



myplace
support team

Drama and Theatre

Introduction

Engaging with drama has the power to transform young lives. Through exploring their creativity young people can learn new skills and build their confidence. Youth theatre offers a vital and positive contribution to young people's personal development and all young people should have the opportunity to play a part. This briefing provides some useful pointers and advice on what to consider before developing drama activities within your *myplace* centre.

How to use drama and theatre

No two youth drama spaces will be the same and there is no simple model to follow. The personality of each one will be determined by its users. Consider what you, and the young people who will use it, want – is it an informal space for occasional workshops and performances or a fully-fledged theatre, offering a busy programme of on-stage and off-stage activity, supported by professional drama workers and technicians?

Another key consideration is who is leading the call for this particular activity? Have young people independently identified it as something they want or is the drive coming from elsewhere? To be successful as well as popular young people need to have that sense of ownership and be involved at the heart of it from the very start.

A good starting point is to consider what provision already exists in your area. Carry out a simple audit with young people. Some questions to consider as part of this initial audit might be:

- › Where is the existing provision?
- › What does it offer?
- › Is it performance driven or mainly drama workshop?
- › How many members does it have?
- › How does it recruit new members?
- › Is it flourishing? Is it looking for new members?
- › Is there scope to work in partnership with it?
- › How is it funded?
- › What are its development plans?

If there is no existing local provision you have a clear run at developing it. In which case the ethos of your **myplace** drama work should be clear from the outset. For example:

- › What role will young people play in developing and running the project?
- › What role will they play in selecting what it does, and in its wider administration and management? How can they be involved in off-stage roles such as set and costume design, lighting and sound, and what professional support will this require? What will the running costs be?
- › How important is performance (which can become exclusive and all consuming) compared with drama workshop (which is more inclusive but may lack the excitement of performance)?
- › Do you need a formal theatre space or would a flexible 'black box' multi-purpose studio space be better?
- › Are there other local amateur dramatic or community groups who could use the facilities when not in use by the group, to raise revenue to support running costs?
- › How can you ensure a safe environment and appropriate access? You will need to ensure adequate changing areas that will accommodate both sexes, for example, as well as access for spectators.
- › Who will manage the programming, marketing and development if you are putting on performances?
- › Are there formal training courses you could run? Can you get accreditation for participants?
- › How do you ensure new groups of young people get involved?

“Young people all over the country should have access to quality theatre experiences. The long-term benefits are obvious; the more we engage young people in theatre now the more we invest in the future of our country as a whole.”

Kevin Spacey,
Artistic Director,
The Old Vic (quoted on NAYT website)

“The investment Pegasus will make in young people individually and the benefits young people will gain as a member of the group will help them develop responsible attitudes, encourage them to take an active role in their community and act as role models for their peers and other young people.”

Euton Daley,
Artistic Director,
The Pegasus Theatre, Oxford

Case Study

The Pegasus Theatre, Oxford

Pegasus grew out of Oxford Youth Theatre in the 1970s. From the beginning an ethos was in place to listen to and involve young people. This has developed to place them at the heart of the organisation. Pegasus presents contemporary dance and theatre from all over the world, made by both young people and professional artists. It specialises in supporting the development of young people and vulnerable adults, finding ways of giving young people responsibility, recognition, status and self-respect.

Myplace funding is being used alongside other funding to renovate and replace older and decrepit buildings. The new look Pegasus will feature dance studios, new technical production facilities, meeting rooms and a café bar, allowing Pegasus to develop its commitment to young people in the Oxford area through, for example, enhancing holiday provision, launching a series of writing workshops and offering courses in technical elements of production such as lighting, sound and set design.

www.pegasustheatre.org.uk

Tools, ideas, exercises

Drama and acting can be great ways of encouraging young people to express themselves and participate. But not everybody is able to commit to a full-blown theatrical performance. Using smaller roleplay activities can engage young people to explore different situations and try out acting skills without necessarily leading to a performance. And it may instill a love of performance in those who otherwise might not be prepared to give it a go.

Action planning

Young People

How can young people be involved in planning and developing a drama space? Think about three ways you can encourage and secure their involvement at different stages.

Making a Difference

Choose one thing that you can do to positively drive forward the process and identify the steps you'll need to take and when to make this happen.

Vision and Values

How does drama provision fit within the wider values and ethos of your *myplace* project?

Practicality

Be realistic about the size and scale of theatre and drama activity you can run. How much time can you devote to this aspect given other commitments?



Links and further guidance

See **Arts at the heart of *myplace*** a guide for *myplace* centres produced by the Arts Council.

The Arts Council is the national development agency for the arts, supporting a range of artistic activities from theatre to music, literature to dance, photography to digital art, carnival to crafts. See www.artscouncil.org.uk for a full list of Arts Council England publications.

ENYAN is a membership body designed to create connections throughout the diverse youth arts sector at national, regional and grassroots levels. ENYAN aims to raise the profile and support for youth arts within England, and by doing so create more opportunities for the creative and personal development of young people, especially young people at risk. www.enyan.co.uk

The National Association of Youth Theatres has been running for nearly 30 years now and works with over 1,000 groups and individuals to support the development of youth theatre activity through information and support services, advocacy, training, participation and partnerships. Registration is free and open to any group or individual using theatre techniques in their work with young people, outside of formal education. NAYT places young people at the heart of its planning and decision-making and encourages the youth theatre sector to do likewise. See the two research documents:

- › Excellent Youth Theatre discusses how to recognise and value excellence in youth theatre whilst continuing to embrace and celebrate the diverse range of organisations, groups and practices which form the youth theatre sector.
- › Inclusive Youth Theatre discusses ways you can ensure your youth theatre reflects and serves the diversity of your local community and put young people's voices at the core of your work.
- › Contact the National Association of Youth Theatres to see if its Inspire programme can support any planned development. As part of the Inspire scheme a youth theatre can apply for a mentor to visit and work with them on specific and complex development needs. You need to be registered with NAYT. Registration is free and open to any group or individual using theatre techniques in their work with young people outside of formal education. See www.nayt.org.uk

The National Youth Agency has published a book of drama activities – Act Out!, examining improvisation, mime and role-play work. The 32 easy-to-use exercises can be put to good use with groups of young people aged between 11 and 16. Act Out: Drama and role-play activities for young people by Vanessa Rogers is available from the National Youth Agency website at www.nya.org.uk

Youth work author and trainer Vanessa Rogers has also developed a further range of drama and role-play activities which are available from her website at www.vanessarogers.co.uk/catalog/23