

# Reflecting on Partnerships between Higher Education and Professional Theatre Practices

*Rosie Garton, 2015*

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## The event

The *Higher Education and Professional Theatre* conference was a one-day event held at Curve, Leicester on September 10th 2015, hosted by De Montfort University and Curve Theatre with support from Arts Council England, UK Theatre, and the Independent Theatre Council.

The aim of the conference was to explore the growing number of developing relationships between professional theatres, arts venues and performance companies and higher education institutions in Britain, and facilitate discussions around models of these working partnerships. The day brought together an array of academics, theatre practitioners, programmers, policy makers and students and opened a dialogue that debated its way through the delicate negotiations of creating successful working partnerships between the professional arts world and Higher Education institutions.

## Conference Response

### **'This has been a long over-due conference'**

*Charlotte Jones – Independent Theatre Council*

At a time when the validity of courses in the arts is being questioned and when funding for arts practices is being reduced, it is of mutual benefit for HE institutions and Theatre organisations to partner together, pooling resources and knowledge, and enabling survival of the arts through supporting emerging professionals. With one of the key HE agendas being 'Employability', students need support in developing an awareness of the possibilities of paid work within the arts sector, and in identifying the fundamental skills required to attain these positions. In her report *The Cultural Knowledge Ecology* (2012), Sarah Fisher writes that 'many HEI's arts departments have 'pathway' programmes but more could be done on the ground to link these to programmes delivered by cultural institutions'. Three years on, this conference reveals this is in fact happening: partnerships between HEI's and professional theatres are being developed and sustainable models of working together are being forged. Effective collaborations create the exciting potential for a

knowledge exchange across the academy and arts in general, opening doors to new ways of teaching and learning for the teachers, students and theatre workers, and nurturing students as emerging professionals. The Higher Education and Professional Theatre conference initiated a timely dialogue around effective models of collaboration, raising questions, concerns, and hopes for the future. The conference opened with a keynote from Dr Farah Karim-Cooper, Head of Higher Education and Research at Shakespeare's Globe. She suggested that in order to develop successful collaborative ventures, we first should question 'why HE and Professional Theatre want to collaborate? What do both parties stand to gain? What current models are there? Will these models be sustainable?'

I write this conference response as both an academic and a theatre-maker. Like some of the conference speakers, I stand on the borders of academic and artistic languages, methods and motivations. With one foot in immediacy and one foot in the HR systems. With one hand toying with risk and the other typing risk assessments. Part struggling through creativity in the isolated rehearsal room and part surrounded by the inspiring energy of emerging professionals. My reactions to the debates are spurred by identification with these core areas of debate:

- Compatibility
- Communication
- Clarity of purpose

### **Compatibility: Structures and scale**

Arriving from the perspective of a small-scale theatre company, I was particularly drawn towards a recurring theme of size. The similarities between the administrative and financial structures of HEI's and large-scale theatres/organisations create an initial mutual understanding on which to build the collaborative framework. Smaller-scale organisations, however, often with limited or non-existent HR departments and without substantial regular funding, work to very different schedules and procedures to HEI's, which calls for a new approach to the collaborative arrangement. In 2012 Sarah Fisher 'found little evidence of formalised partnerships between small arts organisations and HEIs'. The conference demonstrated that these partnerships are in play, but that the structures of these relationships are not formalised and documented in the way that the relationships with large-scale organisations are. It is a worry that perhaps the paucity of the recordings of these relationships reveals a lower grading of 'value' in working with small-scale organisations.

Dan Barnard spoke from his dual perspective as artistic director of fanSHEN theatre company and as a university lecturer. He suggested that working with different scales of partners offers varying opportunities, and that these differences should be recognised but also considered of equal value. The size of these organisations

means they can work with an immediacy that allows for reactionary and organic responses. Talking us through three examples of student placements within the company, he said 'small companies can be very flexible and create a very bespoke and tailored experience and work towards supporting specific needs of individuals'. He went on to discuss the ways in which placements are often given a role in small companies that are important to the development of the organisation, tasks that impact on the work and show recognition of students' individual skills and abilities, allowing them to hone a specific craft and feel embedded in their working environment.

From the point of view of a small-scale venue, Michaela Butter (Director of Attenborough Arts Centre, University of Leicester) also highlighted how the size of an organisation allows for a different kind of intimate relationship with students. She referred not only to the actual size of the performance space providing emerging practitioners opportunities to take risks in a safe and supportive environment, but that additionally the scale enables direct relationships between students, artists, and the Director/Programmer. To illustrate this, she outlined her relationship with students from De Montfort University, many of whom have presented graduate performance work at AAC in different stages of development and taken part in the AAC supported performance festivals such as Hatch. Michaela focused on 'Tetrad', a collective of DMU graduates who had been regular attendees at the venue. The immediacy of the relationships between the group and the venue staff led to AAC fostering the company's regular performance platform for emerging practitioners. This collaborative relationship between a small scale venue and an HEI is perhaps less defined than the selected case studies, but evidently is of value and appears to work well alongside the partnership between DMU and Curve in terms of the contrast in scale offering students different ways of working in professional theatre environments.

In her end-note, Charlotte Jones worried about the vulnerability of smaller organisations, and warned us to consider re-thinking collaborative models between these and HEI's, dealing directly with possible areas of inequality. Referencing student placements, she asked on behalf of these project-funded organisations 'if students are paying for this, who is paying us?' She firmly reminded us that these small companies do not come with a 'dowry', and if the value of these partnerships is to be recognised, a different financial model from the one used with the larger scale organisations should be agreed.

## **Communication: Terminology and understanding**

Catherine Alexander is Associate Director of performance company Complicite and Course Leader at the Central School of Speech and Drama. Alongside Dan Barnard,

she provided insights from both a small-scale professional theatre and an academic institution. She highlighted the need for early clarification of expectations and desires within HE/Theatre collaborations, including issues of copyright, with good communication being the key to successful relationships. As both an artist and an academic, she is able to broker a distinct difference in the terminologies used by the arts and educational establishments, but realises the problems these differences can cause. She worried about a 'capitalist language that seems to have permeated Higher Education' and stated that she didn't really know what the term 'Employability' meant. Complicite often hire the 'un-employable – the mavericks', she told us, and acknowledged that those working in devised theatre would never be profit makers, so statistics about the number of students employed after their course ends create a 'perceived notion of success that looms too large'.

'Employability' is high on the HE agenda, and the term was returned to throughout the conference. It made me wonder how, in the age of zero hour contracts and reduced arts funding – meaning short contract positions - we can measure 'employability' in the arts? Sarah Fisher's idea of 'employment status' is, perhaps, a move towards finding a shared language between academia and the arts. She certainly recognises that there is a nuance beyond the prospectus-level language of 'employment', and sees great potential in the ways in which HE/professional collaborations can 'improve employment status' through jointly sponsored placements.

### **Clarity: Agreements and equalities**

Possibly in an attempt to combat a misunderstanding of languages across the borders of the academy and the practising arts, the day revealed connections through terminologies that are not exclusive to either world. Metaphors were used as illustrations of good and bad practice and it was striking that these metaphors had a recurring theme of marriage and prostitution. The descriptions of these partnerships often used words and phrases such as: dowry, curb-crawling, promiscuity, brothel, pre-nuptial agreements, prostitution, leaving money on the dresser.

This interesting imagery suggested a desire to clarify the structure of a partnership agreement. It demonstrated a concern for nurturing committed relationships, and creating a contract of equality that allows for sensitivity with recognition that one party could be left abandoned or hurt. Many presenters referred to long-term relationships requiring dedication from both sides to make the partnerships sustainable and, as Jessica Bowles reminded us, they should also be 'enjoyable'. Jacqui O'Hanlon and Taryn Storey, of the Royal Shakespeare Company, promoted the importance of honesty and management of expectations in these collaborative

ventures and suggested that successful models often begin with 'pre-nuptial agreements'. These agreements would ideally map out each party's:

- skills/timescales/management frameworks/budgets
- aims and objectives
- responsibilities
- benefits

In the opening of the event Farah Karim-Cooper gave a warning to potential collaborators about adopting what she termed a 'quick-fix approach', a method that primarily serves to benefit only one of the parties for a short-term goal. She steered us away from a model that leaves one party as the 'service provider', with the finality of 'leaving your money on the dresser', rather than offering a knowledge exchange. She acknowledged scope for possible conflict and misunderstandings between the two different cultures of HE and professional theatre, and outlined the challenges in bringing together 'two different bodies of understanding'. She asked us to consider the balance of the relationships: that HEI's don't use theatres solely as providers, and that theatres find a way to allow access to their practices without disruption to their core activity. She called for a true 'transfer of skills, knowledge and working practices'. Jessica Bowles confirmed the benefit of a knowledge exchange that pulls us out of 'a linear product-based approach that both parties are put in – towards a more rewarding relationship where impact can be measured in artistic/social/well-being terms as much as in financial terms'.

## Key recommendations

Something that struck me, but seemed unspoken, was the question of who the 'people' are who instigate and manage these relationships. Often large-scale theatre venues have a dedicated 'Outreach' role to broker and maintain projects that cross borders beyond the theatre space. Smaller organisations, though less likely to have that dedicated personnel, manage it within their multi-role teams. HEI's often have an Outreach team, although this is generally for the University as a whole, rather than being department-specific. The partnerships discussed in the conference appeared to be initiated by teaching staff, and I wonder, with steadily increasing teaching hours and research demands, how this can be maintained. If Drama departments want to fully engage with these initiatives, there is a demand for either:

- a member of teaching staff being given allocated hours to fulfill this role  
*or*
- a development of a post that specifically manages/creates these partnerships

In terms of the progression of sustainable and beneficial collaborations between HE and professional theatre, it is important that open discussions continue. As Charlotte Jones of the Independent Theatre Council put it, 'this has been a long over-due conference' which opens up possibilities for future engagements and evolving, timely dialogue which might involve the following:

- DMU/Curve host a further event developed from key questions that arose during the conference. This may become a regular platform, which creates a hub for an evolving dialogue to an increased number of participants
- DMU/Curve write an issue in a relevant journal opening the topic for a wider debate, and raising awareness of past and future events
- The DMU student response be used to consider a wider engagement with students who have taken part in collaborative practices
- The mix of artists/academics attending such conferences be considered
- Consideration of how the role of 'liaison person' could be identified and supported at universities

## Case Studies

These case studies have been selected to illustrate different collaborative models between Higher Educational departments and professional theatre practices. Drawing from a triptych of approaches, the collated material aims to highlight the diverse possibilities that successful partnerships can achieve and the significant mutual impact for all parties involved.

Notes have been taken from the presentations at the Higher Education and Professional theatre Conference, the delegate websites, and email correspondence.

### Case Study 1

*The University of Nottingham and New Perspectives Theatre Company:  
Collaborating for Employability*

#### Collaborating speakers

Sally Anne Tye, *Executive Director of New Perspectives*

Jo Robinson, *Associate Professor in Drama and Performance at the University of Nottingham*

#### Contacts

Sally: [sally@newperspectives.co.uk](mailto:sally@newperspectives.co.uk)

Jo: [jo.robinson@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:jo.robinson@nottingham.ac.uk)

#### Web links

New Perspectives [www.newperspectives.co.uk](http://www.newperspectives.co.uk)

University of Nottingham School of English

[www.nottingham.ac.uk/english/index.aspx](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/english/index.aspx)

Hidden Collections <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/graduateschool/resources/hidden-collections/index.aspx>

Student response to a New Perspectives work placement

<https://nottingham.ac.uk/english/teachinglearning/employability/emily-heaton.aspx>

*“Relationships are key... lots of coffee... it’s about talking, talking and talking”*

## Jo Robinson

### The collaborators

New Perspectives is a small-scale rural touring theatre company based in Nottingham. It has been active for forty years and is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation.

The School of English at the University of Nottingham hosts a combination of taught English disciplines, including Anglo-Saxon literature, English language, drama and performance, and creative writing.

### The frame of this collaboration:

The form of this collaborative relationship takes on many different shapes, according to arising schemes, possibilities and desires for each partner. The four primary collaborations discussed at the conference were:

Talks/Presentations – a continuing series of talks for the undergraduate English and Drama students by the Associate Directors of New Perspectives that explore various elements of their professional practices from the making process to the management of touring.

Learning Placements – students apply for a placement with New Perspectives through a formal application procedure in response to a job and person specifications.

Postgraduate Research Skills Training – AHRC Digital Transformations funded project that offered workshops and industry projects for doctoral students to gain skills in project management, communications, networking, public engagement, and the use of new methodologies.

Collaborative Doctoral Award – AHRC funded PhD bursary exploring the ‘Re-Imaging of the Rural Touring Framework’, using the work of New Perspectives as a case study.

### Shared aims and outcomes

**The Work Related Learning Placements** offer experience of real world work placements and focus on developing employability skills for the students. From a discussion with the university, New Perspectives formulate a project proposal

considering their specific needs at the time and what they can offer in terms of learning possibilities. This is shaped into a job and person specifications which the students then respond to in a professional application. This procedure acts as a development of employability skills for the students (who also receive feedback on their applications and interviews) and as a guideline of expectations and deliverables for New Perspectives, the students involved and the University. The successful candidate receives a wide range of training in a professional setting and through a careful selection process, New Perspectives gains a strong trainee to support particular areas of the company's organisational development.

**Hidden Collections: The Research Skills Training** scheme provided postgraduate students from the University of Nottingham with the opportunity to develop a wide range of transferable and specific skills in relation to digital archiving, including new archiving methodologies, project management, public engagement and communication. At a timely collision with the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of New Perspectives, the Company benefited from the their archive of forty years work being 'brought alive', as Sally Tye put it, making a continued legacy for the company.

The **AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award**, made to Tilly Branson, allowed New Perspectives to work closely with a high-quality researcher, reflecting on its practices within the rural tour whilst enabling Tilly to further her independent research interests.

### Risks, challenges and key issues

Jo and Sally highlighted issues of scale as one of their key areas of concern. The pair are acutely aware of the imbalance between a small-scale theatre company with four members of full-time staff and a large institution that currently has over three hundred students per year group enrolled on the English course, with an additional one hundred MA and fifty PhD students - with the administrative structures to match.

There is a clear sensitivity from each party to the possibilities of what each side of this partnership can manage and support in terms of capacity, timescales and finances, within the individual projects. Jo suggested that New Perspectives were 'Taking a risk by letting us into their organisation', and that continued discussions were the only way to ensure the success of these projects and to open up future possibilities. She insisted that 'relationships are key' to such collaborative schemes and jokingly refers to having lots of coffee together as a method of establishing clear communication systems.

In this presentation, the pair negotiated a way through the possible difficulties in balancing the artistic process with an academic process. Sally argued that successful collaboration only arises when each party is able to stay truthful to their

individual business plans, areas of interests, aspirations and discover a meeting point rather than a compromise. She noted that New Perspectives feel under no obligation to take on regular placements unless they tie in with their current patterns of work. The company looked carefully at its artistic objectives, what it needed, could offer and could have the capacity to support, measuring carefully the benefits to themselves, the students and the university before entering into the project. It is then written up as a job specification and criteria are drawn up and proposed to the University. Sally also highlighted the need for the possibility for responding to possibilities that emerged during the initial stages of a collaboration. For example, she recalled that during one set of interviews for the placements the interviewees were found to be of such high calibre that the company offered two posts on projects instead of the projected one.

It is evident that the relationship developed between the partners encourages a flexibility and honesty that enables the on-going collaboration to flourish in different ways. Additionally, there has been a distinct mapping process beforehand that identifies expectations of the project through to its end, pre-empting problems that may arise. This map considered some essential questions:

- How does the proposal benefit all parties involved?
- What are the shared goals and outcomes?
- What happens to the project afterwards?
- Where does it go, where does it sit and who is responsible for it?

As Sally and Jo developed their discussion, it was clear they have created a trusting collaborative relationship. The cups of coffee allow for a more easy exchange that can't be found solely in an exchange of emails. They return to what they believe to be the essential ingredients of their collaborative provision.

#### Methods of collaboration

- Identifying projects that are of benefits to both parties
- Having mutual genuine interests
- Being able to say no
- Having shared goals and outcomes
- Clearly mapping out responsibilities
- Being respectful of the culture of both organisations
- Adapting flexibly in response changing needs/desires of the collaborators and the students involved
- Talking, talking and talking

## Case Study 2

*The University of Derby (College of Arts) and Derby Theatre:  
Engaging in Pedagogic and Artistic Practice in a 'Learning Theatre'.*

### **Collaborating speakers**

Caroline Barth, *Head of Learning, Derby Theatre*

Darren Daly, *Lecturer in Theatre Arts, University of Derby*

### **Contacts**

Caroline: C.Barth@derby.ac.uk

Darren: D.Daly@derby.ac.uk

### **Web links**

Derby Theatre 'Learning Theatre' <https://www.derbytheatre.co.uk/learning>

University of Derby, College of Arts <http://www.derby.ac.uk/arts/>

***“How can we ensure that we achieve both excellent pedagogical experiences and great arts?”***

**Darren Daly**

### **The collaborators**

Derby Theatre is an organisation that supports training, mentorship and artistic excellence, bringing together creative professionals and audiences to share stories and take artistic risks.

The College of Arts at the University of Derby offers a range of creative disciplines including visual art, design, media and performing arts subjects. There is a strong focus on collaboration and preparations for creating work within a professional practice.

### **The frame of this collaboration**

The College of Arts and Derby Theatre work in close partnership. The academic team is based in the theatre building and many lectures and practical sessions are

under the same roof. The partnership strives to find ways in which to share resources and experiences, resulting in many of the technical theatre students working on the main house productions. There is a sense of daily collaboration in the interactions between departments, staff and students, and some of these layers appear to work seamlessly without documentation or unnecessary structure, but within a kind of silent contract arising from corridor discussions. The proximity of the shared environment here seems an essential ingredient in discovering a regularity in the way the pedagogic and theatrical practices overlap.

This presentation focused on one particular strand of the partners' collaboration:

Company Aside – a professional practice placement scheme that sees students working alongside and shadowing theatre specialists in a range of areas. The jobs undertaken by the students include roles in stage management, directing and marketing during a professional Derby Theatre production.

### Shared aims and outcomes

The joint endeavour of Derby Theatre and the College of Arts is to exchange and influence their pedagogic and artistic practices and enable students to gain hands-on experience of theatre making and presenting approaches. The ultimate goal is to provide students with a contextual and technical understanding of professional theatre in order to support their venture into life beyond university and possible working futures in the arts.

### Risks, challenges and key issues

Discussing the Company Aside project, Darren and Caroline raised some key challenges in their collaboration process. These focused primarily on the difficulties of bringing together two different sectors with very different modes of operating. Caroline suggested problems in terms of the practice work of the theatre being integrated into an already established format of courses in the University; Darren mentioned students being placed on the outskirts of the project when it came to the final week of dress rehearsals/technical runs when professional practitioners focused on the 'professionalism' of the show.

What is evident is that there is a clear identification of where the difficulties lay in this scheme, but still a strong desire to discover more effective ways of making the collaboration work for all involved. There seems to be an underlying knowledge of the exciting possibilities this collaboration could create for the students and an earnest dedication to reach the potentials of the project. In order to obtain this goal, Derby Theatre and the College of Arts have created a 'moving on' document that draws out the arising issues from the Company Aside scheme and seeks to discover ways to support the aims and objectives for all involved.

Some of the key issues and solutions include:

**Partnership and course integration:**

- Students and academics on the theatre's programming group, ensuring that the theatre's offer is relevant and timely for degree modules
- Weekly meetings between theatre and academic staff allow better planning
- Academic staff structuring their modules with what is being programmed at the theatre thus developing a culture of student engagement with both the main house and studio programme
- The development of long-term, not one-off projects.

**Project Perceptions:**

- Clearer induction for all staff
- Reduced number of roles allowing staff to have a clearer focus
- Reflective process through the research and ongoing formative evaluation

**Quality of student support:**

- Full staff training programme to support understanding and to develop facilitation skills
- Creation of a new permanent full-time role that straddles the Learning and Technical Departments: Stage Manager and Learning Coordinator. This role allows for communication with the rehearsal room to maximise learning opportunities. The aim of the role is to ensure a positive and supported experience for the students. Freelance staff had previously taken on all stage management roles and this didn't allow for a fully supported learner journey.

**Methods of collaboration**

The nature of collaboration here is an interesting one. Although there is a shared ethos of enabling a learning experience within a professional theatre setting, it has evidently been a challenge to find means of merging pedagogic practice and artistic programming to support this vision whilst maintaining a sense of individual cultures. The development structure drawn up by Derby Theatre and the College of Arts is a coherent document that outlines the issues from the initial Company Aside scheme and provides solutions to pilot for the next round. Under the headings of 'Challenges' and 'Solutions', the plan highlights the individual aims, objectives and interests of each party, providing a meeting ground. It considers reflections by the students and the two organisations involved to achieve a clear and uncompromised vision of the collaboration. The document acts as a contract of agreement, which all parties can refer back to, and much like a job specification, provides a clear understanding of what exactly is being provided by whom.

## Case Study 3

*De Montfort University and Curve Theatre:*

*Collaborations: Inside and Outside the Curriculum*

### **Collaborating speakers**

Tracy Cruickshank, *Associate Head of the School of Arts and Head of Drama at De Montfort University.*

Suba Das, *Associate Director at Curve Theatre*

Nicola Daniels, *DMU Graduate and independent performance artist*

### **Contacts**

Tracy: T.Cruickshank@dmu.ac.uk

Suba: S.das@curvetheatre.co.uk

Nicola Daniels: nicky.daniels@hotmail.co.uk

### **Web links**

De Montfort University [www.dmu.ac.uk](http://www.dmu.ac.uk)

The Curve Theatre [www.curveonline.co.uk](http://www.curveonline.co.uk)

***"The opportunity to work in a professional theatre has become a vital part of the degree experience."***

## **Nicola Daniels**

### **The collaborators**

The School of Arts at De Montfort University offers courses in performance arts, visual arts and arts management at undergraduate and postgraduate level. The teaching encourages practical and theoretical explorations into contemporary practices. Curve Theatre is a major producing theatre, housed in an innovative new-build, with a mission to create 'exceptional and compelling experiences' which 'engage with a modern diverse audience.'

### **The frame of the collaboration**

The collaboration between the Curve and DMU involves a series of schemes that support student skills development. The most prominent of these is an annual co-production, but the partnership also includes exhibitions and internships, performers coming to classes to talk about acting and current roles, and staff from DMU going into Curve to deliver pre and post-show discussions.

### Internships

Curve hosts DMU students on modules designed to facilitate their engagement with creative industries; students are assigned to particular in-house productions and, with the support of tutors, create bespoke units of learning in areas including dramaturgy, assistant direction, workshop facilitation, and the production of educational resource packs.

### Co-Production

The co-production is an annual project that began in 2011; it is one of the largest public-facing collaborative schemes between DMU and Curve. Students go through a formal procedure of audition to gain a part in a play selected by an associate director at Curve, which they then rehearse and perform under direction within the professional theatre setting.

### Shared aims and outcomes

Through these collaborative projects, DMU and Curve aim to develop a working relationship of benefit to both partners, as well as to the students and wider audiences. In particular, some of the aims and outcomes listed by Tracy and Suba included:

- Developing links with emerging artists and potential future professionals
- Bringing new audiences into the building, in the form of family/friends of cast
- Providing an invaluable professional experience alongside, rather than in place of, studies
- The opportunity to work in professional theatre to develop skills and practices which will lead to future employment
- The opportunity for DMU to work with a large cast, which would otherwise be prohibitively expensive
- An opportunity to stage riskier/more provocative work
- Provides DMU with a unique selling point for the course, attracting students
- Makes the industry feel approachable for students

### Risks, challenges and key issues

There were, however, risks and challenges alongside the opportunities, and Tracy and Suba went on to outline the key issues. They both mentioned a worry about simply exploiting the students as unpaid performers, rather than as people taking part in a learning experience. There was a challenge for Curve in being able to accommodate the range of skills and experiences the students bring with them, and this limits who can realistically be involved. The practice is very distinct from the one that DMU operates, in that students who audition at Curve are not guaranteed a part in the production.

The most recent of the co-productions was Mark Ravenhill's play, *Mother Clap's Molly House*, and this choice posed a series of difficult questions for the partnership, which Tracy detailed. Do we want the students to perform a piece that will challenge them? Or simply in a piece they can invite their grandparents to? Should we expose to challenging work in practice as well as in theory, forcing them to interact with work that discusses lives and worlds beyond their immediate experience? Or work that, on religious and cultural grounds, they might not be able to discuss at home? Is the project about pushing at boundaries, or should it simply be a showcase of the work the students and Curve do? Is it about experience and development, or simply about giving students an opportunity to perform? She ends with stating that all these elements are appropriate in different ways; but these are the conversations that need to be had, and choices that need to be defined.

### Methods of collaboration

In closing, Suba talked about the excitement and opportunity that collaborating with DMU affords to Curve, particularly in terms of the co-productions: these are large plays, political plays, provocative plays, plays that would ordinarily require a lot of co-production partnerships to bring to the stage. But across all the areas of collaboration there is a clear responsibility to define what the educational experience is for the participants. It was clear from the presentation that there is a need to reflect this responsibility in the methods of collaboration, and to reflect on those methods over time.

Tracy set out a number of questions which DMU and Curve use to review and develop their collaborative approaches; clearly, these questions could equally apply to other partnerships between HE and arts industry institutions:

- How do we maintain a balance between the student experience and professional skill development?
- How do we develop a repertoire in an educational context that also has commercial appeal?
- What role do we play in encouraging and maintaining a student audience beyond Curve's normal audience?
- Does the project develop new (albeit transitory) audiences for Curve, and how can we capitalise on that transitory audience?

## Conference Abstracts

### Keynote Address

#### Farah Karim-Cooper (Shakespeare's Globe Theatre)

*'Co-mates': Theatres and Universities*

This talk will explore how the partnerships between universities and theatre organisations have developed in recent years, addressing what motivates such partnerships, the types of collaborative models that work and how sustainable they are. Karim-Cooper will draw from her own experiences working at Shakespeare's Globe.

### Panellists' Abstracts

#### Adel al-Salloum (The Spark Arts for Children)

*Digital Arts, Children's Theatre and a New Curriculum*

*Pop Up Play* is a new product developed in partnership between The Spark Arts for Children, De Montfort University and Dotlib. It is a mixed reality creative play system that enables the use of immersive digital technology to create learning opportunities for children and young people to enhance their creativity, language and communication skills. The product has been supported by the Digital R&D Fund for the Arts. *Pop Up Play* is part theatre, part film, part game, part playground. The PUP system takes images, live or recorded and projects them onto a screen. These images might relate to children's books, gallery or museum exhibitions, theatre productions or national curriculum topics. Video cameras with motion tracking then place participants into a projected world for exploration and open-ended learning. Pop up Play has created new practices. This augments and transforms existing practice, with its own signatures and proposition such that it represents a new ontology.

#### Key Issues:

- What role can arts organisations and HE providers play in cultivating the development of new ideas and practice that broaden opportunity for creative engagement?
- How is this best delivered and evaluated to deliver maximum benefits to the broader arts and cultural sector?

#### Catherine Alexander (Royal Central School of Speech and Drama)

Devising Professional Productions with HE Students: Central School and Complicite

This year Complicite and Acting CDT at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama entered into a creative partnership to develop work together, share resources and create research and learning opportunities. We plan to co-produce public production and development work led and mentored by Complicite professionals that has the potential to be professionally presented by Complicite. BA (Hons) Acting CDT has a long history of working in collaboration with professional theatre companies including Complicite, Blind Summit, Scarlet theatre, Transport, Inspector Sands and Punchdrunk. The course is currently developing models of creating devised work in partnership and evolving IP / copyright agreements that incentive the creation of new work and provide benefits to both parties. We propose to outline this case study of a partnership between an HE institution and professional theatre company that specifically seeks to develop collaboratively devised productions with diverse student groups.

**Key Issues:**

- Creating work that is collaboratively devised - who owns what?
- How can you keep experimentation and risk alive in drama conservatoire productions?
- What can the HE institution offer the professional company?

**Roger Apfelbaum and Kerry Irvine (Bath Spa University)**

*Professional Engagement and MAs in Theatre for Young Audiences and Performing Shakespeare: the egg and Shakespeare's Globe as Models for Diverse Theatre/HE Collaboration in Postgraduate Courses*

Focussing on the 'Performance Engagement' module shared between MAs in Theatre for Young Audiences (MATYA), Performing Shakespeare (MAPS), and Dance, the case study will consider various models of relationships between HE and theatres. Whereas the Performing Shakespeare students go for a two week residency at Shakespeare's Globe before students create their own professional projects for assessments once back at university, the MATYA students work in a variety of ways to create projects for assessment with 'the egg' (Theatre Royal Bath's dedicated space for young audiences and a major part of the formal 'Cultural Partnership' between the Theatre Royal and Bath Spa University). The different kinds of student experiences that constitute the module's professional engagement foster questions about the relationships between undergraduate and postgraduate students, and the range of involvement with theatre productions and educational activities. We are especially interested in exploring ways to achieve shared goals.

**Key Issues**

- Two-way exchanges between HE and theatres: how is success defined in collaborations?
- Differing language and goals in performance and professionalism (students, lecturers, practitioners, and theatres): academic assessments and achievements

in a professional environment; valuing professional experience in an academic context; marketing collaborations.

- Different models for exchanges: experiential (internships, productions) and dedicated educational programmes; curricular and extra-curricular activities.

## **Dan Barnard (London South Bank University and fanSHEN Theatre Company)**

*Does Size Matter? A Case Study in Student Placements with Small Theatre Companies*

Dan will focus on the case study of fanSHEN theatre company and draw on interviews with those who have undertaken placements with fanSHEN. He will argue that a smaller theatre company can sometimes create a more bespoke and challenging placement for students in which they feel they are having real impact and that this tailoring benefits the company as well as the student. Dan will draw on his dual perspective as artistic director of a theatre company and as university lecturer and conclude with reflections on the practical implications of his findings for universities and small theatre companies.

### **Key Issues**

- What are the benefits and disadvantages of students of doing placements in small theatre companies?
- What, if anything, makes such placements different from those in larger organisations?

## **Caroline Barth and Darren Daly (Derby Theatre)**

*Engaging in Pedagogic and Artistic practice in a 'Learning Theatre'*

This is a co-presentation by the Head of Learning for Derby Theatre and a lecturer in Theatre Arts for the University of Derby. We describe Derby's approach to the notion of a 'Learning Theatre' and we share our progress in the context of Derby's community and in our relationship with the university. We explore some of the opportunities for learning for our undergraduates and graduates and also shine a light on some of the key tensions in the model. We then spend some time looking at a particular project called Company Aside, in which students are able to both shadow and perform key roles in the process of producing a professional show for the main house. This project exemplifies the question of how we strike a healthy balance in the relationship between artistic and pedagogic practice.

### **Key Issues**

- How can we foster a culture of wider learning, where students are keen to learn for themselves and make the most of additional learning opportunities beyond the modular course structure?

- How can ensure that we achieve both excellent pedagogical experiences and great art?
- How can arts organisations ensure that learners are able to challenge and influence their artistic practice?

## **Jessica Bowles (Royal Central School of Speech and Drama)**

### *Collaborative Ecologies*

'Culture is often discussed as an economy, but it is better to see it as an ecology. (Holden 'The Ecology of Culture' AHRC report January 2015).

The project I'll share is called 'Cultural Camden' (an HE Funding Council funded Leading Transformational Change initiative) that in 2009 brought together three neighbouring arts organisations with pre-existing but precarious connections: Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, The Roundhouse and Hampstead Theatre. All three share a mission to challenge, influence and shape the future of British theatre, and the project was an ambitious plan to do three things; develop shared services; co-produce new work; and develop training for producers. The funding ended in 2012 and one element is still going strong, the MA and now MFA in Creative Producing. Holden, in one of his models proposes that there are four essential roles that have to be undertaken within any cultural ecology: Guardians, Platforms, Connectors and Nomads. My mini case study will explore whether RCSSD acted as 'connector' and considers the role of placements and their impact on the practices and ecologies of all partners.

### **Key Issues**

- Collaboration, partnership working and ethics / good practice of placements
- Purpose - starting to consider 'not what we are good at, but what we are good for'
- Thinking of strategic, local and national implications for ACE and HE

## **Kate Burnett (Nottingham Trent University)**

### *Make/Believe, Fantasy or Model of Collaboration?*

My case study discusses the current Society of British Theatre Designers (SBTD\*) exhibition *Make/Believe – UK Design for Performance 2011-15* which opened in January at Nottingham Trent University, was shown at the Prague Quadrennial in June and is resident at the V&A until 3 January 2016. The exhibition and its catalogue are the product of motivated individual designers and academics developing partnerships between professional but largely voluntary professional organisations, such as the SBTD, ALD, ASD, ABTT and ACTD\*, with HE institutions (including the V&A), key industry companies, some government (Arts Council) and Foundations' support, but essentially self-funded and enabled by designers and students. The SBTD exhibitions and their catalogues have been significant in assembling bodies of professional work that in turn provide identity and reference points (shifting with contemporary trends) for both emerging and established

practitioners. Exhibiting at the V&A and around the UK has vastly increased the visibility of this subject area, but we are having to ask whether such networks and projects are sustainable

\* Society of British Theatre Designers, Association of Lighting Designers, Association of Sound Designers, Association of British Theatre Technicians, Association Courses in Theatre Design

### **Key Issues**

- The sustainability of networks and projects
- The reliance upon voluntary work
- The alignment of HE research and career opportunities

## **Sophie Bush (Sheffield Hallam University)**

*be|spoke: Managing Creative Tensions in HEI/Professional Theatre Collaborations*

In June 2014, Sheffield Hallam University produced *be|spoke* as part of its sponsorship of the Tour de Yorkshire. An original play by Chris Bush, specially commissioned for the event, it incorporated the stories of university staff and students, and the general public, and was produced by the university in a public square outside its main entrance. The play was directed by Department of Humanities' lecturer Ashley Barnes and featured a cast of Performance for Stage and Screen students, a band of student musicians, and a team of student stage managers, but employed a professional Production Manager, Musical Director and Designer, as well as commissioning a professional playwright. This provided a unique learning opportunity for students, whilst also raising numerous tensions as the different working practices of a large university and free-lance theatre practitioners came into contact. This case study will explore the difficulties and rewards of such a project.

### **Key Issues:**

- What are the key benefits to students of working alongside free-lance theatre professionals?
- Where are the most evident areas of friction when free-lance theatre professionals and large HEIs work in collaboration?
- What lessons can be learnt to smooth these processes in future collaborations?

## **Michaela Butter (Attenborough Arts Centre, University of Leicester)**

Attenborough Arts Centre is based in a university that does not offer formal theatre or drama courses. In recent years the centre has developed its role as an inclusive centre for experimental theatre and live art, offering opportunities for young companies to trial work and actively engage with the Centre's diverse audiences in gaining feedback. Partnerships are being brokered to connect companies to wider research projects in physics, psychology and medical science as well as more

overtly connecting the work of the centre with the University's wider Corporate Social Responsibility agenda.

**Key issues:**

- developing student audiences;
- navigating the university labyrinth;
- better understanding how to create connections and opportunities between academic research and theatre practice

## **Tracy Cruickshank, Suba Das and Nicola Daniels (De Montfort University and Curve Theatre)**

*DMU and Curve Collaboration: Inside and Outside the Curriculum*

The collaboration between the Leicester Theatre Trust and DMU pre-dates the establishment of Curve, but it is with Curve that the collaboration has become, arguably, most rewarding. In addition to placements and internships, talks, workshops and exclusive behind the scenes access, students have the opportunity to audition, rehearse and perform at Curve in an annual production led by the theatre's artistic team. A unique 'selling point' of the Drama programme at DMU, this co-production, running since 2011, is at the heart of a far broader collaboration between the University and Curve. It is certainly its most public facing aspect and it poses a number of exciting and sometimes testing challenges.

**Key Issues:**

- Professional and pedagogical practice
- Student experience and student expectation
- Shared and shifting agendas

## **Charlotte Jones (Independent Theatre Council)**

- How well does the HE sector understand the Independent sector?
- What are the barriers to constructive engagement and partnership?
- Where are the examples of excellent practice?
- How can the University Theatre sector become an active and essential part of a viable, integrated touring circuit?
- What are the challenges for University Theatre programmers?
- What about audiences?

## **Jacqui O'Hanlon and Taryn Storey (Royal Shakespeare Company)**

*Radical Mischief and Shakespeare's Biggest Classroom: The Royal Shakespeare Company's Collaborations with the Higher Education Sector*

In the last three years the RSC has been developing models of work with students in the Higher Education sector. In 2011, we embarked on a relationship with Ravensbourne College students to deliver Shakespeare's Biggest Classroom - an interactive platform in which to embed a Live Studio event as part of our Schools' Broadcasts. This year the RSC begins a collaboration with the University of Birmingham based at The (new) Other Place, a 200 seat studio theatre which opens in 2016. The collaboration is rooted in the vision of TOP as a centre for creative and academic exchange. Students will also have access to creative and teaching spaces, with RSC artists and practitioners providing input to undergraduate and postgraduate courses. Theatre artists will work with scholars and students in creative experiments that stimulate connections between the arts, the academy, and society at large. The RSC is also in discussion with other universities in the UK about developing innovative ways in which the company can develop their relationships with the HE sector. This case study of the RSC's collaborations with Ravensbourne and the University of Birmingham, examines how we have approached the planning and development of these projects – and shares what we have learnt about balancing the opportunities and challenges.

### **Key Issues**

- Risk Management
- Managing Expectations
- Business to Business Relationships

### **Jo Robinson (University of Nottingham) and Sally Tye (New Perspectives)**

*The University of Nottingham and New Perspectives Theatre Company:  
Collaborating for Employability*

Since 2012, New Perspectives Theatre Company and the School of English at the University of Nottingham have worked collaboratively with the aim of enabling students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels to access high quality work related learning and employability experience, initially as part of the HEA-funded project Embedding Employability in English (<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/eeenglish/index.aspx>). Jo Robinson and Sally Anne Tye will outline the different collaborative projects undertaken and discuss the challenges encountered, lessons learned and benefits gained.

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## Contributor Biographies

**Adel al-Salloum** is Director of the Spark Arts for Children, based in Leicester.

**Catherine Alexander** has taught at the Central School of Speech & Drama since 2006. She trained at L'Ecole Jacques Lecoq (including two years at the Laboratory of Movement Studies) and participated in the National Theatre Studio Director's Programme. She is an Associate Director for Complicite, Artistic Director of Quiconque and has worked nationally and internationally as a performer, director and teacher for 18 years.

**Roger Apfelbaum** is Course Leader of MA in Performing Shakespeare and Senior Lecturer in Acting and Drama at Bath Spa University and engages in collaborative teaching with Shakespeare's Globe and Theatre Royal Bath, among others. He regularly teaches modules based on theatre visits and discussions with theatre professionals, and was formerly Collaboration Facilitator for Curve and De Montfort University productions and internships.

**Dan Barnard** is Artistic Director of fanSHEN, a London based theatre company. fanSHEN's mission is to transform the world into something to be experienced, rather than something which is consumed. For fanSHEN Dan has co-directed ten productions. Dan's work as assistant director includes *Jerusalem* by Jez Butterworth (Apollo Theatre), directed by Ian Rickson. Dan is also a Senior Lecturer in Drama and Performance at London South Bank University. Dan has also taught at Drama Centre London, London School of Dramatic Art and Trinity College, Carmarthen. He co-convenes the Performance and Ecology Network at the Young Vic with Lisa Woyrnarski from Central School of Speech and Drama and Rachel Briscoe.

**Caroline Barth** graduated from Sheffield University with a BA Hons in English and Drama. She started her career by founding her own in theatre in education company, Pageant Theatre Company, which toured schools in the north and the midlands for over three years. She then went to work in a building-based producing theatre, establishing the Education Department at the Queen's Theatre, Hornchurch and then moved into London to become the Head of Education at the vibrant Theatre Royal Stratford East. Following this, she was appointed the Creative Director for Creative Partnerships Derby and worked with the other regional directors and Arts Council East Midlands to establish The Mighty Creatives, now the regional bridge organisation. She has worked with Sarah Brigham at Derby Theatre, a Learning Theatre, for the past two years, supporting the set-up and delivery of this trailblazing model.

**Jessica Bowles** is a Principal Lecturer at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama in the UK, where she leads an MA in Creative Producing as well as a number of partnership projects for the School. Since 2008, she has been working with Prof. Bob Shiel, Director of the Bartlett School of Architecture UCL on collaborative research between making, performance and 3D scanning, in collaboration with SHUNT, and ScanLAB projects. She was on the Board of C4CC (2010-14), a University of London initiative to bring together leading researchers to collaborate with creative industry freelancers, small businesses, and students to create tangible prototypes. Since 2013

she has been working on 'Shared Space' a pan European project with universities, museums and arts organisations to establish a platform for exploration, redefining and creating performative environments. She was the artistic leader for SpaceLab, the educational component of the Prague Quadrennial June 2015.

**Kate Burnett** MA, is an award-winning theatre designer and Reader in Theatre Design at Nottingham Trent University (NTU). She has designed extensively for regional, national and touring theatre companies; also large scale schools and community performance projects for orchestras, opera companies and art galleries. Kate is Curator of the *Make/Believe: UK Design for Performance 2011-15* national exhibition for the Society of British Theatre Designers (SBTD). The exhibition has shown this year at NTU, at the Prague Quadrennial (winning a Special Jury Prize) and currently at the V&A Museum until 3 January 2016. Previous national exhibitions curated for the SBTD include three with Peter Ruthven Hall; *2D>3D* (2002) winning the PQ Golden Triga, *Time+Space* (1999) and *MakeSpace!* (1994) awarded a PQ Gold Medal; also *Collaborators* in 2007, the first SBTD exhibition at the V&A Museum. For World Stage Design 2013 in Cardiff, Kate was Editor of the WSD2013 exhibition catalogue.

**Sophie Bush** is a Lecturer in Performance at Sheffield Hallam University. Her research and teaching interests lie in the history, practice and politics of contemporary British Theatre. Publications include: *The Theatre of Timberlake Wertenbaker* (Bloomsbury, 2013) a Study Guide to and new Student Edition of Charlotte Keatley's *My Mother Said I Never Should* (Bloomsbury, forthcoming) and a co-authored article 'No Flowers: Performative Interventions "at the Moment of" Margaret Thatcher's Passing' (*TDR/The Drama Review* 59(2), 2015). She maintains an involvement with practical theatre-making, as director and devisor.

**Michaela Butter** has over 30 years of experience working in the arts as a curator, promoter and funder. Currently Director of Attenborough Arts Centre, the University of Leicester's arts centre, she is responsible for developing an inclusive approach to a growing programme of visual arts, dance, Live Art and experimental theatre with a strong emphasis on supporting emerging talent. She is working in partnership with Derby university theatre and Mansfield College to support selected locally based theatre companies on a skills development project. Her initial career centred on museum and gallery development. She then spent ten years working in senior positions at both the regional and national offices of Arts Council England with particular responsibility for managing capital projects and fostering international partnerships. She was Chair of Déda Dance House in Derby and Vice Chair of the Pan-European organisation, Culture Action Europe. She was awarded a MBE for her services to the arts in 2013.

**Tracy Cruickshank** is Associate Head of the School of Arts, and Head of Drama at De Montfort University.

**Darren Daly** is a lecturer in Theatre Arts at the University of Derby. Prior to this he was a professional actor and director for stage, screen and digital media with the occasional foray into dramaturgy. He trained as an actor at Birmingham School of Acting and holds an MA in Text & Performance from RADA & King's College London. Current undergraduate teaching includes Theatre Lab, Directors &

Directing, Performance Project and Shakespeare In Performance. Research interests include contemporary approaches to performer training, digital performance of Shakespeare and the director as pedagogue.

**Nicola Daniels** is about to begin her MA Arts at DMU having graduated from the BA (Hons) Drama Studies programme in July 2015.

**Suba Das** is a theatre director and producer, and Associate Director at Curve.

**Thomas Hescott** is a writer and director. He was previously Staff Director at the National Theatre, Resident Director for Chichester Festival Theatre, Associate Director for Y Touring and Director and Project Manager for the Heat and Light company at Hampstead Theatre. He sits on the Association for the National Youth Theatre, is a member of the board for Stage Directors UK, and a trustee for the Directors Charitable Foundation. Recent work includes *Tory Boyz* by James Graham (West End), *The Act* (Ovalhouse, and subsequently West End – nominated for Most Promising Playwright, Off West End Awards), and *Outings* (national tour).

**Kerry Irvine** is Senior Lecturer at Bath Spa University, teaching on level 5 and 6 on BA Acting programme and the module Professional Engagement on MA Theatre for Young Audiences. She engages in collaborative teaching with industry professionals through BA programme and is Director of theatreLab, a producer-led organisation that facilitates and encourages partnerships between HE and industry practitioners to stimulate and develop new theatre product.

**Charlotte Jones** read English and Philosophy at York University and Law at the College of Law Chancery Lane. She trained as a solicitor and worked as a legal advisor at Brixton Law Centre and the Interchange Studios. She also worked at York Rape Crisis and Women's Aid as a counsellor and advisor and as a freelance trainer and facilitator since 1991, specialising in company management, contracts and negotiating skills. Charlotte has been Chief Executive of the Independent Theatre Council since 2000 and was previously Deputy Director responsible for management advice, union negotiations and dispute resolution.

**Farah Karim-Cooper** is Head of Higher Education & Research, Globe Education and Chair of the Globe Architecture Research Group. She oversees the higher education programme and leads research and scholarship at Shakespeare's Globe. Farah is also Visiting Research Fellow of King's College London and directs the Globe component of the King's/ Globe joint MA in Shakespeare Studies. She has also created a module for Birkbeck College's MA in Contemporary Performance, which commenced in January 2011. Farah extended Globe Education's higher education programme to the doctoral level by bringing into the organisation two Collaborative Doctoral Award students, researching theatre space and audiences, both of whom completed in January 2012. Farah is the author of *Cosmetics in Shakespearean and Renaissance Drama* (2006); *Shakespeare's Globe: A Theatrical Experiment*, co-edited with Christie Carson (2008); and *Shakespeare and the Hand* (forthcoming).

**Jacqui O'Hanlon** has been the RSC's Director of Education since 2008. During her time at the RSC she has led on the development of *Stand Up for Shakespeare* a manifesto for Shakespeare in schools, established the RSC's Learning and

Performance Network, a long term partnership programme with schools and theatres nationally, and initiated the company's Schools' Broadcast series. She has led on developing major education partnerships nationally and internationally with broadcasters, universities and theatres. She co-authored *Using Drama to Teach Personal, Social And Emotional Skills* and edited the *RSC Shakespeare Toolkit for Teachers*, published by Bloomsbury in 2010 and 2014. She is also a board member for Told By An Idiot.

**Jo Robinson** is Associate Professor in Drama and Performance in the School of English, University of Nottingham. Her research focuses on nineteenth and twentieth/twenty-first century theatre and performance with a particular focus on the relationships between place, space, community and region. She regularly collaborates with creative industry and heritage partners, and has been awarded three AHRC collaborative doctoral awards for PhD students to work with Nottingham Playhouse, New Perspectives Theatre Company, and the British Library. In 2012 she led the School of English's HEA Departmental Teaching Development Grant project, 'Embedding employability in English: work related learning and reflection in the creative industries'.

**Taryn Storey** was appointed Higher Education Programme Developer at the Royal Shakespeare Company in July 2015. She has recently completed an AHRC funded PhD at University of Reading on New Writing Development in Post-War British Theatre, and has taught Drama at the Universities of Worcester, Reading, Bedford and Oxford Brookes. She has previously worked as an Education Associate Practitioner at the RSC, as Youth Arts Co-ordinator, at Pegasus Theatre in Oxford, and as Creative Director of a major project at the Theatre Museum in London.

**Sally Anne Tye** is Executive Director of the East Midlands based touring theatre company New Perspectives and Northants Touring Arts. Sally has more than twenty years' experience as a senior manager, working for companies including Abbey Theatre Dublin, Nottingham Playhouse, Sinfonia Viva, Leicester Haymarket, Sunderland Empire, Nottingham Royal Centre, Sheffield Theatres and Engine House. She has focussed on creating and implementing successful strategies designed to generate income (both existing and new), fundraising, sales, marketing and communication and managing change. Sally is a National Rural Touring Forum board member and also sits on the Strategic Board of the Nottinghamshire County Council Music Hub.