented to them, but by vibrant, dynamic and engaged young adults – in many ways representative of their older siblings. This facilitated a pedagogic-aesthetic innovation as a unique rapport was established with the audience: an authenticity only possible with young actors. It is certainly no coincidence that Johnston, along with others in the wider TYA/TiE movement at the time, started to be inspired by the work of Augusto Boal, who presented his first workshops in the UK at Goldsmiths' College in 1985. Boal himself was influenced fundamentally by the pedagogy of Paulo Freire, who, as Anthony Jackson puts it, "... places the dialogic at the very centre of his philosophy of emancipatory education" (Jackson, 2007)^{xiii}. Learning through dialogue was happening at many levels and in many places at Theatre Centre; in school halls, rehearsal rooms, company meetings, at festivals and at conferences. It's also worth noting, that as well as through conventional conversation and the sharing of theory, learning occurred through negotiating meaning in theatre-making processes: through images, sounds and narrative. Vital to Johnston's philosophy was a mutual respect extended to all those involved - artists, administrators, technicians, audiences,

teachers and funders - all encouraged to engage in dialogue about the effectiveness of the plays. Consequently, Theatre Centre, along with many other TYA/TiE companies, became a dynamic training ground for theatre artists and other workers. Specifically, many actors from non-traditional backgrounds of all kinds, who began their careers in ensemble companies such as Theatre Centre, gained pathways into the profession that otherwise would have been denied them. This is in stark contrast to the career prospects currently presented to theatre-makers who face barriers as a result of their class, disability, gender, race and sexuality particularly. Despite the raft of current initiatives designed to increase diverse representation, such as the quotas now embedded in the National Theatre's planning^{xiv}, the nature of most contemporary actors' experience is within an economic model dependent on much more precarious employment than in the '80s. As a result, examples are rare of young UK theatre-makers involved in dialogic, experiential learning as part of their work, particularly within producing theatres and larger touring companies. A developmental experience for individual actors - many of whom develop portfolio careers embracing writing, directing and producing - is more likely to emerge in smaller companies, formed by contemporaries with shared ideas and aspirations. Unsurprisingly, these actors are from similar backgrounds, particularly in terms of age. So, there is little of the cross-generational learning in these small companies that Johnston encouraged.

By contrast, Theatre Centre's young actors in the '80s had an implicit understanding that their role was multi-faceted and that dialogic learning was at the heart of their practice. It was as important to contribute to the dramaturgical process of creating new plays and to wide-ranging policy discussions, as it was to rehearse and perform in a more conventional way. As Johnston says in his introduction to *Peacemaker*

and *Under Exposure* in the Methuen collection, *Six Theatre-in-Education*

Programmes: “All of our scripts are the result of collective team-work, that is group discussion and thinking on themes, issues, content etc.” (Johnston, 1987)^{xv}

Alongside the mainly young cast, the company would work with more experienced artists (although, like Johnston at the time, they would now be considered comparatively young, as they were in their late 20s and 30s). Hence, it would be fair to infer that the dialogic encounters in the Theatre Centre rehearsal room produced more than just first-rate plays, there was also a much wider exchange of experiences. Pedagogy, the political context, policy formation and company strategy were all discussed and negotiated by every company member. This meant that company members saw themselves, crucially, as part of a radical movement. It follows that just as Johnston himself was in part influenced by his predecessor at Theatre Centre, the children’s theatre and drama-in-education pioneer Brian Way, so more experienced artists took responsibility for nurturing the next generation.

Johnston himself considered mentoring emerging artists to be at the heart of his work (a commitment that benefitted me personally). It could be said that a sense of legacy, a passing-on to the next generation, distinguishes this moment in TYA as a *movement*, rather than solely a field of work defined by place, audience or genre. In fact, this sense of a continuing legacy was held together by a broad set of democratic and pedagogic values: with the rights of young people to access theatre of the highest quality the principle that ensured a focus on aesthetics as part of the broader mission.

In arguing that Theatre Centre’s radicalism combined innovation in both education and aesthetics, it is worth noting that the they are not conflicting aspirations. It would be mistaken to fall into the trap of presenting the instrumental and intrinsic value of

TYA as a binary tension. In fact, it was the company's commitment to diversity that led to them pushing aesthetic boundaries too. Here, disability studies theory is useful to amplify this point. In their article "Towards an Affirmation Model of Disability" (2000), John Swain and Sally French move beyond the more familiar territory of the social model of disability (Oliver, 2010, Priestly, 1999) and state:

The affirmative model, however, is not about the 'pain of impairment', but on the contrary the positive experiences and identity of disabled people from being impaired and disabled. The social model is collectively expressed, most obviously, through direct action and campaigns in the struggle of the powerless for power. The affirmative model again builds on this particularly through the development of the Disability Arts Movement within which disabled people collectively affirm their positive identity through visual arts, cabaret, song and ... poetry. (Swain & French 2000: p259)^{xvi}

We can extend Swain and French's "affirmative model" beyond disability to assess the experience of diverse theatre artists coming together; where concerns about class, disability, gender, race and sexuality converged. What held Theatre Centre together, given the disparate range of life experiences was, as Swain & French would have put it, a "non-tragic view"^{xvii}. Not only was the work informed by an array of perspectives borne out of non-normative lived experience, but it was the ensemble's very *combination* of experiences that created the "celebration of difference" that was the central ethos of the work. By illustration, the characters Simp and Bluey in *Peacemaker* (a dancer and juggler respectively) become representative not just of the underclass in their different, but similar, tribal societies, but also, in another way, symbols of creative artists struggling to find a common means of expression that recognises differences.

The "celebration of difference" philosophy was expressed shortly after Johnston's time at Theatre Centre by the positioning statement of the "Mixed Company", written

by the then Associate Director, Philip Tyler (although the statement was apt for the work of the Women's Company too):

Linking of these various struggles and celebrations is the work of a mixed company – ensuring that in focusing on one of these struggles the others are neither lost nor abandoned... In discussions on integrated casting – disabled workers – lesbian or gay men – everyone concerned should be aware of the experiment taking place. (Tyler 1987)^{xviii}

However, the internal workings of the company were primarily supporting the its main purpose: to engage and inspire children and young people in schools. At their best, the plays took on the challenging context of a school hall - with all its distracting acoustics, dimensions and smells - and created a profound sense of what the anthropologist Victor Turner might term *communitas* (Turner, 1987)^{xix}, a sense of a cohesive, but temporary, community. Jill Dolan in *Utopia in Performance* takes Turner's concept and posits the idea of "*utopian performatives*", which she describes as:

... small but profound moments in which performance calls the attention of the audience in a way that lifts everyone slightly above the present, into a hopeful feeling of what the world might be like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense. (Dolan 2005: p5)^{xx}

In the 1986 film, we see the Theatre Centre Mixed Company performing the devised show *Tschioca Cholova* to a group of infants. Perhaps the most compelling element of this section of the video is the way that the camera lingers on the enthralled faces of the children. They are clearly completely absorbed in the way that song, design, narrative and the actors' commitment lift them from their school hall into the world of the story. One gets a sense that these children are experiencing a utopian moment

as Dolan describes it, with arguably a spiritual dimension. It is impossible to know the precise nature of their experience: what they were thinking and feeling. However, there's a distinct sense of a shared experience and they appear transported. In addition, combined with the communal experience, each child would be experiencing their own private interaction with the play. As Mike Alfreds says:

Good audienceship can only occur if they're allowed space for their creativity. Instead of judging and shopping, each member of the audience participates actively in realising the performance and develops a more intimate relationship with it. Any moment in a performance can have a totally different meaning and be a totally different experience for each person. All members of the audience create their own story. *This is genuine audience participation.* Storytellers initiate, audiences complete. Storytellers suggest, audiences fulfil. (Alfreds 2013: p29)^{xxi}

It's in this act of completion, filling in the gaps with imagination, that deeper learning occurs. These are also the kinds of acts of imagination that would have been rare, if not unprecedented, for children at this time, as the story was presented by an ensemble of young, racially-mixed and otherwise diverse performers. The utopianism, then, as Dolan would emphasise, is not a static utopia imagined by an absent author. The play provides a unique space where every child can imagine their own unique affirmative possibilities.

The sense of a radical TYA/TiE movement with a dynamic legacy is still alive, although more muted than in the last century. Many of the pioneers from the mid-20th Century are still active, as evidenced by the tributes and contributions in Johnson's honour at the Derby symposium, and they have continued in the past fifty years to pass on ideas and knowledge. Producer-writer-director Vicky Ireland added a further provocation at the Derby symposium, when proposing a new annual lecture

in Johnston's honour. Interestingly, Ireland suggested that his memory would best be served by a lecture "on the subject of outrage":

David made revolutions. He raged against unfairness, against elitism, lack of care, lack of recognition. He fought for inclusivity, by supporting all those he felt needed it. He spoke up for children and young people, because he cared deeply. He sought out writers who would say it and artistic teams who would play it and he brought about change.

... And I find it interesting that whilst I tend to connect outrage with something hot and burning, the definition is in fact 1250-1300; from the Old French *outrage*, meaning, "to push beyond bounds".^{xvii}

It is the sense of outrage that Johnson typified - "pushing beyond the bounds" - that is present now in many of the calls for greater equality and diversity in theatre. What is more, Johnston channelled his sense of political outrage into strategic leadership. Johnston was a "creative producer" before the term achieved common currency. Always starting from a clear set of values, he had the facility to address challenges through divergent thinking. He was constantly aware that the work could only flourish, that the outrage could only lead to tangible results, if there was a rigorous analysis of the current context. As he states in the re-discovered film, he was constantly working for TYA to achieve the recognition and status it deserved. For that reason mainly, he was instrumental in producing festivals and forging international partnerships. One wonders, then, how he would respond to the current state of TYA and how to unlock its potential?

During the Open Space at the Derby Symposium, participants were clearly frustrated by the many inhibiting factors now facing TYA in schools. For the most part, the halcyon days of TYA/TiE in the 1970s and 1980s are viewed as an historical anomaly. Notably, Theatre Centre are now reduced to touring one show a year,

when they toured up to six in the '80s. Inevitably, then, there's a general counsel of despair that a movement of artist-led plays for young people will never again be available widely to our children and young people in schools. However, I wonder, taking another metaphorical lead from *Peacemaker*, if there's a chink in the wall that could re-ignite a movement, albeit one that would inevitably have different characteristics from the past.

To ground this thinking, it's worth analysing the current landscape and the inhibiting factors to a resurgent artist-led TYA movement. The terrain of much of the debate on arts education in general is to justify it in instrumental terms, as typified by the Cultural Learning Alliance^{xxiii}, who have been campaigning to turn the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) priority into STEAM (with the added A for Arts). By contrast, when David Johnston began his tenure at Theatre Centre (in 1977, pre-Thatcher), there was extensive dialogue with local education authorities (LEAs), who have since had their power to create policy drastically denuded. There were a range of drama advisors in LEAs who were important stakeholders, contributing meaningfully into the company's policy. Before the National Curriculum, these LEA advisors championed the wider benefits of TYA and would assist the company in contextualising their work within specific local knowledge. Now, central government has immeasurably greater control over how schools are run. In 2007, Anthony Jackson pointed out how education changes have affected theatre in schools, particularly the marginalisation of Drama as a subject:

Education policy in the UK has been dominated for some twenty years by an obsession with results and league tables – ever since the introduction of the national curriculum in 1988 and subsequently the progressive implementation of performance indicators for teachers and pupils alike. Subject benchmarks, detailed assessment criteria for every learning outcome and a barrage of tests to be undertaken at almost every level of the child's progression through the

school have led to a mountain of forms to be completed and boxes to be ticked. The resulting bureaucracy, together with the omission of drama as a formally recognised curriculum subject (except under the umbrella of English), has contributed to the marginalisation of the performing arts in many schools.(Jackson 2007: p199)^{xxiv}

This argument is still pertinent over ten years later, emphasising how established, and therefore obdurate, this narrow education paradigm has become.

One can see, therefore, that despite some notable exceptions, the kind of artist-led work Theatre Centre was making in the '80s is a difficult fit in today's schools. The theatre visit to a school now asks even more of the classroom teacher than before, aside from the need to find a narrow curriculum rationale for the experience.

Teachers report, for example, very high levels of stress as a result of the dominance of standardised testing and as exemplified by the crisis in teacher recruitment and retention (Foster, 2017; Hilton, 2018). For a theatre company to be effective, it needs the time, space and finance that the system now ill-affords. Above all, teachers need to see TYA as a benefit to their purpose, not a hindrance. Part of the answer to this dilemma has rested frequently with curriculum-targeted plays that explicitly address, for example, aspects of the English/Literacy, Science, History or PHSE curriculum; narrowing substantially the potential of the theatre experience. Hence, it is clear that plays emanating from artist-led dramaturgy are now seen mostly as a poor fit in schools. In addition, one can see why participants at the Derby Symposium, including the classroom teachers present, felt that the best way to produce the highest quality theatre experience in schools was to work beyond the curriculum and therefore outside school-time.

If high quality theatre in schools is to flourish again, it follows that it is vital that it is *not* primarily evaluated against instrumentalist criteria. A new framework is needed

to evaluate the more slippery area of the intrinsic values of the experience. To accomplish this, I have adapted a model originally designed by the marketing company Morris Hargreaves MacIntyre (2005) (MHM), bringing together qualitative and quantitative analysis of the motivations for cultural attendance^{xxv}. MHM have identified four key motivational factors: the social, the intellectual, the emotional and the spiritual. The diagram below shows how these could be brought together to evaluate the intrinsic value of a play in a school. Unlike MHM, I have considered the model as a set of interlocking concerns, rather than a hierarchy. In this way, one can understand the interconnectedness that a theatre experience represents. The audience moment captured on the 1986 Theatre Centre film, for example, captures a response where all four elements appear to come together. I have also recast MHM's "intellectual" category as "educational", so that learning is understood to be an embodied experience, rather than purely cerebral. In recognition of the framework's need to evaluate how well theatre brings together diverse experiences in a democratic spirit, I have called it: "Dialogue-Across-Difference (D-a-D)". The framework is broad enough that, with imagination, it could be aligned fruitfully to objectives in a school plan.

Dialogue Across Difference (D-a-D)
A framework for evaluating Theatre in Schools

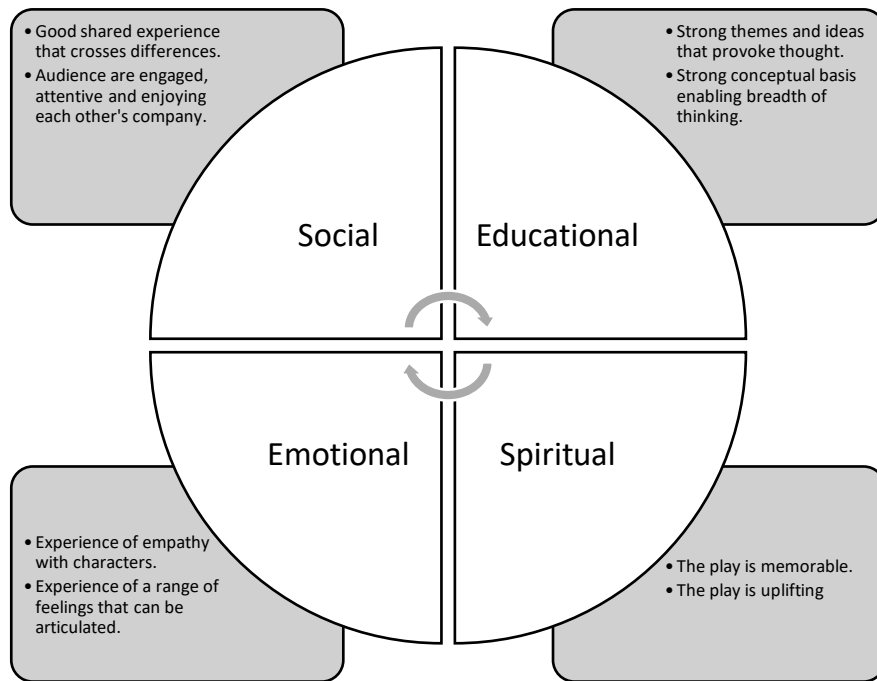


Figure 1.

Therefore, the evaluation of a play is not only useful to assess a theatre company's impact, but can also be a bridge into the curriculum, mainly through the "educational" strand. The "social", "emotional" and "spiritual" categories should also be recognised for their pedagogic value, albeit not strictly measurable in terms of data on academic achievement. One of the chief benefits of the D-a-D evaluation model is that it doesn't separate raw academic achievement data from the promotion of a positive learning environment; a prerequisite of achievement, however defined. In this respect, it is worth reflecting on the wealth of research on how "positive psychology" contributes to achievement, with strong evidence that growing mental health problems are affecting not just happiness, but also, unsurprisingly, achievement:

There is evidence to suggest that whole school approaches to student well-being enhance not only mental health and resilience but also promote pro-social behaviour, pupil engagement and academic learning (Clift & Jensen, 2005; Noble et al., 2008; Roffey, 2011; Weare & Gray, 2003). A focus on well-being in schools is a different way of conceptualising and responding to pastoral care issues. Although it is recognised that some pupils will need

something different or extra, a well-being focus is on universal and pro-active intervention to promote relationships and resilience. Instead of putting most resources into students who come to the attention of senior staff and specialists because of behaviour, emotional or learning difficulties, the mantra is that 'every teacher is a teacher for well-being' (Wyn et al., 2000). This is a 'catch-all' strategy that ensures that all pupils, including those whose needs are less evident, are in an environment that is supportive of their social and emotional development as well as their learning. (Hilton 2015: p21)^{xxvi}

I would assert that a strong focus on identifiable contributions to well-being, evaluated against the D-a-D model, will enable contemporary TYA companies to appreciably reinvigorate their partnerships with schools.

In conclusion, there were three essential elements of Theatre Centre's policy and practice under David Johnston that can be taken forward today, namely:

- The promotion of a democratic ethos that encouraged dialogic learning and thereby optimised career development for diverse artists;
- The presentation of high quality plays in schools, combining aesthetic and pedagogic attributes;
- A determination to give this hidden work wider profile, particularly through international exchange.

These essential elements are possible today, but the development of TYA in the UK will need a seemingly paradoxical mix of utopianism and pragmatic strategic thinking. It was these twin qualities that Johnston brought: a divergently-thinking creative producer, combining a sense of outrage with articulate advocacy and a clear vision.

A bold future Arts Council England policy initiative could unlock the potential of a new wave of TYA in England, with potentially parallel initiatives in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This in turn might influence policy further afield internationally.

To create this sea-change, I propose that every regularly-funded Arts Council producing theatre organisation with a grant of over £500,000 (that does not currently have a specific TYA remit) is required to ring-fence at least 10% of their Arts Council grant for an independent TYA provision to take plays to schools. This funding, of course, should be used to lever additional funds from other sources. School-age children currently represent c13%^{xxvii} of the population of the UK and this fund would ensure that all those pupils would have the opportunity of experiencing theatre. An initiative like this would be welcomed by many, particularly leaders like Sarah Bringham, who already understand the centrality of work with young people to theatre's future. This should not reduce the theatre offer for those young people visiting theatres, but actually build a love of theatre to encourage independent visits as well as school trips (which themselves are increasingly hard to achieve with current bureaucratic and financial constraints). Each company would operate autonomously from their parent organisation, and be charged with forming their own policy on how to create high quality work that also contributes to diversifying the theatre workforce. Every year, the Arts Council would make available funding for a festival of TYA where the plays, processes and policies can be shared nationally and internationally and a movement re-ignited.

This annual festival would be the perfect platform for the annual David Johnston Lecture on Outrage.

Public Interest Statement

This article analyses the work of Theatre Centre, the theatre for young audiences (TYA) company, under the leadership of David Johnston between 1977 and 1986. It explores how the company's work at that time can provide ideas for current theatre organisations, particularly with respect to increasing diversity. Theatre Centre had a radical approach to taking theatre to schools. Johnston instigated an inclusive, democratic approach to every aspect of the company, resulting in high quality productions that celebrated difference. Theory from performance, education, social psychology, disability studies and anthropology are all used to shed light on Theatre Centre's work. Finally, practical recommendations are proposed for how theatre organisations can learn from Theatre Centre's work.

Footnotes

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- ⁱ *Peacemaker* is published in: Redington, C. (1987). *Six Theatre-In-Education Programmes* (pp27-39). London: Methuen.
- ⁱⁱ For a history of Belgrade TiE see: Turner, O. (2010). *A History Of Theatre In Education At The Belgrade Theatre, Coventry* [pdf]. Coventry: Belgrade Theatre.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Derby Theatre, Sarah Brigham Interview: “It’s vital that every young person is given access to high quality arts experiences and able to realise their own creativity.” | Carl Woodward. (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.mrcarlwoodward.com/interview/derby-theatre-sarah-brigham-interview/>
- ^{iv} For more information on ASSITEJ, see: Assitej International | International Association Of Theatre For Children And Young People. (2018). Retrieved from <http://www.assitej-international.org/en/>
- ^v Lisa Evans’ play *Under Exposure* can be found in : Redington, C. (1987). *Six Theatre-In-Education Programmes* (pp41-55). London: Methuen.
- ^{vi} Palmer, T. (2018). David Johnston - Memorial. Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/gjZrmJgrFVg>
- ^{vii} Ibid
- ^{viii} Ibid
- ^{ix} Haill, L., & Wood, S. *Stage By Stage South Bank: 1976 – 1987*. London: National Theatre. Retrieved from https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/sites/default/files/stagebystage-pt3_1976-87.pdf
- ^x It is worth noting that Rufus Norris, the current Artistic Director of the National Theatre speaking at the Act For Change debate (June 2015), was not aware of any disabled actors working for the National Theatre before his tenure. The Act For Change Project: National Theatre Event - 2015. (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qul2EqBmhos>
- ^{xi} It is worth noting that the term “able-bodied” is now not generally considered to align with the aims of the Disability Rights movement, although it was common currency at the time (see: *The Art Of Respectful Language*. [pdf]. Retrieved from http://www.equalitytraining.co.uk/images/news/language_of_respect.pdf).
- ^{xii} Joe was a white actor with the company.
- ^{xiii} Jackson, A. (2007). *Theatre, Education And The Making Of Meanings* (p. 185). Manchester: Manchester University Press
- ^{xiv} Diversity On Our Stages | National Theatre. (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/about-the-national-theatre/diversity/on-our-stages>
- ^{xv} Redington, C. (1987). *Six Theatre-In-Education Programmes* (p23). London: Methuen.
- ^{xvi} Swain, J., & French, S. (2000). Towards An Affirmation Model Of Disability. *Disability & Society*, 15(4), 569-582. doi: 10.1080/09687590050058189
- ^{xvii} Ibid p569
- ^{xviii} Tyler, P. (1987). Celebration Of Difference. *New Voices : SCYPT Journal*, (16).
- ^{xix} Turner, V. (2000). *The Anthropology Of Performance*. [Place of publication not identified]: PAJ Publications.
- ^{xx} Dolan, J. (2005). *Utopia In Performance*. University of Michigan.
- ^{xxi} Alfreds, M. (2013). *Then What Happens: Storytelling And Adapting For The Theatre*. London: Nick Hern p29.
- ^{xxii} Ireland, V. (2018). The Annual David Johnston TYA Lecture On 'Outrage': A Proposal. In *Peacemaker - Research Symposium*. Derby. Unpublished, accessed with permission of the speaker.
- ^{xxiii} Cultural Learning Alliance. (2017). *STEAM: Why STEM Can Only Take Us So Far*. Retrieved from <https://culturalllearningalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/CLA-STEAM-Briefing-A4.pdf>

^{xxiv} Jackson, A. (2007). *Theatre, Education And The Making Of Meanings* (p. 199). Manchester: Manchester University Press.

^{xxv} Morris Hargreaves McIntyre. *Never Mind The Width, Feel The Quality*. The Museums And Heritage Show, Manchester, UK, 2005, pp. 9-13. Accessed 6 June 2018.

^{xxvi} Roffey, S. (2015). Becoming An Agent Of Change For School And Student Well-Being. *Educational And Child Psychology.*, 32(1), 21-30.

^{xxvii} Number Of Schools, Teachers And Students In England. (2014). Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/number-of-schools-teachers-and-students-in-england/number-of-schools-teachers-and-students-in-england>

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