

Big Brum Theatre in Education Company

Artistic Policy

I. Principles of Involvement

Vision. Big Brum Theatre in Education Company seeks to provide the highest quality theatre in education programmes for children and young people across all age ranges and abilities, in schools, specialist units and colleges in the West Midlands. As practitioners we proceed from the premise that children are not undeveloped adults but human beings in their own right, with specific experiences that go to the heart of being human. Art is a mode of knowing the world in which we live and the Company uses theatre and drama to work alongside young people to make meaning of their lives and the world around them. Theatre in education work in schools is the lifeblood of Big Brum, however the Company is committed to the on-going development of its provision of out-of-school work with young people, specifically through its youth theatre work and other community projects.

II. Theatre as a Mode of Knowing

The world is knowable. The work of Big Brum proceeds from the materialist philosophical premise that the world is knowable. Art, like science, is a mode of knowing this world in which we live. Art cognises life truthfully. But the truth is not fixed immutable knowledge, it is knowing in the present moment and therefore subject to change. Like evolution, artistic production is a process of becoming, born out of the need that human beings have to know and re-know themselves, individually and socially. Art is social imagination, which functions through a synthesis of feeling and thought with implications for future action in life.

Theatre Image. Theatre images and dramatic action compact reality and resonate for an audience on both a conscious and unconscious level. Image enables us to cognise apparently different aspects of reality in their essence and in relation to each other. This resonance is the intuitive starting point for the gleaning of new knowledge that can be conceptualised and categorised. The power of this mode of knowing is that the image resonates in the mind long after facts have been forgotten.

Art, Education and Human Rights. Because we believe that participation in and access to art is a necessity, like education, we believe it is a basic human right. Young people, more than anyone, have a need to learn who they are and why they are who they are. It is through this that they acquire a powerful sense of justice and the drive to change the world. Working artistically with

them, using the tool of the imagination, we use art to envisage a more reasonable, more just, more tolerant and more human world.

The Rights of the Artist-Educator. The exploration of reality socially through art is a discourse that requires the freedom to question, challenge and dispute every authority. Big Brum reserves the right to maintain our artistic and educational integrity and create our work free from censorship and political interference.

III. Theatre in Education

Trusting the child. We use the art form to enable young people to educate their own minds not in *what to think* but *how to think*.

Active learning. Theatre in education (TIE) is unique in its capacity to engage young people through the combined power of theatre and active participation. The TIE programme is the point of mediation between the young people and the world they inhabit. Learning takes place through a dramatic situation that matters to the participants. They explore the content of a programme through a frame (perspective on events) or role that is 'other' than themselves (e.g. Jurors rather than a group of Year 7 children) with a purposeful task, interacting with the Actor Teachers. Learning takes place through a dramatic situation that matters to the participants, and because it matters the young people experience felt understanding. They are free to make decisions and take full responsibility for their actions safely in the fiction of the drama. This process allows for a self-ownership that is systematically denied them in everyday life. Through the imagination in action, playfully contested amongst peers, the participants test future possibilities, creating a different reality explored dramatically.

Content. Our work is not geared to specific areas of the national curriculum; the content of a TIE programme offers an exploration which can be used to access all aspects of the curriculum. Skills and knowledge are acquired with and through meaning making.

Conceptual learning. The learning area under examination is often conceptual, e.g. the concept of Justice. No single concept exists independently of others. To operate with concepts, in relation to each other, is the basis of all meaning making. We cannot know without concepts to know in.

The 'crucible paradigm'. Pedagogically, the drama mode of learning is in direct opposition to transmission teaching. In TIE the Actor Teacher and the young people co-operate in learning. This is the means by which we explore in order to explain to ourselves. We refer to this as the 'crucible paradigm' where we stir our knowledge around together. This not only transforms the relationship between teacher and student but it transforms the relationship between student and student, who become collaborators in their learning. We place the young people in their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This is

the distance between the actual development level, as determined by independent problem solving, and the level of potential development, as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. Actual development level characterises mental development retrospectively, while the ZPD characterises mental development prospectively. In the drama mode young people are liberated by stepping into the 'otherness' world of the fiction and in doing so shedding many of the inhibitions and obstacles of being the day-to-day 'me'. The 'crucible paradigm' demands that co-learners collaborate in a space where young people are taken seriously by adults and each other, a space where the matter under exploration makes human sense. Thus in drama children stand a head taller than themselves in everyday life.

Working with one class at a time. Fundamentally we define our work through the practice of working with one class at a time, thus enhancing the Actor Teacher to young people ratio above that of the normal classroom situation. This is essential if we are to maintain TIE as a discrete art form that enables real learning to take place. It is a safeguard for the quality of the work.

The TIE programme. Just as it seeks to engage the whole child, a Big Brum TIE programme is conceived holistically. Any drama, theatre or participation during a session, any teaching materials offered to support the programme either in preparation for the Company's visit to a school or to be continued after it, is an element of the programme as a whole. Each element is integral.

Working with teachers. Big Brum is committed to building working relationships with teachers and partnerships with schools which develop the quality of provision that the Company can offer.

IV. Equality of Opportunity

Inclusion. Our work is tailor-made to suit all ages and abilities irrespective of class, race, gender, sexual orientation or special needs. We aim to work with as many of the most disadvantaged of our young people as possible. Big Brum seeks to be an advocate for the young who require a more just and equitable society. Without this understanding TIE would be stripped of its *raison d'être*.

Touring Schools. The Company sees it of central importance to take work *into* schools. We tour to both primary and secondary schools in the region. We are committed to making provision throughout the education sector.

Community. Although the core activity of Big Brum is based upon touring schools, we recognise our responsibility to apply our methodology and adapt our art form to the wider community outside of formal learning.

Disseminating the work. In keeping with our stance on the role of art and education in society and the rights of young people, Big Brum is committed to

promoting and disseminating this methodology locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

V. Quality of Experience

A permanent core company of specialist practitioners. The quality of the Company's work is maintained and developed through its core company members. The Company is responsible for engaging all Company members in a continual and developing process of theory guided practice. The training provided for permanent Company members contributes to a unique pool of knowledge and experience, an accumulated expertise in the art form. This provides the continuity from one project to another, enabling Big Brum to deepen and enhance the power of the programmes and projects it undertakes.

Evaluation. The Company places the highest value upon the rigorous evaluation of our practice both during and at the end of a project. We are committed to developing new and more effective models for evaluation both internally and in collaboration with outside expertise.

High quality theatre. The Company aims to provide theatre of the highest quality, with the highest production values possible within its resources. The engagement of young people in a TIE programme increases in proportion to the quality of the production. This is not simply a question of aesthetics, although this is important; it is a question of meaning. A design for a programme needs to pay attention to detail for the use of objects and props, in order that they offer authenticity and significance that grounds the imagination of the young people in the fiction and thereby the learning area.

New work. Big Brum strives to make each TIE programme a new piece of work. This propels the Company to move forward, incorporating the new in a living struggle to re-examine our ways of working, resist the formulaic, and the temptation to rest on what has gone before.

VI. Policy and Practice (and vice versa)

Living Document. We believe that the viability of our artistic policy can only be measured in practice. It should reflect the Company's struggle to achieve its aims. We intend to use this policy as a living document. It marks a moment in our collective understanding, which in time will itself be developed and added to.

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