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Young People as Legislators – Legislative Theatre and Youth Parliament

Abstract

Young People as Legislators is the result of a six month Legislative Theatre project with Collective Encounters Youth Theatre, Youth Focus NW and Youth Parliament UK. The project formed part of a wider scheme of practice as research that explored youth theatre practice as political engagement for young people. Legislative Theatre practice was utilised to work alongside the Youth Parliament's *Make Your Mark* scheme, an annual poll for young people to decide on campaigning issues. In this paper, I consider three elements; tokenism in youth engagement, differing experiences between artistic process and product as well as applied theatre's inability to develop long term effects. Employing the critical theories of Paulo Freire, the paper regards the practice as a failed attempt to develop critical youth theatre practice. I argue that the Legislative Theatre project led to uncritical engagement and no political change due to the youth organisations regarding the theatre practice as a service to satisfy their own targets and requirements.

Introduction

The relationship between theatre and social change has been thoroughly discussed within applied theatre practice and related academic discourse. The debates are numerous and follow dominant themes including the association between individual and social change, the political agency of the facilitator and whether focussing on ‘social impact’ is of any use to applied theatre practice (see Thornton, 2015; Mirza, 2005; Thompson, 2009). In addition to these debates, Michael Balfour’s article *The politics of intention: looking for a theatre of little changes* (2009) and Dani Snyder-Young’s publication *Theatre of Good Intentions – Challenges and Hopes for Theatre and Social Change* (2013) were strong and clear provocations to practitioners who are in pursuit of creating social change with communities.

The arguments outlined above underpin this article and the practice included. The article describes a Legislative Theatre project undertaken in collaboration with Collective Encounters Youth Theatre, Youth Focus NW and Youth Parliament UK. The aim was for young people to have open dialogue with elected officials and to have an active role within a decision making process. The project is employed as a case study to discuss and spotlight the existing debates about applied theatre’s ability to create ‘actual change in the real world’ (Snyder-Young, 2013:135).

The Project

Since 1999, there have been fourteen bills and amendments in the House of Commons and the House of Lords that were directly aimed at reducing the voting age to 16. None have been successful. The bills and amendments were in addition to a range of enquiries led by organisational bodies including the Electoral Commission. All mainstream political parties, apart from the Conservatives, have expressed support for reducing the voting age and each devolved assembly has voted in favour of allowing 16-year-olds to vote (Votesat16.org, 2016).

The State of the Nation 2013 report by the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission (2013) claims that, ‘for the first time in over a century there is a real risk that the next generation of adults ends up with lower living standards than today’s generation’. Young people today encounter an unprecedented mixture of challenges including job insecurity, decreasing home ownership and a potential £50,000 student debt. As living standards and opportunities decline for young people, their civic rights and political agency develop a significant importance. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was ratified by the UK in

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1990. In Article 12 it specifically says that; ‘States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child’ (United Nations, 1990). In accordance with Article 12, I argue that the UK government is abrogating its responsibility to ensure young people have the right to engage in formal democratic processes. Young people should have the right to influence decisions that directly affect their future. This chapter aims to explore whether a critical theatre can develop young people’s political agency within the existing framework of the Youth Parliament scheme.

The exploration of the question centres around my experience of a Legislative Theatre project with young people, delivered by myself and the Youth Theatre Director at Collective Encounters, Ben Mellor. The project was a collaboration between Collective Encounters, Youth Focus NW and Youth Parliament. The aim of the collaboration was to utilise Legislative Theatre to enhance the Make Your Mark scheme, a youth democracy initiative that enables young people to vote on issues to be discussed by Members of the Youth Parliament. The project intended to utilise this initiative to create a space where young people could influence a decision-making process with MPs present.

The project took place throughout the summer and autumn of 2016 and was delivered in three sections; 1. Legislative Theatre taster workshops for youth councils and youth theatres throughout the North West. Twelve workshops took place reaching 209 young people. 2. Creation of a Legislative Theatre performance with young people. Two groups totalling 15 young people created performances focusing on two separate issues on the Make Your Mark ballot. The issues covered were body image and mental health. Ben Mellor managed and directed the performance based on mental health. I facilitated and directed the body image performance, which will be the focus of this section. 3. Performance at the regional meeting of Youth Parliament at Lancashire County Hall to an audience of 126 people, predominantly made up of young people and youth workers. Focus group interviews were conducted with participants before, during and after the process.

The project was identified when I was working as the Youth Theatre Director at Collective Encounters (2013-2016). Youth Theatre participants expressed the desire to create a performance that aimed to engage with MPs. This derived from creating performances (*Dog*

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Eat Dog (2014); The Centre (2015)) for audiences that usually consisted of friends, families or members of the community. The young people were aware of ‘preaching to the converted’ or having their voice heard by those with limited political capital. These young people’s experiences provoked a question; to what extent would MPs engage with young people if invited to a youth theatre performance? This question was related to wider research regarding the lack of mutual engagement between young people and elected members of parliament (Furlong, 2013; Sloam, 2007; O’Toole, Marsh and Jones, 2007).

The questioning led to working with the following partners;

Collective Encounters: a theatre for social change organisation based in Liverpool who ‘use theatre to engage those on the margins of society, telling untold stories and tackling the local, national and international concerns of our time’ (Collective Encounters, 2016).

Youth Focus NW: a youth advocacy organisation based in St Helens that works with young people throughout the North West. Their mission is to ‘improve the lives of young people by working with them to enable each individual to reach their full potential and become active citizens’ (Youth Focus NW, 2016). Youth Focus NW works in collaboration with local council’s children’s services throughout the North West to deliver UK Youth Parliament schemes.

Make Your Mark: ‘the biggest annual referendum of teenagers in the UK’, is an opportunity for all young people to vote on a range of issues that they think MYP’s should campaign for. The process happens in three stages on an annual basis; MYP’s vote on a range of issues to decide the ten Make Your Mark issues. The ten issues are put to young people from all over the UK who vote for their top five issues. The results of the ballot are debated by MYP’s in the House of Commons and a decision is made to campaign on two issues via the youth select committee and lobbying campaigns. For 2016, 978,216 ballots were cast nationally and the North West had the largest share of votes with 194,091 votes. The process is managed by the British Youth Council (British Youth Council, 2016; Youth Parliament, 2016).

It was intended for the performance to take place within the second stage of the Make Your Mark process, which would enable the young people to debate two of the ten issues prior to casting their vote. However, due to a logistical error by the British Youth Council (BYC) and the date provided to Youth Focus NW, the young people had already cast their votes prior to

viewing the performances, therefore rendering them futile in their primary aim. The creative teams were made aware of this a week prior to performance day. In addition to this, no MPs or councillors attended the performance. This presented an example of applied theatre practice's vulnerability to the influence of social, cultural and political 'landscapes' when intending to contribute to 'wellbeing and social change' (Prentki and Preston, 2009:14). The understanding of these contexts and their influence on the efficacy of the performance is of significant interest. The problematic engagement with formal participatory structures such as Make Your Mark hindered attempts to form a critical practice. The project illustrated the vulnerability and precarious nature of theatre's relationship with formal youth civic engagement.

Legislative Theatre with No Legislators: The Logistics of Social Change

Boal (1998:16) describes Legislative Theatre as follows:

We do not accept that the elector should be a mere spectator to the actions of the parliamentarian, even when these actions are right: we want the electors to give their opinions, to discuss the issues, to put counter-arguments, we want them to share responsibility for what their parliamentarian does. Our mandate's project is to bring theatre back in to the centre of political action – the centre of decisions – by making theatre as politics rather than merely making political theatre.

When determining which performance form to employ, that would actively engage young people with MPs, the logical decision was Legislative Theatre due to its 'mandate'. Boal argues that the process of Legislative Theatre is where the 'citizen is transformed into legislator' (1998:15). This was the sole reason for using Legislative Theatre within this project; to realise a theatrical space where young people could enter in to dialogue with MPs and engage in a formal political structure. Ideally, the aims of Legislative Theatre fortified the aims and structure of the Make Your Mark scheme.

Boal's claim to bring theatre back in to 'the centre of decisions' is complex when observed in relation to young people. Young people do not have the right to vote in the UK – they are not regarded as 'electors' (Boal, 1998:16). They could not therefore be placed 'back' in to the centre of decisions. Kershaw (2001:219) argues that Boal's claim of transforming citizens into legislators differs substantially from his practical accounts and likens Boal's assertion to 'proclaiming that a net-maker is a fisherman even though he never goes to sea'. He observes that the closest citizens got to being 'legislators' in Boal's own practice was 'to suggest...that some laws might be more welcome than others'. Kershaw's observation likens Boal's work to

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a process of public consultation on a predetermined agenda, as opposed to direct influence on legislation. I argue that the criticisms of a predetermined agenda are similar to those I experienced with the Youth Parliament scheme.

I will utilise two performance anecdotes to discuss these issues. The performance was devised in an episodic manner with three stories presented to the audience regarding issues of body image. The audience at the Make Your Mark event were then given the opportunity to decide on a story which they wished to forum. The audience chose to discuss Leanne's story with its subtitle – *'edit me'*. Leanne's story focused on a young woman's ambitions to be a model and the manipulation of her image by modelling agencies and fashion outlets. As Leanne arrives for a casting, the photographer orders her to stand in a range of positions and stances that Leanne needs correcting on. *Let's start with one hand on your hip please*, Leanne follows accordingly. The photographer orders *A bit sharper*. The process repeats itself until the photographer innocently remarks *I am just going to see what I can do with the photos*. Leanne, led by her insecurity, enters the office and sees the photographer working over a manipulated image of herself where her thighs, stomach and face are all being pulled and pushed in to new directions. She confronts the photographer *that's wrong, you can't do that, it's false advertising!* The photographer simply responds *you either get used to it or there is the door!* Leanne responds *just...edit the photos*. Her inability to have any effect over the representation of her own body leaves her feeling frustrated and hopeless. The scene arose from discussions regarding legislation on mis-representation of models and how this false advertising can have detrimental effects on young people's self-esteem and mental health.

Can we come to a compromise? The young female audience member opened the forum session with this question to the photographer. The photographer responded that if she does not manipulate the images, she will lose her job. The forum appeared to be terminated, the antagonist's use of her own vulnerability presented a considerable challenge to the audience member's approach. However, after a short hesitation the audience member returned with *as long as you don't do it in a disrespectful way, that's fine*. The forum opened again and the audience member began a conversation based on compromise, where she will be ethically represented in the photograph and the photographer will not be at risk of losing her job. The novice antagonist, who was only introduced to the forum process over the duration of the project, is stumped and agreed. The audience cheered, the solution offered was unanimously welcomed and the foruming of Leanne's story came to an end.

There was a short period of time available following the forum, during which several audience members showed the desire to discuss Abby's story. The story explores the experiences of a young girl who has undiagnosed bulimia. The effects of the condition are recognised by a member of staff at school and a meeting is held with Abby, her father and the teacher. Similar to the forum process with Leanne's story, there were two interventions, the second built upon the first and a consensus was reached. The limited time slot allotted to forum the work and the tendency for the audience to easily develop consensus limited the efficacy of the performance. The pressure of time on the forum was clearly evidenced as I was forced to rapidly close the performance and thank the organisers. 60 minutes was allocated for two forum performances.

The allotted time for the forum work raises questions regarding the logistics of developing a critical dialogue, as well as the organisers' understanding of the practice. There is no clear rule for forum work that declares a specific time should be allocated to enable dialogue but the examples above show that one hour is not sufficient for two pieces of forum theatre to be meaningfully and critically interrogated. The process of forum theatre is 'continuous' with no 'single intervention being judged ideal' (Babbage, 2004:69). In the case of the performances discussed, I envisaged my role as the joker being to question and challenge any consensus that was quickly agreed upon by the audience. The limited time meant that the problematisation or development of interventions was impossible. The multitude of ideas expected in a forum process was absent whilst the acceptance of a single intervention became the norm. This was due to the limited time available for problematisation of interventions from the audience.

The performances were positioned between a number of other activities scheduled as part of the regional meeting of Youth Parliament at Lancashire County Hall. My input was limited in the planning of the day as the performances were perceived as separate from the other activities planned by the youth service. This led to all organisation being undertaken by Youth Focus North West and Lancashire Youth Services who were hosting the event. The allocation of one hour for two performances demonstrates the lack of knowledge and understanding from the youth agency partners regarding the structure and form of forum theatre. The logistical issue and its effect upon the performances demonstrated to me that assumptions shouldn't be made regarding a partner organisation's understanding of theatre form and its requirements. In retrospect, me and Collective Encounters should have aimed to be more involved in such matters as logistics rather than solely focusing on the intervention itself.

The idea of Legislative Theatre is for such an intervention to inform the piece of legislation being discussed. The suggestion of regulation regarding manipulation of images was popular during the forum and seemed a realistic proposal for legislation. However, the absence of MPs and the organisational setup of the Make Your Mark scheme were explicit challenges to the 'legislative' part of the process. The performance's inability to engage with any form of legislative output meant that it ceased to be Legislative Theatre. Although the use of forum theatre without its legislative aspect can have multiple benefits, there are also a range of issues and dilemmas.

My main concern with the use of forum theatre is how it can potentially reinforce individualist notions of activism and be a 'largely personal experience'. (Babbage, 2004:64) Whilst I have no issue with and support the empowerment of young people via artistic and theatrical processes, the aim of this project was to go beyond the personal and engage with the political. The notion of self-empowerment aligns with individualist approaches to citizenship which are advocated by youth agencies such as the BYC. With this in mind the forum theatre and its unintended outcome of individual development was sufficient to satisfy the organisation. However, my aim had been to develop a theatre piece that understood the protagonist's 'social and material objective reality' as a means to develop social empowerment (Davis and O'Sullivan, 2000:293). The incompetence of the national organising body, the BYC, led to the development of an individualised 'self-empowerment' narrative. The absence of MPs and the restricted timings of the performance enabled the individual narrative to dominate. This was a process that was welcomed by the BYC but caused a range of challenges for the development of critical engagement.

'False Generosity' in Youth Engagement

Vicky (2016), who was a new member of the group said:

...we have to look at the future as something that is not concrete and is not already formed so there is a chance for us to change it. It is not already fixed. You need to think about what you can do individually, find other people and mould that future for yourself rather than accept what is already there for you.

Vicky's statement reflected the feelings of hope, optimism and empowerment shared by the group at the end of the five-day rehearsal period. These feelings were represented in the group interviews undertaken during the devising and rehearsal process. This was a unique mix of

young people whose primary motivation for participating in the project was either theatrical or political, using theatre to engage their political interests or employing their politics to inform a theatrical process.

Five days were scheduled during the summer of 2016 to decide on one of the ten Make Your Mark issues, deliver forum theatre skills and create a 'rough' performance. This intensive process was defined by the requirement of a Legislative Theatre performance in October. This also met the traditional conventions of youth theatre practice with its focus on a performance outcome. The nature of the project contradicts Thompson's assertion that 'applied theatre should concentrate on the mechanics of the process' (2003:xxi). While I agree with Thompson that process is of major importance within applied theatre practice, to separate process and product in such a way negates the inseparable relationship between the two as well as the political efficacy that performance can have. The idea of a performance to MPs had stimulated an ethos of commitment as the young people were aware of the performance's potential importance. As Sam (2016) said, 'If they don't do nothing it will show to us and other youth theatres that they don't care'.

The positive and empowering sense of engagement was also recognised by many of the young people who believed that their expectations were 'exceeded in terms of the quality of work that we produced'. Vicky (2016) said, 'I expected to create something that could hopefully promote positive change and I think that is what we have done'. The responses during the process exemplified Neelands' (2007:316) description of applied theatre as 'offering the chance to participate artistically and socially in the practice of freedom'. This was also a process that represented an example of 'good' youth theatre practice in that it aimed to support 'social, personal and creative development' (Richardson, 2015:13). The positive and critical experiences in the rehearsal and devising process realised my aspirations for the practice.

These positive feelings and experiences could not transition from process in to product. The desired impact and parameters of the project did not solely rely on the young people's participation but also on participation by the MPs. Process and product were interdependent. A positive and critically engaging theatrical process for 12 young people did not guarantee the attendance of MPs and councillors at the final performance. As no MPs attended the performance, a substantial break was established between process/intention and product/outcome. The reason for the MPs absence was unclear as a majority of invitees did not

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respond. However, those who did respond stated they had prior arrangements for other events. The artistic and social participation in the practice of freedom during the process became the denial of a role in the practice of formal politics when it came to the performance.

Freire (1996:26) identifies the idea of false generosity as a tactic adopted by oppressors to dehumanise the oppressed:

Any attempt to 'soften' the power of the oppressor in deference to the weakness of the oppressed almost always manifests itself in the form of false generosity; indeed the attempt never goes beyond this. In order to have the continued opportunity to express their 'generosity', the oppressors must perpetuate injustice as well.

I argue that the control and restricted agency of young people has led to the development of subtle and discursive forms of oppression. The development of schemes such as Youth Parliament, in my experience, illustrate the notion of false generosity that Freire discusses. As the lead researcher and liaison with the partner organisations, there were no examples of false generosity whilst working with colleagues from various youth services across the North West. This was a positive and engaging experience for the research. The youth workers wanted to support the development of critical dialogue between young people and MPs, a joint ambition between theatre practitioner and local agencies.

However, in our positions as theatre makers and youth workers, we had little influence on the overarching national structure that the BYC develop and distribute. An example of this was when the date was changed. I was contacted by Youth Focus North West who understood the significance of the date in relation to the vote and the performance. A long conversation was held and we agreed that it would be ethically wrong on the young people for their performance to be cancelled, but there was also acknowledgement that the activity would be pointless. In retrospect, we were co-opted in a mechanism of false generosity.

The BYC has a 'particular position in the political system', as the co-ordination of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Youth Affairs enables a close relationship with MPs and youth policy, but at the same time they have no formal decision-making powers (Rainsford, 2017:795). It could be argued that the BYC act as 'extension agents' of the oppressive culture manifested by government paternalism towards young people and ideas of critical citizenship. By appearing to enable young people to have a voice, they are manipulated into believing they are acting as political agents. As Freire (2013:101) argues 'manipulation inculcates into the invaded the

illusion of acting or their acting within the action of the manipulators'. It was at the point of performance that we can see the project shift from engagement with critical educational ideals to manipulation.

Freire extends his ideas on false generosity by discussing what he calls antidialogical action. There is an attention to detail regarding the subtleties of control that the oppressor can adopt when faced with potential forms of resistance from the oppressed. Freire (1996:129) argues:

When the oppressed are almost completely submerged in reality, it is unnecessary to manipulate them. In the antidialogical theory of action, manipulation is the response of the oppressor to the new concrete conditions of the historical process. Through manipulation, the dominant elites can lead the people into an unauthentic type of 'organisation', and can thus avoid the threatening alternative: the true organisation of the emerged and emerging people.

The control of national agendas over local practice was an example of the 'unauthentic' organisation Freire discusses. It was also a clear example of how practice can become isolated and almost self-indulgent within the workshop space. Although there is a tendency to place the onus on organisations such as the BYC in this process, I am also conscious of my own role. I could have been more cautious as to the intentions of dominant structures and how these can be radically different to the context of the workshop space. I am aware that my recognition of such structures came too late within the project. I found that the multitude of responsibilities I had to balance and co-ordinate within the project were demanding and predominantly based in action as opposed to reflection. It is my learning from this project that when balancing agendas whilst aiming to create a critical theatre practice, the 'cultural remnants of the oppressor society' will endeavour to disrupt and occupy authentic acts of political agency (Freire, 1996:140).

A Starting Point for Civic Engagement

Although I have been critical of the process as a whole and the challenges it presented to the development of a critical theatre, I would not like to undermine the process' efficacy entirely. Babbage (2004:30) argues that the unique context of Boal himself being a council member in Rio de Janeiro (1992-1996) enabled a lot of the Legislative Theatre experiments to gain direct access to legislators. However, in other projects where the access to decision makers is not definite, as demonstrated by my project, Legislative Theatre can act as the 'production of

purely symbolic laws'. She further contends that 'symbolic authority should not be so quickly dismissed' because:

If Legislative Theatre changes the way participants see their society and their own role within it, and then – crucially – begin to *act* from that changed position, then symbolic power might yet have real consequences.
(Babbage, 2004:30)

From post-performance questionnaires, a majority of the audience said that they enjoyed the performance very much (80%) and thought that the subjects were well handled (82.86%). Members of the audience also made comments such as 'It gave me different ideas of how to manage things', 'I know about these issues - but it made it real for me' and 'I felt more involved in the issues - made me think more about it'. In response to the question *Tell us one thing about the performance/s that surprised you*, an audience member cited the use of forum theatre:

The ability to improvise/adjust the scene according to audience suggestions. Thank you very much! You gave me a really deep appreciation of each issue you covered, and I am extremely grateful for that. (Audience Questionnaire, 2016).

Within the paradigm of the Make Your Mark scheme, the 'consequences' were minimal as neither 'Body Image' or 'Mental Health' reached the final ballot. The project failed to create 'real consequences' in the paradigm of Youth Parliament. However, the impact outside of the Youth Parliament paradigm was evident and theatre as a possible route to the conscientisation of young people was apparent

From the responses provided by the young people, it is evident that the project had an *effect* and offered an opportunity to enhance critical citizenship. Instead of feeling disheartened, the project led to ideas and provocations of self-determination. The use of theatre was pivotal to this process taking place, as forum theatre presents an alternative and practical method to debate and discuss issues; 'because it was a play and drama, it wasn't just speaking about an issue it was actually acting and showing... so it could widen people's imaginations.' (Sebastian, 2016). These elements of the performance enabled a space where participants and audience members made suggestions and discussed 'plans for change' (Boal, 2008:98).

It was at this point that I needed to reflect upon whether the ambition of employing theatre as a medium of change within the Youth Parliament context was unrealistic. The evidence from the young people, participants and audience, proves that theatre can act as an opportunity for young people to critically engage with social and political issues. Whilst individual forms of

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critical engagement can lead to wider social change is unclear, I do not believe that the 'individual' should be excluded from the process of social change.

In retrospect, the aims of the project were over-ambitious and necessitated two separate projects. The first project would be based purely on the process of critical development for the young people involved. This may allow the time and space for an 'internal revolution' to form, to develop aspiration for social action as the work of Jana Sanskriti advocates (Ganguly, 2010:142). Such a process would not necessitate a performance but could be solely based on the exploration of political, historical and social contradictions. This also differs from the individualist forms of self-empowerment that I critiqued earlier. The second project would be the action for the 'external' revolution, the identification of the desired social action and the adoption of performance to fulfil said action.

The attempt to develop both critical consciousness and political action within one project was a difficulty. For example, although the project acted as an alternative way to discuss political issues and had demonstrable effects on the civic development of individuals, the possibilities for action were limited due to the uncritical youth citizenship frameworks. To reiterate Freire's argument (2014:24):

A more critical understanding of the situation of oppression does not yet liberate the oppressed. But the revelation is a step in the right direction.

I argue that although the practice appeared to be making a 'step in the right direction', it was a failure in terms of direct political action. If I wish to develop a practice that aims for political action, but ends up only supporting the development of 'critical understanding', should I and the practice I advocate be content that we have made a 'step in the right direction'?

Conclusion

ME: What does politics mean to you? Any changing thoughts about politics?

Sarah: My original thought was that it is bullshit, nobody takes people into consideration, even though change is to help people.

ME: And you still believe that?

Sarah: Yes.
(Sarah, 2016)

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The quote shows that the project did not reach its intended aims of engaging young people in a political process. Sarah said that the project did not lead to her altering her views on politics. I do not believe that the young people involved in the Legislative Theatre project are responsible for this disengagement. The problematic working relationship with organisations such as Youth Focus NW that formed the foundations of this project should be held accountable for the practice's failure. Despite initial assurance to the contrary, I was positioned as a 'client' as opposed to a partner by the youth service and Youth Focus NW. My practice was perceived as a service that could be momentarily installed to satisfy the requirements and targets of the North West youth service provision rather than as embedded contribution to artistic or political agency for young people.

I want to look at why theatre practitioners working for large scale organisations often end up feeling helpless or used, regardless of shared social and political aims. Thompspon's move to studying affective practices (see Thompspon, 2009) came about as a result of his long history of working with large state institutions such as prisons and their focus on creating 'effect' and adhering to social policy. The work with such organisations did not only result in 'drying out the artistic content of the work' (Thompson, 2000:102), but also limited the practitioner's political agency. The practitioner became a vehicle for achieving the aims and 'impact' agendas of the larger organisation. Documented experiences such as Thompspon's and other debates on effect and impact led by Etherton and Prentki (2006) establish that the practitioner can easily become subservient to the demands of the organisations and institutions they 'partner' with. Unfortunately, the Legislative Theatre project delivered by me and Collective Encounters was another instance of this unfair and imbalanced relationship that negatively impacted not only on me and the young people I worked with but on the entire espoused agenda of youth political empowerment.

This conclusion is mainly a chronology of issues and experiences that took place which proved that my practice was regarded as the work of a 'client'. The starting point for this discussion is the differentiation between the rhetoric of partnership and the reality of being a client. The initial communication between myself and Youth Focus NW in March 2015 utilised terms such as 'joint working' and enthusiastic statements such as 'we are fully behind the partnership' (Youth Focus NW, 2015). The rhetoric was welcomed and reciprocated by me and the positive tone led me to believe we could achieve meaningful partnership. The notion of fair partnership is something I aspire to and aim to achieve, and which I am comfortable in claiming that my

colleagues within the applied theatre sector also aspire to. However, the outcome of the project in October 2016 devalued notions of partnership, as the theatre makers found ourselves operating as mere components within the wider youth service mechanism.

As the equipment was packed away on the 8th October 2016, a range of youth workers complimented me on how the performance engaged the young people and how it would be a good idea to use theatre for future youth parliament work. The form of engagement the performance offered was evidently different from youth service provision. It was an annoyance that such recognition arrived so late in the process. The short and ephemeral product was celebrated whilst there was no interest in the complexities that the process entailed. I do not deny that there was enjoyment and engagement from the audience and the young performers. The young people who participated in this process demonstrated a willingness and commitment to the ideals of the practice and their own critical engagement. However, our efforts did not remedy the flawed foundations of the relationship between me and the youth service providers. There was no partnership and no effect. My aim of developing a meaningful partnership with youth agencies laid bare the reality of the client relationship which was proven to be unable to provide artistic and political engagement for young people.

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