

ROYAL CENTRAL
SCHOOL OF SPEECH & DRAMA
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

THEATRE
PECKHAM

LONDON
WORKS
CREATIVE

WHAT'S IT WORTH?

EVIDENCING THE VALUE OF
PARTICIPATION AT THEATRE PECKHAM

Dr Catherine McNamara / October 2014

CENTRAL CONTINUES TO IDENTIFY AND EXTEND THE BENEFITS TO SOCIETY AND INDUSTRY OF ITS WORK AS AN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION AND AS A PLACE WHERE PROFESSIONAL AND COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS MEET AND PARTICIPATE IN THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS.

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- > 'One person's journey at one school: preventing transgender discrimination', *Race Equality Teaching* 32(2) (Public Sector Equality Duty Special Issue), Institute of Education, Spring 2014 (co-authored with Dr Jay Stewart)
- > 'International collaborations: A Theatre for Social Justice project in the UK, in N. Bowles and D. Nadon (eds), *Staging Social Justice: Collaborating to Create Activist Theatre*, Southern Illinois University Press, 2013 (co-authored with Dr Selina Busby)

> *BME Student Experiences at Central School of Speech & Drama*, Higher Education Academy, 2012 (co-authored with Nicholas Coomber)

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Catherine McNamara

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

IN 2014 THEATRE PECKHAM AND THE ROYAL CENTRAL SCHOOL OF SPEECH AND DRAMA RECEIVED FUNDING FROM CREATIVWORKS LONDON TO CARRY OUT RESEARCH INTO YOUNG PEOPLE'S ENGAGEMENT WITH DRAMA, THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE.

We received funding as part of Round 7, 'Demonstrating Value'. The research is intended to be a critical step for Theatre Peckham in setting up a fit-for-purpose, two-year, post-16 performing arts course for those aspiring to enter into education and employment in the creative and cultural sectors. We wanted to ask young people directly about the value they placed on such education and participation in the arts – what was it worth to them?

We hope to disseminate the findings from the project to a number of our industry and academic partners who are also seeking to enhance the recruitment, attainment, retention and experiences of young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds and share the learning journey that we have taken through this project.

We are keen to bring the learning from this project to the table with other small, specialist performing arts education providers in London to develop holistic progression pathways involving London's wider creative economy. We are keen to exchange ideas and examples of good practice with comparable institutions and organisations involved in wider arts practices, including visual arts and dance with a view to mobilising the efforts of all organisations supporting young people's journeys into training.

THE PROJECT

The project included a review of pre-existing reports related to participation in the arts, the benefits of engagement with the arts for young people and cultural value of the arts more broadly, as well as qualitative interviews with 34 young people from Theatre Peckham, two schools and a college in the London Borough of Southwark and London Bubble, another theatre organisation that provides education and training for young people. The young people were all aged between 14 and 21 years.

The interviews focused on their experiences of participating in drama, theatre and performance-related activities in various areas of their lives, including school and youth arts providers such as Theatre Peckham, London Bubble and the National Youth Theatre. For some of the interviewees it also included work experience (paid and unpaid).

THE RESEARCH QUESTION

What is the value of participation and education in drama, theatre and performance at any part of young people's journeys?

1. What is their participation and education worth to them in terms of their ambitions and aspirations?
2. What is the economic and creative value of their participation when set against the practical constraints they face in their everyday lives?
3. Does their sense of the value of participation correlate with our understanding of the value of participation?

ISSUES RAISED: THE THINGS THAT YOUNG PEOPLE VALUE MOST HIGHLY

We looked across the transcripts from every interview and identified key themes and patterns, as well as significant points made by individual participants. The value that young people place on their engagement with drama, theatre and performance is located around five main areas. They are summarised here and described in detail in Section 2.

Pleasure

The majority of the 34 young people interviewed described a deep sense of enjoyment as a significant and valuable aspect of their participation. Some described the pleasure they gained from a sense of achievement, a feeling of reward after working hard at something and the enjoyment of release or escape from the everyday as they took on a character's thoughts and experiences. One person spoke about participating in drama and theatre as being 'one of the greatest pleasures on earth'. The value of pleasure as real and important to the majority of the young people interviewed is not to be underestimated or dismissed.

Accessing opportunities

Participants at Theatre Peckham and London Bubble valued the different subject content and the different working methods in those settings, compared to the

content and approaches experienced through GCSE Drama in school. A high number of the participants talked about accessing information from their teachers in the various settings. This information is seen as vital to the opportunities that the young people can then pursue. As well as information about options and routes into education and further training, 14 participants placed significant value and importance on the support they had received while applying and auditioning for opportunities beyond their 'home' setting.

Community

Approximately half of those interviewed said that the environment created by their teachers (both in schools and in theatre organisations) was invaluable to them. Some spoke of feeling comfortable, and feeling a strong sense of belonging. Some valued the relationships they built with peers, as well as with staff. One participant talked about being challenged by working with a new group after being encouraged by a teacher at Theatre Peckham to apply for the National Youth Theatre. He described an initial feeling of being outside his own community and feeling very different to this new group, but that the experience led him to challenge his own views of other people in a positive way.

Transferable skills

The young people reported using their skills which were cultivated in drama-related activities in a wide range of other areas of their studies and lives such as presentations in class, interacting with people generally and confidence with the use of standard English. One participant said she felt the skills she had learned in drama would be useful for her as a future primary school teacher.

Increasing knowledge and level of qualification

Many students spoke about the value of participating in drama that led to future qualifications. Not all students were choosing to pursue drama in the long term, but those who were valued the fact that their extracurricular course would lead to a GCSE qualification, in some cases the equivalent of two GCSEs, for example. One respondent commented that she had enjoyed learning

about the political and historical context of events after performing political plays, and that it had increased her knowledge and understanding of historical events.

The participants discussed some of the key barriers and obstacles they felt they experienced as they pursued their interests and developed their abilities and experiences in this subject area. These are described in detail in Section 2 and include:

- > financial barriers
- > family and societal views of drama
- > race, class and background
- > other barriers: lack of industry connections; lack of preparedness for auditions; low confidence.

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION

During the interviews, ideas were put forward by many of the young people. These were ideas for additional experiences that they had not yet had themselves, and which they felt did not exist in ways they could access. Not all of these ideas will be new to all organisations, but this set of suggestions indicates where the participants feel the gaps are in terms of the valuable experiences that could and should be available to them.

The suggestions are given below and are described fully in Section 3:

- > preparation for auditions and entry into drama schools
- > increased study of Shakespeare and acting for camera
- > engaging with the industry
- > provision for the 16–18 age range
- > financial support and financial advice
- > increased representation of diversity in the industry.



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 OVERVIEW THEATRE PECKHAM WORKS TO REALISE ITS VISION OF A RICHER, MORE CULTURALLY INTEGRATED BRITISH THEATRE. IN AN AREA OF MULTIPLE DISADVANTAGE, THE ORGANISATION OFFERS TRAINING, EDUCATION AND PROGRESSION ROUTES TO ITS MEMBERS.

Starting with the very young, Theatre Peckham creates pathways for under-represented young people into higher education and employment. The theatre is becoming established as a cornerstone of Peckham's cultural life.

Theatre Peckham and The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama both have a strong and active desire to identify real and concrete ways of increasing social mobility and socio-economic progression in the creative sector.

We wanted to work together to gather data relating to what it is that young people value when they participate in drama, theatre and performance practice. We wanted to create time and space to ask them what the valuable experiences are which they feel would support their life choices and career aspirations.

We wanted to measure and demonstrate how exactly young people believe their lives are enriched and their career aspirations developed through participation in creative and cultural activity.

The first section of the report outlines the project's aims, rationale and methodology, as well as discussing how cultural value is defined in the context of this research. The second section provides an account of the findings from the interviews alongside an analysis of the findings drawing on the data from the transcripts. The third section offers suggestions for action that came directly from the participants. These suggestions are ideas for initiatives that the young people felt would directly add value to their experiences of education and training in drama, theatre and performance.

1.2 KEY ACTIVITIES

Qualitative research – interviews with 34 students which included:

1. Audit of the cultural and creative activities that students from low socio-economic backgrounds engage with;
2. Analysis of which cultural and creative activities the students value and why;
3. Analysis of what the students perceive would more strongly provide value at Theatre Peckham in, for example, a new post-16 course.

1.3 PROJECT RATIONALE

What we understand as the 'value' in participating in culture and the arts is in the process of being redefined. A momentous conversation is taking place in the UK. The **Cultural Value Project** is a research initiative, introduced by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) in 2012. The project is one of the initiatives attempting to better understand cultural value and refine the methods employed to talk about this value.

As part of this initiative, the AHRC has supported over 70 independently led academic projects investigating the arts and culture and the value they bring to individuals and society.



More than ever before, there is a necessity and a drive to develop a language that is understood and recognised by the funding bodies, the applicants and those participating. There is a recognition that to better understand what actually happens to people in their encounters with arts and culture there needs to be a renewed methodological rigour and an imaginative expansion to approaches and techniques (AHRC Cultural Value Report midterm report: 2).

It is within this broader climate seeking to inspire innovative ways of measuring and understanding the value of culture and arts, that this project report positions itself.

As noted in *The Value of Arts and Culture to People and Society* (Mowlah et al., 2014: 14) there is a significant gap in current research regarding the drivers for engagement and impact of arts and cultural engagement specifically involving children and young people. Most

recent studies have tended to prioritise adult data sets over children, significantly skewing the debate. Since the 1850s a generational account of cultural experience has been acknowledged by scholars in cultural, literacy and youth studies as necessary in order to have a coherent analysis of culture and the way it is valued. Indeed, as argued by a current study commissioned by the Cultural Value Project, 'recognising what young people have to say about the value of art and participating in it might influence the current discourse and illuminate some previously unrecognised aspects and cutting into the sometimes sterile debate' (Manchester, 2014). Providing young people's perspectives on what it is they value when they participate in the arts, specifically drama, is essential in gaining a fuller and more representative understanding in the cultural value debate.

The Arts Council has recognised that engagement in the arts is heavily influenced by levels of education,



socio-economic background and where people live. It is the well-educated middle-class professionals and managers that are most likely to be heavily involved in parts of the cultural sector that are dependent on public funding (Bennett and Savage, 2005). A degree and professional occupation are the most accurate predictors of engagement with publicly funded cultural experiences. The **Taking Part Survey** is a major, continuous survey of cultural and sport participation in England, commissioned by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in partnership with Arts Council England, Sport England and English Heritage. The survey has been underway since 2005 and is ongoing. It collects data on many aspects of leisure, culture and sport in England, as well as an in-depth range of socio-demographic information on respondents. The data highlights some significant differences along socio-economic lines by examining how arts engagement varies by different indicators of socio-economic status, including National Statistics Socio-Economic

Classification (NS-SEC), personal income per annum and educational level (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/taking-part>).

There has been significant evidence demonstrating that race and ethnicity are a substantial variable in participation in the arts and culture. The Taking Part Survey demonstrates that people who define their ethnic group as white are significantly more likely to have engaged in the arts at least three times in the past 12 months (61%) than people from black and minority ethnic groups (49%) (Martin *et al.*, 2010: 13).

Government statistics analysed by the Labour Party show that the number of black and minority ethnic primary school children taking part in extracurricular activities between 2010 and 2013 decreased by 51% for dance, by 44% for music and by 41% for drama (Labour Policy Review, 2014: 10).

Reports such as these highlight that access to culture and the arts is still strongly influenced by the intersecting factors, ethnicity and socio-economic background. Understanding these barriers is a key component to the social exclusion debate and different levels of engagement in the arts.

The inclusion debate is taking a turn towards not only considering the ways in which art and culture are available, but also whether they reflect diversity. In his report on Diversity for the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (2008) entitled *Supporting Excellence in the arts: from measurement to judgement*, Sir Brian McMaster writes, 'it is my belief that culture can only be excellent when it is relevant, and thus nothing can be excellent without reflecting the society which produces and experiences it' (McMaster, 2008: 11).

More recently in 2014 **The Act for Change** project was launched to challenge a lack of representation of diversity in various areas of the media. The lack of representation of black and minority ethnic groups in the acting industry has received considerable media attention recently with, for example, Lenny Henry being invited by British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) to give the Annual Television Lecture 2014. He used the lecture to ask what can be done to increase representation of ethnic minorities in television. As demonstrated in the 2012 Creative Skillset Employment Census of the creative media industries, representation of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) people declined from 7.4% of the total workforce in 2006 to 6.7% in 2009 and was 5.4% in 2012 (Creative Skillset, 2012: 4).

By engaging with the three intersecting themes of (1) young people, (2) socio-economic situation and (3) ethnicity, this report seeks to understand cultural value as this set of young people experience it. The purpose of this report is to identify real and concrete ways of increasing social mobility and socio-economic progression into the creative and cultural sector.

1.4 DEFINITIONS AND CONTEXT

In his book *The Politics of Performance Radical Theatre as Cultural Theatre as Cultural Intervention*, Baz Kershaw provides a detailed account of the development of alternative and community theatre in the postwar era (Kershaw, 1994). Alternative theatre or radical theatre was a movement that proposed a theory of performance as an ideological transaction, a cultural intervention and

community action. Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s theatre director Joan Littlewood was an important figure within this movement. Littlewood directed her energies towards local projects that emphasised cultural democracy, active citizenship and the creative animation of community-based activity and spaces. Fundamentally, her projects and programmes promoted the importance of children and young people's access to and participation in cultural activity, social encounter and creative play, challenging the undervalued nature of children and young people's citizenship. 'Littlewood proposes that "the young need to participate in living" and that they require outlets (spatially, socially and creatively) to be stimulated and developed to become effective citizens' (Holdsworth, 2007: 298).

While it is evident that there is a large body of historical research already in existence around engagement in the arts in general and, more specifically, young people's engagement in drama, theatre and performance, little research exists that explores the value that young people place on their own experiences of engaging with drama, theatre and performance.

In order to explore this value in a way that would directly impact on the work that Theatre Peckham does, qualitative research in the form of interviews was carried out between April and July 2014. Young people from a range of settings in Southwark were invited to participate in a 60–90 minute interview as part of the project 'What's It Worth? Evidencing the Value of Participation at Theatre Peckham'. (See Appendix for a full list of questions.)

John Holden, writing for the Demos think-tank offers a three-fold definition of cultural value based on the triangulation of 'Intrinsic Value', 'Instrumental Value' and 'Institutional Value' (Holden, 2006). Intrinsic meaning 'essential to' or 'integral to' implies that distinct forms of culture – dance, theatre, literature and so on – have a value in their own right. 'Instrumental value' involves the use of culture as a tool or an instrument with the aim of accomplishing something else, such as economic regeneration, improved exam results or better, faster patient recovery. 'Institutional value' refers to the social goods created (or destroyed) by cultural organisations, for example citizenship or social cohesion. Such organisations are part of the public realm, and how they do things creates value as much as what they do.

Thus, it is important to recognise that there are three different levels of 'value' and that these are intimately

connected. Intrinsic benefits like pleasure, beauty or happiness, are likely to weigh into more 'instrumental' value, like better performance at school or social cohesion. McCarthy et al. contend that 'not only are these intrinsic effects satisfying in themselves, but many of them can lead to the development of individual capacities and community cohesiveness that are of benefit to the public sphere' (McCarthy et al., 2004: xv). The study contends that spill-over components cultivate the kind of citizens desired in a pluralistic society.

Within this context, The Cultural Learning Alliance (2011b) cites a number of reports, concluding that learning through the arts and culture improves attainment across many other aspects of the school curriculum and has a wealth of other beneficial impacts on young people in terms of both soft and hard skills acquisition (Cultural Learning Alliance, 2011a). In the US, large cohort studies of 25,000 students show that taking part in arts activities increases student attainment in maths and literacy, with particularly striking results for students from low-income families (Catterall, 2009).

A systematic review of international evidence found that participating in structured arts activities led to increases in transferable skills (including confidence and communication) of between 10% and 17% (DCMS, 2010: 20). Participation in the arts is associated with a 14% increase in the likelihood of a 16–18 year old reporting they are 'very likely' to go on to further education (Fujiwara et al., 2014: 21).

There is also significant research related to the relationship between engagement in the arts and personal and social development. Engagement in arts activities conducted outside of the curriculum and outside of everyday routines, with a different mix of pupils and an arts practitioner external to the school, facilitates the psychological processes of personal transformation in children. Engagement in the arts has the potential to create a space for liminality for children and young people (Atkinson and Robson, 2012). Their study suggests that participation in the arts may build inward-looking self-esteem and self-awareness and outward-looking confidence and connectedness. Participating in arts and culture outside formal settings like school is indicated as having a positive effect on social development.

There is growing evidence that children and young people's engagement with the arts and culture has

a knock-on impact on their wider social and civic participation. Systematic reviews carried out via the CASE programme (DCMS, 2010) and Cultural Learning Alliance (2011b) cited American research evidencing that high-school students who engage in the arts at school are twice as likely to volunteer than those that do not engage in the arts and are 20% more likely to vote as young adults. Further, findings by Winner et al. demonstrate how participation in drama enhances empathy, perspective taking, and emotion regulation (Winner et al., 2013: 8).

Perhaps the strongest way in which arts and culture contribute toward citizenship and social inclusion is by strengthening social capital – social relations and interactions between people that can have a range of positive effects. Indeed, this echoes Atkinson and Robson's research demonstrating that activities outside the curriculum and everyday routine are important factors in developing positive relationships with others. There is strong evidence that participation in the arts can contribute to community cohesion, reduce social exclusion and isolation and/or make communities feel safer and stronger (Mowlah et al., 2014: 33).

Previous research has demonstrated that young people who have studied arts subjects tend to have higher employability and are more likely to maintain employment than those who have not. In addition, young people who took two or more arts subjects at standard grade tend to have a higher rate of employment than those who took only one arts subject (Marsh et al., 2006: 5). Another study argued that the arts and culture industry pays nearly 5% more than the UK median salary of £26,095 per annum (CEBR, 2013: 7). Other findings have highlighted that fewer than one in 20 graduates were in unemployment and that half earned over £20,000 and one-third earned less than £15,000 per annum (Ball et al., 2010: 2).

On the other hand, this research also indicated that practising artists as a sub-sector of this industry tend to earn a lower than average wage and that unpaid work is becoming a prerequisite for career entry in a more competitive market (Ball et al., 2010: x). Despite this insecurity, job satisfaction across Europe for artists is higher than other employees (Bille et al., 2013). This higher than average job satisfaction was attributed to their role as artists involving more autonomy. The aspects that were particularly valued related to procedural aspects of work rather than to what is produced. Economic security in the arts remains disputed and possibly a strong

feature in the choice to pursue it in Further Education or as a career. The debate seems to reflect a variety of expectations in pursuing 'employment'. Certain individuals may value employment as an activity resulting in financial reward, whilst others may value it as an activity resulting in a reward that is other than monetary.

It is interesting to consider where young people as developing artists are positioning themselves within this body of research and this discourse. We might ask, for example, to what extent the economics of education and participation in the arts is a barrier or an incentive for young people.

There is significant research regarding young people participating in the arts as contributing positively to their skills acquisition (both soft and hard), personal and social development and citizenship and social inclusion. There is currently minimal research regarding the young people's incentives and views for participating. This report seeks to address this gap in the research by interviewing the young people themselves and asking them to describe their experiences of participating in the arts, why they have found it valuable and what they consider as barriers to their growth.

The purpose of this report therefore is to look in detail into these and look at ways in which Theatre Peckham and the sector more broadly can better understand young people's motivations for engaging in the arts and the things that they value about their experiences.

1.5 METHODOLOGY

From the outset the project team intended to talk with young people in a range of settings local to Theatre Peckham. Our aim was to carry out semi-structured interviews with three groups of young people:

- > 10 Year 2 BTEC Level 2 students from Theatre Peckham (16–19 years)
- > 10 young people from the wider creative sector in South London (i.e. Blue Elephant, London Bubble, The Unicorn), interested in progressing into Further and Higher Education (14–16 years)
- > 10 young people from London secondary schools/FE colleges interested in progressing further in the area of Performing Arts (14–16 years).

We also intended to offer a minimum of one workshop for each group intended to provide valuable information about routes into Higher Education in this subject area. This was to include for example, a 'Discover Central' session, a 'Student Life Talk' session or a taster BA (Hons) Acting session delivered by Central's Student and Graduate Ambassadors. The workshops were to be observed by a member of the project team in order to reflect on and evaluate the benefit of having participated in such future-modelling activities.

We worked together with Denise Keane, Head of Education and Training at Theatre Peckham, to schedule young people for interviews during one of their weekly classes at the Theatre Peckham premises over the course of the summer term 2014.

We sent email invitations to key staff at a small number of schools, colleges and theatre organisations in the borough. We followed up these emails with telephone conversations and, in some cases, face-to-face conversations to further explain the project.

The balance of numbers across the three categories above changed as we secured opportunities to speak to young people. The 34 participants came from the following settings:

1. Theatre Peckham (17)
2. Charter School, Southwark (6)
3. City of London Academy School, Southwark (4)
4. London Bubble Theatre (4)
5. Lewisham Southwark College (LeSoCo) (3).

When quoting students in the body of the report, rather than use people's names the setting followed by a number is used.

In asking to speak with young people in those settings, we explained that the key 'criteria' were an interest in drama, theatre and performance and a desire to pursue education and training beyond the level the students were currently at. The teachers and facilitators then implemented varied methods of selection, but generally speaking a group of young people that met our loose criteria were informed of the project and those who were interested in speaking with us volunteered to participate. In one case, for example, a teacher encouraged particular students to come forward and in another, one of the project researchers was invited in to 'pitch' the project and ask young people to volunteer.



The interviews were carried out by three research assistants. Two of them describe themselves in terms of ethnicity as black British women and one describes herself as white Belgian. The interviewers attended a briefing meeting at which the semi-structured interview was discussed, planned and agreed, as well as protocols for interviewing as part of this project. The research assistants were asked to read a number of resources which informed the conversation (Woods, 2011; Taylor-Powell and Renner, 2003).

Kathleen Gallagher's book, *The Methodological Dilemma: Creative, Critical and Collaborative Approaches to Qualitative Research* (2008) and Andreas Witzel's article 'The Problem-Centered Interview' (2000) were also useful sources that underpinned our practice.

The young people were interviewed in their own setting in a room that was as quiet as possible. Generally, each

interview took place in a closed room in order to create privacy for the conversation. In a small number of cases and due to room availability in particular settings, two one-to-one interviews were conducted at either end of a room. If this caused a distraction, or seemed to affect the way a young person was responding, it was noted in the post-interview notes made by each researcher.

The interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed. The interviewees consented to the content of their interview being used as part of this project and to the content of their interviews being shared both with staff at the institution they were part of, and with a wider audience when this report was published.

The research partner at Central and a research assistant read the transcripts and identified themes, patterns and significant points.



2. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

2.1 OVERVIEW THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS DREW UPON BROAD THEMES EMERGING FROM THE STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF DRAMA, THEIR ASPIRATIONS FOR THE FUTURE AND THE BARRIERS. RESPONSES WERE VARIED, BUT MANY STUDENTS HAD SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS TO ALL QUESTIONS ASKED.

For the purpose of identifying common themes and patterns, the findings have been split into the following two main sections and subsections:

The value of drama

- > pleasure
- > accessing opportunities
- > community
- > transferable skills
- > increasing knowledge and level of qualification.

Barriers and obstacles

- > financial barriers
- > family and societal views of drama
- > race, class and background
- > other barriers.

There were a number of suggestions offered by the participants that would increase the value of their experiences. These were often concrete and specific ideas and we outline them in Section 3.

All students were asked about their social class and ethnicity before they answered the other questions. A minority of students struggled with self-categorising their social class, some not fully understanding the question, and it was determined from questions such as their family history of higher education or job status, which led to a categorisation in order to help us to understand something of the background of each young person. Approximately 50% of respondents (16 of the 34)

identified their socio-economic background as working class, or explained their family circumstances in ways that would suggest that was a fair description. The other half of the participant group identified as, or could be, best described as middle-class.

All students self-identified their own ethnicities. Among the 34 participants, there were 12 ethnicities given as follows:

Mixed race/ Black (1)
Mixed race (4)
Black Afro-Caribbean (1)
Black British Caribbean (2)
Black Caribbean (3)
White/Indian (1)
Black British (9)
Black African (2)
White (1)
Mixed race/white other (1)
White British (8)
White European (1).

2.2 THE VALUE OF DRAMA

Students spoke extensively about the value of their participation in drama. A number of themes emerged in the qualitative interviews around the value of drama in itself, as well as the value of their participation in their specific school or theatre group.

2.2.1 PLEASURE

Students gave some insightful and moving comments on the enjoyment and inspiration they gained from participating in drama, showing dramas intrinsic value to young people.

'It's like, it's not a second home, it's like my first home out of home, it feels, it's like a big big adrenaline rush and you're in control. And what you do is what people see, and it's like it's a pleasure for people to be watching you, and you can feel or see them enjoying your performance. Or you're being a part of something that you're enjoying and the feeling, it feels like it's just powerful – I don't know, it's powerful – and I just feel like it's one of the greatest pleasures on earth basically.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 2)

Many respondents echoed this sentiment of enjoying the experience and the rush of performing in front of an audience. A number of students commented on the way they felt that drama was a great form of escape, or of adventure.

'To be able escape from your mind and take on what other people, like what you think other people's thoughts would be and to develop a person or a character, someone that you're not really, you have a bit of you whenever you act but to be able to create a new human being and put them on the stage and create another life...that is a form of escapism for the actor as well. And at one point it was therapy.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 3)

'One thing that I always feel when I go into my drama lessons is that... it sounds cheesy, but I do kind of forget about all the other things and I always just feel so engaged and just in it.'

(Charter School, student 4)

Some students felt drama gave them a greater sense of achievement compared with other subjects.

'Sometimes when I come out of an exam, a history exam, I've learnt all of this like topic, and then like a section of its come up and then I feel like it's a little bit wasted, some of my knowledge or I haven't been able to perform as well as I could have, whereas usually with the drama, performance, you put all of your effort into it and everything you've worked for is in that performance, within that like half an hour and you pretty much get to show everyone the work you've been working on.'

(Charter School, student 3)

'People do hard work for a long period of time but no-one really appreciates it and that's the same as most jobs in the world but with this at least someone can see what you've done and it's really nice.'

(Charter School, student 2)

It was clear that while some students saw drama as a subject they liked but perhaps not something they would pursue in the future, many did feel it was something they wanted to pursue as a career, and many had high aspirations.

'Well, because acting is my main passion I'll never not want to do it ever. That is the number one passion out of everything so I definitely want to take acting seriously and so go to auditions and go to castings and even apply to drama school.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 2)

'Well, I thought at first it would just be a thing that I would enjoy but get over it after a while but now I've because I'm older I've seen what I can actually do with drama. Because now from last year, because I took drama for GCSE, I was thinking of being either on TV or going to America and expanding on my skills with drama and see if I can become something or do something with that skill instead of wasting it.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 6)

2.2.2 ACCESSING OPPORTUNITIES

An overwhelming majority of students interviewed participated in drama in school: they were doing or had done GCSE Drama and/or had been part of school plays. When interviewed about their participation, some of the respondents who were also involved in extracurricular drama specifically valued having the opportunity to study drama somewhere outside of their normal school environment.

'I don't really like drama in school because people are really intimidating and mean in school and so I thought if I come outside of school I can learn new things and feel more comfortable.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 1)

'In school it was more academic and more theory based whereas when you come here it's more practical. It feels like a home environment, it's just friendly faces and just the way it was taught. I just enjoyed it because I'm familiar with everyone here because if I needed help or anything I didn't have to worry about asking for it, I could just ask for it which is why I enjoyed doing the course.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 3)

Evidently some students felt that the drama provision in their school did not entirely meet their needs as aspiring actors. Many students felt that the specific place they were studying drama had given them opportunities they would not otherwise have access to, such as links to other theatres or acting work.

It was also clear that the opportunities they had been given were considered by some students to be the reason that drama had become such a huge part of their life. Many students cited involvement in drama from an early age, with some attending extracurricular drama from the ages of six or seven.

'I just think the whole [London] Bubble thing, just everyone at the Bubble, because if it wasn't for them I just literally would not be here where I am today speaking to you, talking about and feeling the way I'm feeling, I might be feeling the way I'm feeling but it would just be a feeling, it wouldn't be me ascertaining it and actually thinking what I can do with that passion.'

(London Bubble, student 1)

'Being here has made me grow up on theatre.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 3)

'I would say that Theatre Peckham has enlightened my chances of going anywhere and doing things or my dream of becoming an actor.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 4)

One student commented that his mother had initially encouraged him to get involved with acting because she saw he was starting to get into trouble and was keen for him to have a hobby. He spoke about how this has resulted in his life changing completely.

'Where I was before I started acting, I did live up to the stereotypical South London boy but acting has taken me out of that and it has changed my life, Theatre Peckham has completely changed my life.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 7)

Students spoke about participating in a number of different projects and activities, which had been a result of working with their school or theatre group. Many commented they found that their school or theatre group was the reason that they found out about further opportunities to develop their drama experiences, either by being told by teachers or group leaders, or because they had participated on visits to drama schools arranged by their theatre groups. Most of those who had knowledge about drama schools they might want

to attend in the future stated they had acquired that knowledge directly from their drama group or school teacher. Many of those who were asked about where they were thinking about applying for further study replied with the names of schools that had visited their theatre groups, or which they had visited on school trips.

'Well, I didn't really know about any drama schools before I first started because I was a bit confused, I was like, what's that? Because I thought like the Brit school was like the biggest one and I didn't know, and then when I came here John and Lisa and that was telling us about the different types of; RADA, Central, Rose Bruford, East 15 what courses they do and some people came in to do stuff with us and stuff like that so yeah that's how I really found out.'

(LeSoCo, student 1)

For some young people, the opportunities that had been presented to them as individuals participating in drama had even triggered a greater appreciation of drama within their immediate families, with parents and brothers and sisters becoming involved in performing or becoming regular theatregoers.

'Because I'm always going out to drama, they come to watch performances and they see that what I'm doing is actually good, and they talk to my little siblings as well and they want them to follow what I do. And sometimes if we go to the theatre they want me to learn something new about drama and have the experience. Because when I go to colleges and tell them I want to study drama and they always ask what theatre shows have you watched and who are your role models and all of that and so [my parents] always want them to go out and watch stuff like that so I know and have background.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 13)

The participants often spoke very highly of their teachers' support when it came to harnessing future opportunities. One Theatre Peckham student talked about being accepted on to a project with the National Youth Theatre, an opportunity he had found from being part of Theatre Peckham. Others had been auditioned or accepted by other drama schools as a result of working with their theatre group.

Many students highly valued the specific support they received at the school or theatre group in which they were participating. Many students felt the support they had received from the staff was invaluable and many



students spoke very highly of named staff with whom they worked, in terms of guiding them in their study of drama and also in how to harness opportunities now and in the future. The presence of tutors seemed to be invaluable to students when it came to raising their confidence, preparing for auditions, and making plans to achieve their aspirations and goals.

'When I came here, the tutor Denise and Teresa really helped like they would talk about like; if you want to get into this, you have to do this, so that helped me. Before that, I didn't have anything other than the internet and the TV that showed me how I could get into acting and performing professionally.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 11)

'I haven't really thought about it before but their words mean a lot to me and so I will generally follow what [my teachers] say because they give out good advice they have my best interests at heart, they want me to succeed.'

(LeSoCo, student 3)

'Miss Williams is incredibly helpful as well, you can talk to her whenever about anything and she's always like telling us of plays to go to.'

(Charter School, student 4)

'Through Theatre Peckham, I found out about the drama schools primarily through here.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 15)

2.2.3 COMMUNITY

Students also appreciated the environments created at their school or theatre groups, which they felt helped them flourish as young actors and performers. It has been suggested in other reports that the arts are useful in building and strengthening a sense of community, and it appears this rang true for many young people involved in theatre. As well as the staff being helpful for young people's development as actors, many valued working as a team with their peers.

'They don't take it too seriously which is good... they bring you in and they make you feel that you have your own voice and you have stories that you can tell with the group of people that you're in, they make you feel very comfortable, that I like. They make you feel part of the family and the staff there as well; you can crack jokes with them and give them a hug... you can talk about problems, you can laugh, cry together, it's nice.'

(London Bubble, student 1)

'It's the environment back stage and how everybody is on the same team in a sense and everybody's kind of laughing and supporting you and it's just and having laughs and jokes and I think that was the most like fun and influential time for me because it showed how these different types of people could just come together and be friends and work together and help each other for this one purpose.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 12)



One student spoke about working with the National Theatre, and how he had found working with different people had changed his perceptions of people from different backgrounds:

'They was rich and they live in that world but I was quite shocked and surprised to see and it is stereotypical on my part, but to see that they was the same as me, they was, they had a passion for drama and they was there because they believed that that would lead on to things or spur them on to work that much harder.'
(Theatre Peckham, student 7)

2.2.4 TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

A common theme that emerged was that drama provided skills that the participants felt were transferable to other aspects of their lives, or other careers. Many students commented on the amount of confidence they felt they had as a result of their participation in drama, which was applicable to many different areas of their lives.

'I think it's helped me so much with certain things like when it comes to presentations on like things in class, I have no problem in like standing in front of class and talking to people and like even if you want to go into like marketing or something that's really going to help you like being able to talk to people, I can talk to so

many people of different ages and I feel completely comfortable, like I don't feel intimidated.'

(Charter School, student 1)

'It's kind of helped me with interacting with people outside the course as well, being more confident and using standard English, so I can present myself in a good way as well and like it's really really helpful with, mainly confidence because I really lack confidence.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 8)

'Well, I mean it's helped me a hell of a lot, like I'm not a very confident, I find it really hard to be myself and so I enjoy drama because I get to be so many different things but then I kind of realised at the end of it that I am just being me, I can be a confident person I just look at it differently, I sort of place myself into someone else thinking it's easier when really I'm just still being me.'

(City of London Academy, student 3)

Many young people interviewed described a feeling that drama itself was undervalued. Schools were seen as valuing other subjects more and discouraging people to pursue drama as a career.

'I think schools need to be, not pushy of it, but they need to show how great [drama] is.'

(City of London Academy, student 3)

One student suggested schools keep drama compulsory throughout school.

'I think that drama should be compulsory for longer in schools, I know that a lot of people say that they hate drama but in fact like, from going into this year so many people have gone to me; oh I wish I had taken drama A level, I'm not that good at it but I wish I had taken it and I always think... secretly everyone kind of enjoys it and it doesn't really matter if you're not that confident and you don't really enjoy standing up in front of people because it doesn't have to be that be that... I think it just really helps people in so many other ways.'

(Charter School, student 4)

One student commented that although she had decided not to pursue a career in drama, she felt the skills she had learned in drama would be useful for her as a future primary school teacher.

'I've recently done a couple of weeks in a primary school and I saw how they sort of interacted drama in English and music and PE and stuff like that and just like normal stuff, like the children had to write a story and the drama side of it was; acting out the story, so it was making it more interesting and like I think I'd like to sort of write one drama or theatre extract and activate it with the children, so although I won't be in a drama profession it will still be part of what I do.'

(City of London Academy, student 1)

2.2.5 INCREASING KNOWLEDGE AND LEVEL OF QUALIFICATION

One respondent commented that she had enjoyed learning about the political and historical context of events after performing political plays, and that it had increased her knowledge and understanding of historical events.

'We do like a lot of political shows in my class and I hadn't really done political shows before, I'd done a little bit of like kitchen sink drama sort of plays but this time I got to do a lot of political plays like Waiting for Lefty and 1984 and I started thinking more about political plays and looking more at like, McCarthy trials as well and that sort of time and that era of films and stuff... and it's just like looking at political plays and this course has sort of helped me start thinking about political plays and the historical context of them.'

(LeSoCo, student 3)

One student went on to comment that while she greatly valued the experiences that drama had given her, she did not feel that this was equally valued as a subject by those around her.

'I just feel it offers you so many skills like group work, so many different things that will help you in later life so I don't really understand why it's like not as considered as other subjects because personally I think I've learnt, I've become more of a better person from like doing drama than like doing Science or Maths.'

(Charter School, student 1)

Many students spoke about the value of participating in drama that led to future qualifications. Not all students were choosing to pursue drama in the long term, but those who were valued the fact that their extracurricular course would lead to a GCSE qualification, in some cases the equivalent of two GCSEs for example.

Overall, it was evident from the interviews that the students highly valued their experience with drama, whichever setting they were based in and that they found many aspects of their experiences studying drama useful or valuable to their futures.

2.3 BARRIERS AND OBSTACLES

While many students showed a strong passion for drama and many shared an aspiration to become professional actors, most students interviewed felt there were some barriers to them achieving this.

2.3.1 FINANCIAL BARRIERS

'A lot of people can't afford, I mean personally I can't afford to go to a top drama school and go to university and have the best education, so that is a very big barrier for a lot of people.'

(London Bubble, student 4)

Most students had some financial concerns when it came to pursuing a career in acting. Approximately 53% of respondents identified their socio-economic background as working class. Many students cited some financial reason as a possible barrier or obstacle to them being successful in their aspirations.

Reasons for financial concerns were varied. Many of those interviewed perceived the industry as very difficult to get stable work from. There was a perception of extreme competition for jobs in acting generally, with long-term

financial stability being a concern. Many responses indicated those aspiring to acting felt they were possibly choosing a difficult path.

'I think it's money doubts, not during the process but afterwards because that's when you're, you're left to find a job and things... It is hard, going for a career option sort of to do with theatre or something. It is a lot harder to get in to than other subjects so then that's the only doubt that I really have.'

(Charter School, student 5)

Many young people felt that finance was a barrier to further study, citing the cost of studying at drama school or university to be potentially prohibitive.

'I guess like money would be quite tight and especially because [a Student Ambassador from The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama] was saying that it didn't really seem like they had enough time to have like a job and stuff and I don't really understand how like you'd be like in uni without like a job... Because I really like don't want to leave and have like so much debt... I don't know if I'd like get bursaries and stuff and especially because at Central they're in London as well so it's going to mean like more expensive for like accommodation.'

(Charter School, student 1)

'I do think money is a massive sort of worry at the moment, like obviously going to university now is like 9 grand a year, then you've got your rent and your bills and then to be able to afford that is very expensive... I know you can get a student loan but you're still going to have this debt and stuff like that, but also I think, but yeah it is a lot of pressure to have that debt on something and to have a degree that is so specific.'

(City of London, student 1)

'We went to Central I think they said it was like nine grand for the year and that would obviously be quite a struggle for my parents to like, even though they would do their best to do so they would, it would be a struggle in terms of paying it back or whatnot.'

(City of London, student 2)

It was evident that getting into a drama school, or acting more generally, was perceived as having up front costs which were prohibitive. For example, charges for auditions were cited as prohibitive to students making multiple attempts to apply to different schools.

'I mean next year I will apply again. It will be my fifth year and it gets to the point where you think; how many years am I going to spend £50-60, RADA is £80 for an audition fee to go to the school and not get anywhere.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 15)

'Let's say you apply for an agency, you need a portfolio and a portfolio is like £300 and so sometimes it's just not the right time.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 10)

One student already studying English at university stated she had picked English over drama because she felt it was more 'practical' for her future prospects. When asked about future aspirations to study drama, she spoke about the combination of lack of financial assistance for further study and the concentration of drama work in an expensive city.

'I don't have the money to go to drama school after uni or anything like that, my parents can't support me financially, so kind of student finance you know from the government and so when that stops I'll have to earn money... I feel like I need to be in London if I want to act, but I can't do, but I can't stay in London without earning any money.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 17)

One student said he felt as though he had been pressured to go to drama school as the only way of making it as an actor, which meant having to face the financial burden, or not achieve his career aspirations. He spoke about the sense he had from other people that:

'If you don't go to drama school, there's no hope for you, people have done it but you'd have to work so hard, just give up, either go to drama school or don't act and I really disagree with that because obviously it's very very difficult whether you go to drama school or not, to survive from just acting but I think it can be done.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 15)

Financial factors therefore were not as straightforward as just tuition fees being prohibitive, although many students were intimidated by fees. Financial barriers were wide-ranging, from audition fees to worries about future prospects and financial security. Young people going into possible study and later a career in acting were worried about the risk of up front costs paying-off down the line with a rewarding career. For some students it was evident that paying out tuition fees for drama school felt like a risky investment.

2.3.2 FAMILY AND SOCIETAL VIEWS OF DRAMA

Having support from family was something many students spoke about as important to them, and family support often overlapped with financial worries for some respondents. Many respondents stated their families had initially been reluctant to support their passion for drama, or take it seriously as a career, possibly due to a general undervaluing of drama.

'My dad, he didn't have a problem with it but he felt that I just took it as a hobby, he didn't think I was serious as I am as serious with it. So there were times when he felt like there was no point in me doing this, so I think there was a day to watch the play, a play that I did and then through that, I could see that he actually started to support me.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 16)

'My mum for one because she knew that I was interested in acting since primary school but at the same time she wanted her son to become a lawyer or a doctor or whatever and I just kept telling her; I want to do this, I want to do this.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 2)

One young woman described her father as wholly unsupportive of her aspiration to attend drama school.

'The person that would fund me is my dad and he's kind of already said that like unless you, unless by some miracle you can prove it to me, I won't fund you to go a drama or theatre or any kind of education programme or school like that.'

(City of London Academy, student 3)

Some respondents described a general attitude from family members, and in wider society, that drama was seen as a lesser subject, or an unrealistic career aspiration.

'When I was younger I always knew what I wanted to do, I've always had a very intense passion for performance but I tried to do other things that didn't really suit me, you know, I took jobs that I wasn't interested in, I did college course that I wasn't interested in because I was trying to find a career that other people would say is more stable and they never agreed with me, and looking back now I can see if I had the opportunity to go and tell my young sixteen year old self I would go over and say; stop listening to what other people are telling you, you need to do what you want to do because it's the only way to move forward

in life, and that's the biggest that I made, I definitely should have done what I wanted to.'

(London Bubble, student 4)

'I feel like the arts are getting so side tracked lately that it's just not fair and it's going to end up being a world where people think like my dad or think like the governors that think the arts are meaningless and they're not.'

(City of London Academy, student 3)

'People end up going into jobs that they hate just because they're scared of not having money or whatever, yeah I think drama isn't celebrated, or it's not taken seriously enough, it is actually celebrated but people don't take it seriously and I think it is something that needs to be taken seriously because it helps people so much as well.'

(Charter School, student 4)

The combination of lack of familial support and money worries appeared to influence the choices and aspirations of some young people interviewed. Those with less support from their families spoke more frequently of following 'realistic' career choices.

'My mum wouldn't want me to just have 'acting' and what if it doesn't work out, what if she's not there for me, to support me with money and etcetera? And so that's why I was, I'm really sticking to like learning English, getting degrees and everything, just in case... She's the type of mum who would want me to do something academic like becoming a lawyer or a doctor.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 11)

Many young people interviewed were going into acting knowing that their families would not, or could not, financially support them and they would have to make it on their own if it was what they wanted. This meant facing a challenge and a possible burden of financial insecurity in the future, which young people seemed very aware of. However, it was evident that some families, even without extensive financial security, were able to reassure young people they would find a way to support them in their studies.

'When we performed the Romeo and Juliet here [my family] came to watch me, for the exam we did recently for A level they came and watched me and they always said that if I did end up going to school then they would help find a way to fund [it].'

(City of London Academy, student 2)

2.3.3 RACE, CLASS AND BACKGROUND

Of those interviewed 67% identified their ethnicity as something other than white: 17% identified as mixed race and 50% identified as black British, Caribbean or African. As stated previously, 48% of respondents identified themselves as working class, of those interviewed who identified as working class, 66% were black or minority ethnic.

Many young people spoke in depth about how they felt their background was different to other people they interacted within theatre, or perceived as being part of the world of acting. Some young people felt that their ethnicity, social or cultural background was an active barrier to them having a successful career in the industry.

There was a clear feeling from a number of interviewees that the UK industry did not represent minorities adequately.

'When you go to theatre all the time and you feel like; come on! This doesn't represent, if art imitates life and shit, it should show London how it is, because I see Asians in London, I see blacks, you see just loads of people just coming from different walks of life, different areas, different skin tones, different voices, some are more rich, some are more crisp, some are more, represent it man, just represent the multicultural side of life.'

(London Bubble, student 1)

Some students had a perception that the UK was particularly lacking when it came to representation of people from BME backgrounds.

'I'm not 100% sure how to explain it but our colour and our race... it might be harder for us to get a job like that than in America, it will be harder here to get things. Because it's the truth like it will be, if me and another person was aiming for the same job, it will be more likely that the white person will get it over me even if they might not be a better actor than me or a worse actor than me, it will be better or it will be easier for them to get the same job, I will have to work twice as hard as they do.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 6)

The black actresses, you don't see many of them because British films are more like; oh Coronation Street and things like where you have to 'speak like this' and... I don't see a lot of people who speak like

that around here or around London. They've got more like points of view like, I've seen Hollyoaks and there's only one or two black people on there and they don't really get the main roles because, I don't know why... Then you see shows in America where you got like the Disney Channel and they've got a main role with a black girl and you've got black people in it because they're good actors and they don't judge them on anything.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 11)

Students spoke about a perception that being from a certain background had an effect on the sort of theatre people felt able to take part in. Students spoke about being pigeonholed by others, as well as also feeling internal pressure to fill certain stereotypes.

'Because we're from certain areas in London that some might say is a bit troubled or a bit wayward and those unfortunately sometimes those environments that we're in influence us as people and so when it comes to being on stage and being in theatre and doing Shakespeare it's like; nah I'm from Peckham why am I doing Shakespeare?'

(Theatre Peckham, student 2)

Speaking about an experience of participating in a project with a new group, one participant recalled:

'I was the only mixed race boy. They had a little jam session, they had instruments out... and someone said to me 'oh you must be able to rap' and I was like 'oh, okay', and obviously I know why they were saying it.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 7)

These perceived stereotypes extended to television and theatre involving BME people.

'I feel like whenever I watch TV shows and things like that, you don't see a lot of black actors in my opinion, you see the odd one or two, but there's not a lot and I know there are people who do auditions and stuff, or when, it is black actors it is like, shows like 'Youngers', that is a good show but it's just like, it's showing our generation as like a bad generation... In my opinion I'd like there to be more black actors but not like to the extent where we have to play characters that we don't feel comfortable being portrayed as just because we are black.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 11)

The students who had experience in interacting with the wider world of theatre, attending workshops, courses or events outside of their school or theatre group, expressed the fact that this had affected the way they viewed the industry. One student spoke about his experience going to the National Youth Theatre, and that his expectation of being the only one from a working class and non-white background was fulfilled.

'I thought I would go there and everyone like 'oh mummy and daddy paid for it' and had pocket money and so on or something like that so that was how I thought it would be and I was right in a sense because it was, I was the only mixed raced boy there and everyone else was of that background, they was rich and they live in that world.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 7)

The same student went on later in the interview to explain how he viewed his experience there in comparison to his experience at Theatre Peckham.

Theatre Peckham, I've been here, it doesn't matter what colour you are, you've got an acting ability, you're good at acting, we're going to give it to you regardless of what colour you are but like little things, like when I went to National Youth Theatre I felt some type away because I was the only mixed raced person there. Why was I the only mixed race person there, I shouldn't, and that plagued on my mind a lot. Why is everyone white and I'm the only mixed raced boy here?'

(Theatre Peckham, student 7)

'And for me, it felt wrong because I noticed towards, because two weeks is a long time to be around people everyday and I noticed I started to act differently to how I would normally act and I would start talking differently and I know you adapt when you're around different people but I feel that if there was, not if there was more people of colour there... I would have felt a lot more myself, not that colour means anything but it would make me feel myself because; okay there's people of colour here, this is just a normal thing, I'm in an everyday environment, I walk down the street I see a white, I see an Asian person, I see a black person, that's just how it is and it was like I was in a different world because everyone was not the same colour as me and it was just yeah; why, why am I the only person here of colour?'

(Theatre Peckham, student 7)

The perception of being seen as different affected the confidence of young people looking to apply to drama school and progress with their careers, not only due to race, but due to their social background.

'The way I talk as well because I'm from Hackney, I don't always talk um well, well spoken because I speak like slang and all that so I get, a lot of people are like to me; oh you're so ghetto... that kind of impression like really, I don't really move like that, so that's something as well, I'm thinking that if people that I don't even know or I hardly see and they're thinking that imagine if I was to go to an audition and maybe one thing will just slip out wrong, that's sound wrong... like I'm sure that will be, that'll affect me.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 9)

There seemed to be a general perception that the world of theatre and acting beyond the school and local environments did not make space for young people from BME backgrounds or from working class backgrounds, and that in order to succeed they would be subject to subtle pressure to change themselves to fit the mould. The problem was perceived both in pre-existing theatre and television down to participation in drama schools and events. Young people perceived a lack of representation in all levels of the industry outside of their own local communities.

2.3.4 OTHER BARRIERS

Some other issues emerged in the interviews which acted as potential barriers. All respondents were asked if they had connections in the industry. Most people did not have direct connections, although a few did cite some distant familial connections to people working in television and theatre who were able to give some advice. A small number of respondents had parents who were, or had been, part of the industry.

Many young people perceived having connections in the industry as important when it came to getting work and achieving a future career.

'I just think it's obviously about contacts, you know those schools have so many kind of avenues and agents that they can set you up with.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 17)

Many respondents were unsure about the ways to get into the industry and were uncertain about the process of signing to agencies, with some asking for money and seeming inaccessible to young people.

'I do have friends that have connections to acting but sometimes it doesn't really get me far because obviously you need an agent and sometimes it's like, well, how do you get an agent? But they say apply to agencies and sometimes the agencies are like oh you need to pay up front costs of money.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 10)

There was a perception from some that there were secrets of the industry they were not being informed of.

'They're professionals and they just say; oh you have to get into drama, acting classes and obviously, I don't know if they're trying to hide something from us like, like; oh okay you've become famous and you don't want us to do it as well, that what I think sometimes when they all just say the same thing... sometimes it's kind of frustrating when you try and get like the real answers as to how they got into it, like some of them do have agents but they don't say like oh you need an agent, they say you need drama.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 11)

One student commented he felt that many drama students were unprepared for the realities of the industry.

'I feel like um you know sometimes on certain courses and in certain drama schools, you're not given the reality I mean I was, I was fortunate when I was 17, I did you know go to drama classes with my agent I've got right now and she was very very harsh with me at the start and she told me all these things and I wonder, maybe as a person, it might not have helped me as a person, but I certainly feel that a lot of the people who have had shocks, I thought I am not one of those people and I've been more prepared for it and I wish that it didn't take my agent to drill it in to me when I was younger.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 15)

Other barriers cited were generally quite personal to the young people. Many felt that they were perhaps not motivated enough, too lazy or lacking in confidence, which they perceived as a barrier to their success. Some young people did not cite any external barriers at all.



3. SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION

3.1 OVERVIEW IT IS EVIDENT FROM THE BARRIERS THAT RESPONDENTS HAVE SPOKEN ABOUT THAT THERE IS SCOPE TO DEVELOP OPPORTUNITIES THAT YOUNG PEOPLE WOULD FIND USEFUL AND THEREFORE OF VALUE.

The participants offered suggestions for action that we share here with the various organisations and professionals involved in young people's education and learning, in order to help young people overcome obstacles and to create further value in the experiences they gain from participation in drama.

These suggestions are grouped under the following sub-headings:

- > preparation for auditions and entry into drama schools
- > increased study of Shakespeare, acting for camera
- > engaging with the industry
- > provision for the 16–18 age range
- > financial support and financial advice
- > increased representation of diversity in the industry.

3.2 PREPARATION FOR AUDITIONS AND ENTRY INTO DRAMA SCHOOLS

Respondents had very varied ideas for what would be useful. A common theme was a greater level of teaching and information about audition technique: many young people felt nervous or unprepared for auditions at drama schools.

A number of young people interviewed suggested that they would appreciate attending workshops at drama schools prior to auditioning to get a clearer idea of how the school operates and to build their confidence.

'Say if I wanted to apply to Central Speech, if they actually did more like free workshops that anyone could come into and maybe working with them, they teach me stuff that they expect and then coming into

the audition I'd have a basic background knowledge of what they've done and what they've been taught and then I can apply on my own in auditions and stuff like that. So it will be easier because I know the kind of drama and things that they do there.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 13)

'An actual kind of class there would allow me to see what the school is like, you could see whether it was too rigid or strict for you, and if you can see it's a little bit more, not relaxed but a little bit more comfortable for you there.'

(LeSoCo, student 3)

3.3 INCREASED STUDY OF SHAKESPEARE, ACTING FOR CAMERA

Students also felt there were things they could study at their drama group which would help them further their chances when applying for drama school. A few respondents said they felt they wanted a course that offered them a variety of texts and themes to study. There was a particular emphasis from some students on a need to study Shakespeare in more depth.

'I guess like yeah the idea of um playing a, messing around different themes, because yeah you can't just be having one theme because you'd get used to that and you can go out into the real world and experience that it's more than just one theme and I that maybe that, study different plays like Shakespeare and study modern play and then um, to write a play ourselves now so I think playing around with different themes.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 9)

'Yeah I think studying Shakespeare texts would definitely be helpful because it looks like in most auditions for drama school they always talk about Shakespeare and he is an important person when it comes to drama and so having a background about Shakespeare and the text and actually analysing texts and being able to interpret it would help.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 13)

Other students focused their answers in regards to a new workshop on more specific skills, for example, film or television work, or certain acting techniques. This was not necessarily directly related to applying to drama school, but more skills that they felt would be generally beneficial to them as young actors.

'I think we should do more things like 'on camera' so we can see how we look on camera and what we can improve in our like camera work, like right now, I know it's called 'Theatre Peckham' but I think we should try scripts that have been done on TV and see how we can interpret it, so we can make our own and also understand how we can, what they do in the actual TV performances, not just theatre, that's what I would like to get out of the next course.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 11)

'I think controlled facial expressions because I express a lot through my face, sometimes maybe too much, sometimes the audience can't see my face, so I'd obviously need to try and translate that into my body.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 12)

3.4 ENGAGING WITH THE INDUSTRY

One student suggested placements in professional settings for their age group as a way for younger people to understand the industry:

'Maybe being able to perform in or being able to go and work backstage and see how professionals works on the show which would give me the idea of what I will need to do when I want to get there, so then I have, so I'm ready for what would come, instead of sitting and watching them perform on stage and then I can see what happens backstage as well.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 6)

One student drew upon the importance of meeting role models in the industry to inspire young people in their careers.

'I think the opportunity to do more, it's the type of things that I think do happen like workshops, talks from inspirational people, they happen but I mean obviously more wide spread. But the opportunity to

meet people who are doing it, working, managed to stay in the career, acting, writing, producing, directing whatever, having a chance to meet them, learn from them, obviously get to know them but obviously it's just a talk but the chance to meet and mix with those people... obviously you're not asking to meet Nicholas Hytner to put me in the National Theatre tomorrow. But the chance to just see it because sometimes just seeing that is enough to help you with that little push.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 15)

Another student wanted to bring agencies to drama schools to try and showcase talent and progress their acting careers.

'Maybe we can invite like agencies to come and watch us and so we get more opportunities so it's not just like getting the grade but also getting chances to do something with your acting.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 11)

Another respondent felt that he wanted the opportunity to mix with different people from different areas of the UK to widen the groups of people he had performed with.

'They could do retreats and take kids out of this area and mix in with different kinds of kids so that they see different worlds, especially kids from different countries or different parts of the UK, just mix that up so that they have more than what they experience here I think that's one thing that can happen that can be done, it costs money but I think that will help.'

(Theatre Peckham, student 3)

3.5 PROVISION FOR THE 16–18 AGE RANGE

A few respondents said they felt sometimes that they had reached a peak at their drama group or school, or that they felt the work they did there was not serious enough, and they wished to do a course where they felt there was an emphasis on being professional and serious about acting. There are many courses available for this age range in further education and sixth form colleges, but there was a view from several participants that there is still a gap in the 'extracurricular' market.

'I don't think there's enough drama groups for people who are older, I mean when I was younger it was fine because obviously they're around my age but I think they kind of saw it more as like a game and I've always seen it as quite something that I like, whereas now I don't feel that there's enough for like young people my age, like sixteen to eighteen, it's usually like up to like fourteen, fifteen and then people kind of stop going. I don't really feel like there's enough like serious acting classes or companies which are like, that involve like

people sixteen to eighteen who are actually interested.’
(Charter School, student 1)

‘I think if there was a course that was focusing on you being professional, and if you do really want it.’
(Theatre Peckham, student 7)

One young person suggested that a course which linked together different elements of drama, acting, song and dance would be beneficial.

‘If you focus on like set texts, so like set plays, so that then we can say; okay this week we’re doing this and what we have to do... I think a nice structured class where you say; we’re looking at this play, we’re looking at this dance group and we’re looking at this song... and then try and draw them all together so maybe you link the song to a dance and link the dance to the acting side of it I think something like that would really be good because you’re highlighting on each aspect instead of just touching on one and touching on another.’

(Theatre Peckham, student 5)

3.6 FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND FINANCIAL ADVICE

Applying to drama school or progressing with an acting career was also evidently a concern for young people for financial reasons. Some young people spoke about the need for funding for things like portfolios, audition fees and agency fees, and how they felt they needed more help with that in order to feel they had a chance for success. It was particularly interesting to hear that students who had auditioned a number of times were feeling discouraged by the audition fees of over £50 each time when trying to get into drama school. It is possible that drama schools could do more to promote the audition fee waivers and vouchers to young people who are from lower income backgrounds. Similarly, if there were grants available for young people to create portfolios this would give more chances to those on low income in being able to further their careers as young actors.

‘I think more options financially to help me, or just to help people in general.’
(City of London Academy, student 4)

There were similar thoughts around the cost of agencies, with young people commenting that more affordable access to agencies would be appreciated.

‘An agency would be really good, to have an agency to help you look for roles that are suited to you and not having to pay them as much as you would have to, I’ve heard of agencies who take a lot of money, or unless

you’re in like an actual performance group... you have to pay quite a lot for the classes and then the agency gets thrown in but I can’t pay for the classes.’
(Theatre Peckham, student 11)

Tuition fees and cost of living while studying were also a concern for young people. It could be suggested that drama schools and universities could do more to promote any available bursaries or grants to young people from less well off backgrounds. A number of respondents felt like they did not understand how their finances would work at university, and one commented that someone to guide her through would be beneficial.

‘I think if someone sitting down and right; this is how much you can actually get, so someone explaining the whole debt thing and like the student loan and how it would affect me and how much I would be able to afford.’

(City of London Academy, student 1)

‘I think maybe understanding like in full how the student loan system whatever works or how uni itself works, I don’t understand how it actually works.’
(Theatre Peckham, student 12)

Evidently more could be done to increase students’ confidence around their financial capability in higher education.

3.7 INCREASED REPRESENTATION OF DIVERSITY IN THE INDUSTRY

As described in section 2.3.3 it was clear from the findings that a lot of young people perceived the world of drama to be quite exclusive and often limited to a specific kind of person, specifically white and middle class. Many young people from working class or BME backgrounds did not see themselves represented in theatre. The lack of representation was demoralising to young people and a few felt they did not have good chances of making it in the UK when compared to places like the USA, which they perceived to have significantly more involvement of BME actors, especially in television and film.

This is a more complex issue which requires more complex and multiple solutions. Young people need to see themselves represented in theatre, to know that it is possible to fulfil their aspiration regardless of their background. It is also important that young people feel as though their contributions, or future contributions, to the world of theatre will be of value. Ensuring that BME actors and actors from lower socio-economic backgrounds and regions are visible and valued throughout the industry is key in changing this perception.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW STRUCTURE: WHAT'S IT WORTH? THEATRE PECKHAM PARTICIPANTS (MODIFIED FOR EACH GROUP)

Introductory blurb (5 minutes)

This interview will hopefully allow us to get a full sense of your experience of participating in theatre, performance and drama, and what you value most about your experiences. We'll also talk about what you want in the future in terms of your involvement in the performing arts.

This is a semi-structured interview which means I have a set of questions that everyone will be asked, but we can go off track a bit and really talk about the things that are specific to you.

Reiteration of info you have had so far:

- > about an hour's conversation – no longer than an hour and a half
- > we can break for the loo/ get a drink if we need to
- > the conversation is audio-recorded and will be transcribed
- > patterns and themes will be pulled out of all of the interviews, as well as experiences specific to individuals
- > the research project is about Theatre Peckham and Central understanding more about your experience of participation, what you value or feel is important when you're taking part in theatre/ performance related activities, and what might hold you back (if anything does!)
- > something for you from us – workshop on 2nd July arranged with Denise, run by some of the current students at Central and bag of Central stuff
- > you will not be named at any point in the writing up of this interview
- > have we had the consent form from you? We must have that to be able to use the material from the interview.

Section A: warm-up questions to focus the mind and get conversation flowing (approximately 10 minutes)

1. Tell me a bit about the course you're on here at Theatre Peckham and tell me how you knew it was a course you wanted to do (had you been part of Theatre Peckham before?).
2. How would you describe yourself in terms of:
 - a. your ethnicity (e.g. Black British, Bangladeshi, Mixed Race, White British etc.)
 - b. your 'socio-economic background' (would you say you were from a low or no-income family, maybe a working class or middle class background, are you the first to think about college/ university or have most people in your family been to uni – those kinds of things.
3. Can you tell me about some of the other things you've done and been involved with – drama at school maybe, other activities here at Theatre Peckham or at other places, what plays/shows you've seen – that kind of thing.
4. Thinking back to when you applied to the course and were offered a place, what did you think it would be like and did you think it would lead you on to something afterwards?

Section B: shifting into more specific questions (approximately 40 minutes, average of 5/6 minutes per question)

5. Tell me a bit more about your hopes for the future – do you want to study further and maybe eventually work in the performing arts?
 - a. Unpick this answer – if it is about being an actor for example, what kind of actor, what does the person know about the array of ways one can be an actor etc.
 - b. If they have a less clear idea about the long-term future, but know they want to 'do more' ask what that might look like.
 - c. If they want to do some kind of FE or HE course, how far have they got with exploring options?

6. If you were going to do another course here at Theatre Peckham that took you to the next level:

a. What would you want to be learning about?

b. What do you think would give you the best chances of success after that next course?

c. If you didn't know about Theatre Peckham already, how might we reach you – what top 3 things would you suggest we 'use' to sell Theatre Peckham to other young people?

7. What have been some of your best experiences of being involved in theatre, performance etc.? Being in a production maybe? A project at school or college? Getting some paid work maybe? A performance you've seen? Online creative activities like writing groups, zines, blogs etc?

(Unpick this for a few mins and try to get at what it is that is valuable to the person in what they experience – being part of a group/experience that will serve them well for their future etc. – push further if the response is more 'I love acting' to clarify if it's a hobby or fun way to spend time, or if there is some form of 'investment' in making progress.)

8. How about individual people that might have been especially helpful in supporting you or giving you information about what your options are, or helping you towards your goals. Is there anyone like that in your life?

(If so, unpick who that is and what it is they provide for the young person. What's the concrete thing they GET – advice, inspiration, money, support, information, help preparing for applications & auditions etc.)

9. Can you tell me a bit about parental/family experience and attitude in relation to the arts – have you been to see plays etc with your family when you were younger, are you the first person to really be interested in the arts? Do you currently have any industry contacts for example?

Does your family have any links to Theatre Peckham, in particular – has anyone in your family been a member before you, does a parent know the people who run the place etc?

10. How do you find out about the things you are interested in – so we talked about how you came to do this course, and you have told me some of your thoughts about what you want to do after this course.

How do you research these things and find out about them, and get your head around what the options are?

(This is about understanding the young person's sources of info, or approach to seeking out information.)

11. Let us talk about any things that you feel might hold you back in trying to achieve the things you want to achieve. Are there things that are stopping you or slowing you down?

Give a couple of examples to prompt if necessary. Looking here for things such as:

i) financial constraints

ii) the need to work and earn money

iii) worry about how they could take on a student loan

iv) life circumstances that mean they can't see how they could do a full-time BA or other course

v) lack of family support

vi) lack of understanding of how to actually keep doing performance stuff and try and make this a career path

vii) feeling that they wouldn't get in to drama school (and why).

12. What kinds of things would really help you to overcome those barriers? Maybe not a lottery win – more like realistic things that would help you with what you've just said.

These things might form part of a recommendations section for organisations to take on board for example.

Section C: closing (approximately 10 minutes)

13. This has been really interesting. Thank you for talking so freely. I feel I have got a good sense of what is important to you, when you are choosing to spend your time doing theatre and performance related activities.

Is there anything else you would like to tell me as part of this interview?

14. Next steps: the audio recording gets transcribed and will form part of the report about this project. You will receive a copy of the final report around September and we'll invite you (through Theatre Peckham) to an event when we publish that report.

